

REMEMBERING PHILIP MCSHANE

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I divide this reflection into three main parts: A Long-Term Friendship; My Intellectual Indebtedness; and Pondering a Puzzle.

1. A Long-Term Friendship

I first encountered Philip McShane at Lonergan's 1969 lectures on method in theology, held at Regis College when it was still located in Willowdale, Ontario. Fred Crowe had told me earlier about "an Irish Jesuit who is extremely enthusiastic about Lonergan's work"; and as a budding Lonergan enthusiast myself, I was looking forward to meeting him. I was not disappointed. Phil wore off-duty clerical attire, complemented by stockings of bright ecclesiastical purple; and he struck me as the combination of a lively leprechaun and a monsignor on amphetamines, bubbling with both theoretical brilliance and out-of-sight humor. We hit it off immediately; and the encounter turned out to be the beginning of a friendship that would continue for more than half a century.

In retrospect, our friendship arose spontaneously rather than as a consequence of extensive mutual knowledge. But once it was in place, the mutual knowledge certainly developed, fostered largely by periodic exchanges of lengthy emails from the time that option became available until what turned out to be just three months before Phil went to God.

In 1973, Phil left the Jesuits and moved to Toronto. Late that year or early in 1974, he married Fiona Donovan; and I happily served as his best man in the wedding ceremony. In deference to the recent change in Phil's ecclesiastical status, the wedding mass involved just six persons in a small chapel at Regis College. Fred Crowe was the presider; Fiona's sister Dolores was her maid of honor; and Dolores was accompanied by her friend Mary, who had travelled with her to Toronto from Ireland. (Some years later Phil and Fiona divorced.)

After their marriage, the newlyweds continued living in Toronto, both of them taking part-time jobs while Phil searched for an academic position. I was making inquiries of my own on his behalf; and when a graduate school friend teaching at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, mentioned that a position would soon be available there, I immediately told Phil. He applied, got the position, and would remain at MSVU for the next two decades.

At an annual gathering of the West Coast Method Institute, perhaps in 2008, I had the privilege of finally meeting Sally Davison, whom Phil had married seventeen years earlier. I had heard much about her from him; and after a long, quiet, and mutually candid one-on-one conversation with her, it was utterly clear to me why his marriage to her had enabled him to make a major advance toward the deep peace of mind and heart for which he had long been striving.

2. My Intellectual Indebtedness

As I think back on my forty-five years in philosophy, religious studies, and theology classrooms and my publications in tandem with them, I recognize a number of Phil's scholarly efforts that helped me greatly. Let me mention just four of many examples of why I feel intellectually indebted to him.

First, in 1970 I read Phil's *Towards Self-Meaning* (co-written with Garrett Barden).¹ Its highly accessible introduction to Lonergan's work helped me shape all my early courses. Especially useful were its clever (and often humorous) examples and clear diagrams. In particular, its diagram of the cognitional progression from data through formulation to judgment provided the core of my initial handouts; and suitably detailed and expanded handouts of that progression appeared in virtually all of my later courses.

Second, in the fall of 1975, settling into his second year at MSVU, Phil exercised one of his characteristic professional habits: he convened a conference! Labelled "Workshop on Bernard Lonergan's Interdisciplinary Philosophy," it lasted just two days, and it had only a small number of invited participants. Most were from Canadian locations, and I was pleased to be among them. But Phil also had managed to cajole Bernie Lonergan—recently relocated to Boston College—into attending, promising him that his only responsibility would be to hold two question-and-answer sessions. The coalescence of these factors resulted in two intimate and extended small-group discussions between Lonergan and the other participants. For me, one happy outcome of those discussions was that Lonergan enthusiastically endorsed my formulation of a long-range personal inquiry into the philosophical foundations of interdisciplinary studies. That

¹ Garrett Barden and Philip McShane, *Towards Self-Meaning* (Dublin: Gill, 1968).

formulation, frequently revised but never abandoned, has guided my teaching and research ever since.

Third, in recent years I have had occasion to frequently restudy *Phenomenology and Logic*, volume 18 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan. The volume was edited by Phil, and the editorial challenges of dealing with the two weeks of lectures given in 1957 on which it is based were enormous. The importance but abstruseness of the topics, the absence of complete manuscripts, and the fragmentary character of the written materials and tape recordings led to puzzles on many fronts. In Phil's dealing with those puzzles, both his technical expertise and his extraordinary scholarly breadth and depth are manifest; and every time I return to the book I am grateful to him.

Fourth, in 2007 I was gifted with a modest *Festschrift*, to which Phil made the concluding contribution, "The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*."² I was encouraged by his affirmation of the basic commonality of our investigative interests. I was enlightened by his account of that commonality. I was gratified by his positive comments about some of my writings. And I felt confirmed by his recognition of my various charts and diagrams as symbolic expressions of complex intelligibilities. His essay qualifies solidly as an example of my intellectual indebtedness to him.

3. Pondering a Puzzle

In the years following Phil's 1994 retirement from his regular teaching job, a puzzling phenomenon emerged, familiar to the many Lonergan specialists on his email list. The phenomenon was his online circulation of increasingly frequent and sharp criticisms of his Lonergan colleagues' scholarly work. The puzzle is whether the criticisms were fair.

My aim here is to sketch my own answer to that question. I offer this sketch both as a tribute to Phil and as something that might be of interest to other Lonergan colleagues who have also pondered the puzzle. Summarily, it seems to me that all of Phil's negative statements about his colleagues were variations of one general criticism. That general criticism was based on a presupposition that was operative but unwittingly not properly objectified. When that lack is made explicit, the ways in which

² Philip McShane, "The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*," in John Liptay & David Liptay (eds.), *The Importance of Insight: Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 199–225.

the general criticism was fair and unfair are clarified; and perhaps some colleagues' dismay about it will be diminished.³

3.1 Phil's General Criticism and My Analysis

(a) Phil's *general criticism* regards what he took to be a defective general scholarly *practice* of his colleagues. They gave insufficient attention to his own voluminous writings and lectures about various fundamental features of Lonergan's work and their implications. Consequently they failed to properly grasp those features and employ them in their own writing and teaching, thus making their presentations of Lonergan inadequate.

(b) Underlying Phil's general criticism of his colleagues' scholarly practice is a *general presupposition* that, in my view, he did not examine. I suspect that he did not think much about either his high degree of innate intellectual ability and his excellent education or his unusually extensive freedom from non-scholarly duties and corresponding freedom for scholarly work. Even less did he think much about his Lonergan colleagues in those two regards. On the contrary, he simply *took for granted* that the intellectual capabilities and practical options of most of them were similar to his own, that colleagues had sufficient time to read widely in his work, that they would be stimulated by his creative and conversational style of writing, and that they would be enlightened by his clarifications and developments of Lonergan's work. All that was needed was their decision to do the reading. Consequently, when they failed to make that decision, his emails show that initially he was puzzled by them, then frustrated with them, and finally angry at them.

(c) In my view, Phil's unreflective acceptance of his presupposition stemmed from an unintentional oversight about his colleagues, not from ill will. He made assumptions about them because it did not occur to him that what he was assuming might need scrutiny. Hence the progressive negativity of his comments was in good faith. In other words, essentially his criticism of his colleagues' scholarly practice was *subjectively fair*.

³ The sources on which I am drawing for what follows are mainly my large collection of public emails circulated by Phil and personal emails between Phil and me. McShane, "The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*," is my single most important published source.

(d) On the other hand, it seems obvious to me that although most of Phil's colleagues were indeed very bright and energetic people, the other elements of his presupposition about their scholarly practice were mistaken. First, for a variety of reasons, each successive cohort of colleagues had less freedom from non-scholarly duties and thus less freedom for scholarly work than the preceding cohort did; and almost no one had the degree of freedom that Phil himself did. Consequently they had to be far more selective than Phil about how they spent their time and energy. Second, as his website (www.philipmshane.org) indicates, Phil produced a huge number of pages and many video recordings during his career. Doing more than just dabbling with them would require a significant investment of time. Third, while Phil could be very orderly and disciplined in his writings and lectures, not infrequently in later years both types of his presentations were sprinkled with verbal novelties, asides, puns, jokes, and other unusual elements. Some colleagues find that this style facilitates their understanding, but others find that it impedes it. Fourth, almost all of Phil's later work was either published by presses that do not require serious peer-review or was simply posted by him on his own website. For Lonergan scholars not already attracted to that work for some other reason, this fact was likely to make serious investigation of it seem a risky investment of their precious time and energy. In short, I judge that the mistaken character of Phil's general presupposition renders his criticisms of what he took to be a general feature of his colleagues' scholarly practice *objectively unfair*.

3.2 My Overall Conclusion

Objectively sound *decisions* rest on objectively sound *moral judgments*; and the latter rest on both correct *factual judgments* and subjectively sound *moral intentions*. Like the rest of us embodied spirits, Phil was not exempt from making objectively defective decisions. But in my opinion, the latter were more likely to stem from his incorrect *factual judgments* than from his defective *moral intentions*. That opinion is illustrated by my account of Phil's general criticism of his Lonergan colleagues. I concluded that the criticism was *objectively unfair*; but the cause was a mistaken judgment of fact that he made inadvertently, without sufficient reflection. Hence his moral intention was *subjectively fair*.

Insofar as that conclusion is correct, it provides a clearer focus for the dismay that at least some Lonergan colleagues feel or felt about Phil's general criticism. What motivated that criticism was not essentially the

hostility of a competitor who had failed to dominate his opponents. It was primarily the sadness of a teacher who had failed to convince his hearers to grasp and make the most of explanations he had confidently judged to be both true and truly good.

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If Phil's present state of existence is such that he is able to know and react to the activities of people still in the earthly state, I strongly suspect that he is smiling, perhaps even chuckling, at whoever happens to read this reflection, but especially at the writer of it, whose final sentence now ends.