

**BEGINNINGS WITH PHILIP MCSHANE**  
**A Progress-Oriented Tribute**

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This tribute has two main components. A first is autobiographical, to reveal something of my present basis as it pertains to my “forward-oriented tribute.” Forward-oriented tribute? My larger purpose is to draw attention to the need for the academy to learn from McShane. However, in a few paragraphs, I cannot provide helpful detail regarding the extensive writings of this scholar who accelerated well beyond present-day achievement.<sup>1</sup> That will be work for future functional collaborators, globally. The second component is a reflection on the importance of a short book that McShane wrote circa 1974. For it is my view that, if the book is read in the way intended by the author, it will promote much-needed new beginnings in the academy, beginnings that so far have been missed, beginnings that in fact were called for by Bernard Lonergan and also have been missed by scholars in Lonergan Studies.

In the summer of 1979, I went to Montreal for a summer course that McShane was teaching at Concordia University. The course text was *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*. He encouraged us to work on the exercises in the book, which I enthusiastically did. At first glance, they might appear to be too elementary. Phil told us that one of them was from a book of puzzles for school children! I soon found that trying to get at what McShane was trying to help us “get at” was not easy. With those exercises, I was making beginnings in adverting to and describing details of my experience, in instances, of what can be called our “dynamics of knowing”<sup>2</sup> and our “dynamics of doing,”<sup>3</sup> our desire, and our loneliness.

Later in the year, I had the opportunity to meet McShane again for a brief chat. I needed to choose a university program. Various options were available to me, all of which seemed feasible and worthwhile. I shared my puzzlement with Phil. As was his way (I never saw him “give the answer”), he didn’t give me advice. He shared with me what Nadia

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<sup>1</sup> Philip McShane, philipmcshane.org.

<sup>2</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, chs. 3, 4 and 6. See also Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL3, 299 and Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, Appendix A: The Two Diagrams, 319–323.

<sup>3</sup> See note 2.

Boulanger said to one of her students (Quincy Jones, I think it was) who, at an early point in his career, was having trouble deciding whether he should give himself to classical music, or jazz. “You have the ability to do both. You could be happy in both. Choose the one which you cannot live without.” On the return journey to Toronto, in a crowded car, lost, or rather found, in thought, my decision was made: mathematics and science for now, a “base camp,” so that, eventually, I could go on to modern theology and whatever else might be possible.

In 1983–84, I spent eight months in Crete with my brother John, his wife Marta, and their family, in a tourist home in Rogdia, a village west of Iraklion. During that visit, I worked through E. J. McShane’s (no relation to Phil) book on integration theory;<sup>4</sup> and volume I and some of volume II of Jacobson’s two-volume classic on algebra.<sup>5</sup> I also enjoyed countless discussions with my brother John, about poetry, life, *Insight*, as well as Lonergan’s discoveries in economics, about which John was writing at the time. I remember John pointing to traffic and the two of us identifying goods contributing to “basic” or “surplus,” and laughing when we noticed that a particular van had goods in various stages and levels of both types of production and consumption. In the spring of 1984, the landlord in Rogdia decided to renovate the house. John and his family moved to a smaller house in the village. For my last six weeks in Crete, I rented a room in Iraklion. I took the opportunity to read more of McShane. In the mornings, in a tiny inner courtyard garden, in the kindly shade of a lone orange tree, I read, pondered, and prayed through *Music That is Soundless: An Introduction to God for the Graduate*. This gave me a marvelous boost which, among other things, helped me better integrate my ongoing development in the sciences.

I include the following anecdote not for its profundity but because it is also emblematic of McShane’s writings—practical and kind. In the autumn of 1984, finding a place to live in Halifax was a problem. Students were lined up for weeks at the Dalhousie University Housing office, tracking down incoming ads. I finally managed to get a room in a rundown house on the Northwest Arm, a considerable distance from campus. The house had electricity but no heat, hot water, or insulation. By late October, it was becoming too cold to sleep well, let alone study in my room. At that time,

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<sup>4</sup> Edward J. McShane, *Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Jacobson, *Basic Algebra*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Freeman, 1980); and Vol. 2, (1985).

McShane also lived in Halifax. With what I eventually learned to be timing that was characteristically serendipitous, he showed up at my “cottage” one evening, with woolen blankets and an electric floor heater, which were exactly what I needed.

Mathematics was a growing love but was only part of my vocation. In keeping with my decision of 1979, I gradually expanded my focus to include foundational issues in mathematics, science, and theology. The works of McShane and Lonergan became increasingly important to me. The method and mood of *Wealth of Self* remained and grew.<sup>6</sup> McShane shared with me Lonergan’s account of “the history of any particular discipline”<sup>7</sup> where Lonergan identifies the need of genetic systematic understanding. Attending to instances, the ongoing task of attempting to up-take Lonergan’s heuristics of genetic systematic understanding has been having an ongoing “genetic-effect” in my foundations, including in my heuristics of functional systematics. Of course, such efforts are only beginnings.<sup>8</sup> In the last few years, I also have been making a sustained effort to reach up-to-date precisions in understanding, and in communicating, Lonergan’s (concretely verifiable) two-flow economics.

While I was not in constant contact with Phil, he was a great teacher, mentor, and friend in the “forty plus” years that I knew him. He was always supportive and, as many others have told, was rarely unavailable to help in whatever way he could. Whenever I might have strayed into work that would have been “too speculative,” he would alert me to the problem with a joke, a question, or a technical note. (But don’t blame my mistakes on his mentoring.) I remember talking with Phil about the fact that thinking about experience is a mature form of prayer. When I finished my PhD in mathematics (1992), I visited him, Sally, and their family at their home in New Brunswick. Phil suggested that I start reading Aquinas’ work on angels.<sup>9</sup> I stayed for five days. In the mornings, I read from the *Summa*. In the afternoons, Phil and I chatted for an hour or two about my efforts. He helped me begin to read Aquinas personally, to see that Aquinas was talking about his experience, and mine. About twenty years later, Phil encouraged me in my first forays into *De Deo Trino*,<sup>10</sup> a book that he told

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<sup>6</sup> See note 22.

<sup>7</sup> Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method 2*, CWL 23, 175–177.

<sup>8</sup> See note 22; and CWL 3, 609–10.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I, qq. 50–64.

<sup>10</sup> Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWL 12.

me was one of his lifelong prayer books. For me, now, the hypothesis of the Third Person Given is foundational. It is also (self-) evident that “four real relations”<sup>11</sup> are not known through conceptual theological debate; and that for modern theological understanding, one needs to attend to experience with up-to-date explanatory heuristics of aggreformic *human* processions.<sup>12</sup>

I circle back now to McShane’s book that, in my view, has the potential to be helpful in resolving at least two fundamental and intertwined problems: (1) good intentions and exceptions notwithstanding, contemporary Lonergan Studies does not promote reading *Insight* in the manner intended by the author; and (2) at this time in history, *Insight* mainly cannot be read in the way intended by the author.

Regarding (1), the dominant mode of contemporary Lonergan Studies is scholarly discussion of such things as understanding, feelings, meaning, scale, values, conversions, generalized empirical method, emergent probability, dialectic, God, salvation, Law of the Cross, love, and so on, in general terms, mixed with particular concerns, without making basic efforts in “non-generalized” empirical method. Are those basic efforts really needed? I remember McShane asking the Toronto audience in 1978: “Is God easier to understand than dog?”<sup>13</sup> The next year, in Montreal, he said that a theologian should know Lonergan’s economics and have data on their own neighborhood and city. When asked how much science a theologian needs to know, Lonergan replied: “A theologian should be able to read Lindsay and Margenau.”<sup>14</sup> And, since then, the bar has been raised considerably. Alas, contemporary Lonergan Studies continues to (mis-)lead students into superficial “summary and comparison.” Among other

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<sup>11</sup> CWL 12, 471–473.

<sup>12</sup> A great help for me have been metagrams developed by McShane. See, e.g., Philip McShane, “Metagrams and Metaphysics,” article 2 in *Prehumous* (2007), <http://www.philipmcshane.org/prehumous>. Also helpful for me has been, Philip McShane, “Clasping, Cherishing, Calling, Craving, Christing,” article 12 in *Posthumous*, (n.d.), <http://www.philipmcshane.org/posthumous>.

<sup>13</sup> *Hermeneutics and Structuralism* (York University, Toronto: Conference, November 22–24, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Lambert and McShane, *Bernard Lonergan, His Life and Leading Ideas*, 176. The reference is to Robert Bruce Lindsay and Henry Margenau, *Foundations of Physics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957).

things, this provides no way of collaborating effectively<sup>15</sup> with modern expertise struggling to solve “problems of this later day.”<sup>16</sup> I don’t claim mastery. But one doesn’t need to be a master to recognize a tradition that, so far, has been making no serious effort to be up-to-date in either method or content.

What of (2)? Lonergan was a strange sort of genius. The slope of *Insight* is far too great for the contemporary academic ethos. Words in the book may appear to be familiar. But Lonergan was reaching well beyond the current *acquis*,<sup>17</sup> creatively shaping old language to express radically new understandings. The book is a complex scientific foundations text for a future graduate program.

Knowing what Lonergan meant is beyond us. But aspects of the method described by him are not: attempt to “correctly understand experience”<sup>18</sup> “at the level of one’s time.”<sup>19</sup> This is where McShane’s book *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations* comes into play, for both (1) and (2). As was his way with individuals, it meets us where we are, in history. Start with “simple things.”<sup>20</sup> McShane does so with a shrewd selection and ordering of “specimens.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be deceived by the book’s brevity. Even if one has some elementary mathematics and physics, a first honest struggle will require time.<sup>22</sup> For the serious scholar, shoring up one’s background to work with McShane’s book should not be a stumbling block. Certainly, that task will be far less demanding than what is required of “the probably nonexistent average reader”<sup>23</sup> of *Insight*. As with any decent text in science or art, to read McShane’s book, one needs to put it

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<sup>15</sup> Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, “Resolute and Effective Intervention in the Dialectic,” sec. 14.1.4, 305–308.

<sup>16</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 770.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding *acquis*, see Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method I*, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* vol. 22, eds. Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 462.

<sup>18</sup> See *W0*, in McShane, “Metagrams and Metaphysics,” 13.

<sup>19</sup> This is from the original Preface to *Insight*. See Frederick E. Crowe, S. J., *Lonergan* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 58 (including note 1).

<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 27.

<sup>21</sup> See note 22.

<sup>22</sup> “I hope that I am not too tiresome in concluding with the remark that even if you spend a solid month on this chapter’s suggested specimens, it is only a beginning.” McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed., 38.

<sup>23</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 56.

aside and struggle through the exercises. In that way, beginnings will be possible in being luminous in instances, in particular, in the emergence of grasping correlations of correlations of correlations<sup>24</sup> or two kinds of probabilities.<sup>25</sup> Readers will be helped to glimpse something of the concretely verifiable “inside-out of radical existentialism.”<sup>26</sup> Following leads given by the young McShane, readers will be helped in getting intimations of the need and possibility of explanatory heuristics of history,<sup>27</sup> the embodiment of “Ultimate Being ... and Infinite Surprise,”<sup>28</sup> and that way be also vectored then toward more, path-present-and-beyond.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed., 24; Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 271.

<sup>25</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed., 37.

<sup>26</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, ch. 5, 39–46.

<sup>27</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed., 106.

<sup>28</sup> McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed., 111.

<sup>29</sup> “[P]lease, don’t mistake my slim understanding there of **forty** years ago [1974] with my shabby better grip now on this present writing subject’s marrow-minding harrow-blading “the stooks rise around” the subject-as-subject reaching towards all and all of us and Those Subjects-as-Subjects.” McShane, “Epilogue: Embracing Luminously and Toweringly the Symphony of Cauling,” *Seeding Global Collaboration*, eds. Patrick Brown and James Duffy (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2016) 232.