

MEMORIES OF AND GRATITUDE FOR PHILIP MCSHANE

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1. Crossing Paths

After completing a dissertation on Lonergan's work (a 400-page exercise in what I later recognized to be nominal understanding), I began full-time teaching in Texas and settled into a routine pattern of preparing new courses, grading papers, and doing committee work. A departure from that routine began in 1983 when I attended a conference at the University of Santa Clara in honor of Voegelin and Lonergan. There I first met Phil McShane and was fascinated by his unconventional presentation and a short conversation we had while waiting for a ride to the airport. That was the start of a 36-year conversation and my reading of his extensive flow of publications. He renewed my interest in Lonergan's work, and I started attending the annual Lonergan conferences at Boston College each summer since he did as well. The correspondence between us grew, one that the Internet and email rapidly accelerated in later years. Subsequent conferences that he led in Halifax and Vancouver, along with his prolific writings, have made all the difference in my slow departure from my years of wandering along conventional academic paths.

With Phil's encouragement, I began writing more and making more conference presentations. In 2003 Mike Shute and I co-authored a book on ethics that Phil quickly announced was already obsolete since we had not adopted functional specialization in composing it. My interest in Lonergan's discovery of the early 60s grew, and, when the University of Texas at Austin established Forty Acres Press for faculty wishing to publish their own textbooks, I began using it for the series of books that has now grown to nine texts, four of which have had co-authors. Any of the latter could easily have had as a subtitle, "The Education of Bill Zanardi."

What was going forward in those years since 1983? Mainly due to McShane's friendly "nudges," I was shifting my thinking, teaching, and mode of discourse. Four questions map some of the shifts: (1) What does Lonergan mean by "self-appropriation"? (2) Why is operating in the horizon of theory, i.e., seeking explanatory understanding, so important for doing serious scholarship? (3) If functional specialization is such an important breakthrough, what exactly are its prospects? (4) How can I share this new practice with others and encourage their experiments with it?

My responses to these questions will be brief. First, McShane supplied exercises in his *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations* and elsewhere to encourage readers' attention to their own intentional acts. I found additional exercises in the literature of neuropsychology of perception and in cases from clinical psychology. Over ten years I made slow progress in climbing out of Plato's cave, in part by sharing those exercises and case studies with my students. I found that the intellectual displacement attendant on self-appropriation was an experience of "strangeness," but also one that arrived not in a single moment but as a cumulative experience of many "aha" moments.

It was some time before I grasped why operating in the second horizon was so important. Even through graduate school my education had largely been in a classicist tradition and offered little exposure to explanatory understanding. I recall a seminar at Boston College led by Father Joe Flanagan and Pat Byrne. In my naïve response to the former's question about what sweat is, I gave him a synonym! Years later a libertarian colleague of mine, seemingly at ease in talking about liberty as the absence of constraint, prompted me to think more closely about what I understood about liberty.

My new research on liberty focused on the simplest of the intentional acts, namely, paying attention. In the literature of contemporary neurosciences, I quickly found that "simple" it was not. Eventually I was able to work out a normative notion of ordered liberty; in doing so, I took my first steps into the horizon of theory. The distance between where I had begun the research project and where I finished it was proof to me that operating in the first horizon, albeit with an expanded vocabulary, was not serious scholarship.

What of the breakthrough to and the prospects of functional specialization? In the first place, it promises to supplant the pre-methodical inquiries that continue to be acceptable in much of the Humanities. Over the years I have noticed a number of philosophical bandwagons rolling along with new stars leading the parades. For example, I recall studying Nietzsche's works in graduate school. The scholarship of the day usually referred to him as a herald of existentialism, but then a new view, attributed to Richard Rorty, claimed he was a pragmatist. Some years later I learned that Nietzsche scholars at the University of Texas were teaching that he was a neo-Kantian. About that same time Alexander Nehamas published *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* and proposed an alternative to all three of the preceding. The bandwagons kept rolling, but was there any progress in understanding?

How was I to invite a new generation to experiment with functional specialization? Few doubt the practical benefits of the division of labor in industry. Most of us know something of peer review as conventionally practiced in the sciences. Doing the fourth functional specialty, with its recycling of the first two sets of objectifications through a set of third objectifications, exemplifies both divided labor and peer review. Phil added how a further recycling of the third objectifications enhanced the odds of detecting missing insights and overlooked opportunities for development. Thus, a current collaborative book series entitled *Exercises in Lonergan's Dialectic* is a continuation of what Phil saw as a way to encourage more scholars to experiment with this way forward.

2. Incarnate Meaning

So what if our paths crossed and if I now say it made all the difference in my life? In retrospect, I count myself so very blessed. As I noted before, full-time teaching added plenty of “busyness” that allowed me to drift along for eight years. Such busyness could have continued and consumed my entire academic career. Then, to paraphrase a Proust passage Phil was fond of quoting: Would I have become only an older but much faded version of my younger self? Would I have ever even envisioned walking on stilts?

How did I at least partially escape this conventional pattern? Even after the California conference in 1983, I was hesitant to depart from comfortable patterns of thinking and acting. McShane’s patient and generous mentoring gradually altered what I wanted to understand and how I shared my questions and what I understood with my students. By the second decade of this century, I recognized a gap had opened between my present thinking and doing and what had been true of both in my earlier years. For example, the books that I began writing around that time were nothing I could have envisioned and certainly could not have undertaken previously. Additionally, the new courses I was designing and my efforts to reach my more advanced students were deliberate departures from earlier courses and pedagogies. I was developing and wanted the same for my students.

What was it about Phil that encouraged such a desire for further development? His generous attention to what I was writing (he was a reader and critic of drafts of almost all my books prior to 2020), his patient nudges about what new questions I should pursue, and his own writings that kept leaping ahead of where he had been just a year before were all sources of inspiration. Most inspiring, however, was his embodiment of a spirit of exploration. Inseparable from who he was, this evident joy in

discovery was a model for how I might yet develop. In Max Weber's language, he became for me a charismatic figure of intellectual and spiritual authority. In Lonergan's terms, he brought to life what it meant to incarnate meaning. Under either heading, he became for me, as friend and mentor, a person worth loving and imitating.

3. A Late Puzzle: "In Thought we live."

Since the editors of this issue have requested each contributor identify one of Phil's works that has been life-changing, I gladly cite his book *Allure* and his statement there: "In Thought we live."¹ First, some background. During a break at a Boston College conference sometime around 1990, Phil advised me to give some thought to what Lonergan meant by "the empirical residue." It was only years later that I realized why his advice was so on point. In the following comments, I will try to sketch why his advice was so important in my development. To start with, the empirical residue eludes explanatory understanding. Aristotle formulated the basic insight: there is no science of the particular qua particular. Why is this a problem? Well, what if my own biographical variables (e.g., the so-called "accidents of birth") turn out to be little more than "juxtapositions and successions" of empirical differences? Does this threaten my sense of self-identity? Am I a "particular qua particular" and so unexplainable? Are so many personal joys and sorrows beyond any explanation?

Besides the puzzle about personal identity there was a question that intrigued me since my college years. How does any individual "fit" into a larger historical process? We can describe our lives, i.e., we can recount experiences of successions and durations, much as anyone does in writing an autobiography. However, I had a further question: Where do any of us fit in this immense historical context? I asked questions, and some of them explored beyond what happens to me, my loved ones, and acquaintances. I was venturing into the why and the wherefore of human history. I eventually even wondered about my own wondering and asked whether my flow of questions served any purpose.

Along the way I came across authors who composed better formulations of my questions. I wondered with Lonergan if there are any "successive stages of this, the greatest of all works."² I resonated with Phil's talk of

¹*The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, 237.

² Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWL 12, 491.

“finitude’s lonely molecules” facing mortality and asking whether there is more to living than daily preoccupations with work and rest, family and a circle of friends. I think the puzzle about the empirical residue is relevant to answering this question. Reading *Allure* led to my understanding that divine minding grasps both what human explanatory understanding at its best only approximates and what wholly eludes theoretical understanding, i.e., the empirical residue. Now does the existential significance for me of “In Thought we live” begin to be more apparent?

To thinly outline how that maxim became so important to me, I begin with a question: Are you and I beings distinct from one another and everything else? If we each have different histories composed of diverging series of antecedent conditions and our varied and often inconsistent responses to them, then it seems obvious we have become distinct beings with different identities; we are distinct realities. Yet, what is fairly obvious seems at odds with passages in Lonergan’s 14th Place in *Insight*.

...[B]esides the primary intelligible, there are to be considered the secondary intelligibles, for the unrestricted act of understanding, inasmuch as it understands itself, also grasps everything about everything else.

[...]

Still, though the secondary intelligibles are distinct from the primary, **they need not be distinct realities**. For knowing does not consist in taking a look at something else, and so, though the secondary intelligibles are known, they need not be something else to be looked at. Moreover, the primary being is without any lack or defect or imperfection; but it would be imperfect if further realities were needed for the unrestricted act of understanding to be unrestricted.³

These passages give two explicit reasons and make an implicit appeal to the universal viewpoint to affirm that you and I are not distinct realities. First, intentional acts preparing for or complementing acts of finite understanding have “no place” in talk of infinite understanding. If the primary intelligible had to engage in multiple intentional acts to learn about and understand “further realities,” it would not be unrestricted or complete in itself. Put another way, those acts would be conditions for knowing, but God’s knowing is unconditioned.

Second, an unrestricted act of understanding does not need other realities for it to be complete. As unrestricted it is not dependent on conditioned things for its own completeness. What sense did I make of this

³ Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 683. (Bold font added.)

claim? The following passage provides a clue: “No external term makes God know, or makes God will, or makes God create, conserve or govern. For things are not the cause of divine knowing; rather, divine knowing is the cause of things. And it is the same in the other cases (willing and so on).”⁴

Here I made a breakthrough in searching for an understanding of the puzzle about the empirical residue and personal identity. All conditioned things are wholly what they are because of their relation to divine knowing and willing. What any secondary intelligible could be is eternally known and, if it exists, is eternally known and willed by the primary intelligible.⁵ How much of a breakthrough was this for me?

Given that “the unrestricted act of understanding, inasmuch as it understands itself, also grasps everything about everything else,” God also understands the empirical residue. But for an unrestricted act of understanding, the knowing of all such differences occurs in an eternal “now.” The implication is that “In Thought we live.” That is, all secondary intelligibles, along with their antecedent conditions and responses, exist “there [in the mind of God] and no where else.”⁶ While from a human perspective our lives have a dimly lit past, a barely understood present, and an unknown future, to God they are present and eternally known in all their details.

What is my current best understanding of the original puzzle? As finite entities, each conditioned thing is distinct from God. This much was never puzzling. What was puzzling was the added remark that even so they “need not be distinct realities.” Now, if explanatory knowing is by identity and if reality is whatever is intelligible and knowable, then to say “in Thought we live” is to posit an intentional identity of us, in all our particularities, within an eternal and unrestricted act of understanding. Do you find this quite strange? I do. What does it imply for understanding our identities and roles in history? This is a line of contemplative inquiry to which Phil’s gracious nudges led me late in life, a development I did not expect and for which I am grateful.

⁴ Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Jeremy D. Wilkins, CWL 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) 441.

⁵ Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, CWL 8, 687.

⁶ *Vignette* 10, “A Place in the Son: Rise with Me,” 11, available at <http://www.philipmeshane.org/217-vignettes-2018-33>.