

Tribute to Philip McShane

I would like to thank Fred Lawrence for offering me this opportunity to say a few words about Phil McShane. I take this opportunity to offer a few anecdotes and personal reflections, many based on conversations with Phil over 43 years as well as some comments on Phil's academic life and works.

I met Phil in 1977 when I returned to complete my undergraduate studies at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax in a course he was teaching, titled; *The Question of God*, using his text: *Music That is Soundless*. The course was my first introduction to Lonergan and to myself in that manner. After the first class my impression of Phil was that of an eccentric Irishman. Half way through the course I had come to understand him as a person who was at home in his humanity. At an end course party, we began our friendship as fellow guitarists singing Paul Simon's "Sounds of Silence". Phil was a reasonably accomplished pianist but had taken up guitar while working on his doctorate at Oxford, impressed with Simon's song, which echoed the problems in society around human conversation. I suspect that learning to play the guitar may have also been a survival strategy from the ethos of Oxford.

In 1980 or so, Phil shared with me that after his first reading of *Insight* in 1957, his first thought was "This stuff is not going to take." What did Phil do after having that thought?

I can say with a good degree of certainty that Philip McShane was a scientist, a methodologist, a dedicated pedagogue, a creative scholar and for me a colleague and friend. I will try and say a bit about each of these descriptions of Philip McShane.

The background Phil brought to his first reading of *Insight* was in mathematics and physics, in other words he brought his experience of theory to his first reading of *Insight*. Phil, I have no doubt, was already theoretically converted when he began reading *Insight*. He was at home in the explanatory world, not because Lonergan promoted it, but because he had discovered for himself, that it is the way forward. Reading *Insight* gave him not just a name, for what he had already achieved, but a way of distinguishing the various differentiations of consciousness. I suspect that intellectual conversion was not far off, if not already occurring before finishing that first read. Lonergan did not mention the terms theoretic conversion but he did refer to theory often in his writings. Phil comments on this in *Lack in the Beanstalk: A Giant's Causeway*: "He [Lonergan] never wrote of theoretic conversion, even though it was pivotal for him for both the emergence of epistemo-logical luminosity and the transposition of philosophy."¹

Even before Lonergan developed functional specialization Phil had often chatted with Fred Crowe, and probably Lonergan, about method in terms of how to implement Generalized Empirical Method, which had been on Lonergan's mind for some time. (See Second Preface of RSE, p. liv on this topic) In 1966 Lonergan shared his recent discovery of functional specialization with Phil that Lonergan would eventually publish in his 1969 paper in the *Gregorianum*. After that occurrence Phil focused more on method in his teachings, writings and conversations.

The first signs of Phil as a methodologist are revealed in his two articles that he presented at the Lonergan Florida Conference of 1970 on botany and music (published as *Plants and Pianos* in 1971 Milltown, Dublin). These articles attempted to manifest how Functional Specialization would help in transposing both zones into an ordered explanatory context. Phil's later writings would

¹ South Brookfield, Nova Scotia: Axial Publishing, 2006, 89.

reveal that he could move about in the sciences, not just with understanding in a theoretical context, but also with the context of GEM and FS in mind.

Functional collaboration would become a focus, in his different forms of communication and research. At the same time, he focused on theoretic conversion, an aid to understanding the relationship between science and the implementation of Functional Specialization and Generalized Empirical Method. Phil was convinced that theoretic conversion was the necessary key to achieving intellectual conversion and face the challenge in the follow-up to Bernard Lonergan's thought. He was constantly developing diagrams and various metagrams (Terry Quinn and James Duffy will say something about these) in an attempt to identify the processes of future work required to implement Lonergan's major insights and discoveries.

One of the better examples, of his developing pedagogy, were in his many books and articles on economics. Phil was concerned about social justice and the suffering and burdens that present schemes of economic and political practice were placing on the global community. He travelled widely to Aus., Korea, India, South America and more to provide lectures and workshops in economics. Over a period of two decades Phil would write and publish six books and various articles on economics. He continued also to refine his approach on how to present Lonergan's economics and after years he refined his focus to the two firms, the foundations of economic science. If something did not communicate the necessary insights to the audience, he went back at it.

As a methodologist and a pedagogue, Phil was expressing his authentic subjectivity, continuing to grow in understanding the existential leap that Lonergan's intentionality analysis potentially made possible for the subject, for the academy, the culture and the future. There is a talk Phil gave in the early 1970s in Wales to a group of Jesuits in their tertianship titled "Towards a Future Spirituality". It is difficult to read and not sense his at-homeness in his own transcendental horizon. His pedagogy encourages a turn to the subject, a move to reflect on one's performance, no matter the topic. The talk, 31 pages, was never published but draws on his personal experience as he had earlier expressed in *Music That is Soundless*.

I say authentic in that Phil, as many may know, was unhappy with the state of education. I recall in 1979 Phil was invited by the university's President to offer a public lecture to mature adults to encourage them to attend university. Approximately 50 people were in attendance. Phil offered a view on education as understanding and not memorization or commonsense nominalism. In conclusion, Phil advised them all to go to the library, take out the good books, go home and read them. The lecture was to be a gathering to increase enrolment. Phil stayed true to his position. It would have been dishonest and against his own view on education to tow the PR line.

As a student of his for 44 years, and that is still ongoing, Phil always offered assistance and clues, but left you to work it out on your own, staying true to the nature of human development by encouraging one's independence regarding their intellectual growth. He always had time for his students offering pointers towards their own development. I recall one student who managed one philosophy course with him telling me the prof never gives the answer. Phil was a clue provider, you might say. That student went into another field. My point being that Phil's self-appropriation and experience of his own growth in understanding is embodied, he is at home in his appreciation of the other's process of development.

In 1984, shortly after I had completed my graduate studies in philosophy and theology, Phil invited me to teach in the Philosophy department at MSVU. We taught philosophy together for 10

years until his retirement in 1994 and we often schemed about how better to teach and approach topics always asking the question: What's next? Or how can we do this better? I was doing most of the questioning though and he was always there to offer assistance.

In the later 1990s, Phil began hosting conferences, first in Nova Scotia and later, alternating between the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Saint Mary's University in Halifax. The early conferences focused on science and theory, the later ones on functional collaboration. One of his creative schemes in 2009 was the idea of what he called SGEME, the society for the globalization of effective methods of evolving. It was not long lived, but it embodied his creative spirit which was always scheming, searching for better ways to provide collaborative work.

A further creative development of Phil's is a view of education as the Childout Principle: "When teaching children any topic, you are teaching children children." In the early 1980s Phil developed a course while at the Mount called "The Child as Quest" which focused on that Principle, although I do not think the name "Childout Principle" emerged until afterwards.

One of Phil's last creative schemes was what has become the *Duffy Exercises*, facilitated by James Duffy. It is the challenge of implementing what Lonergan identified as crucial to progress. A collaborative process of groups of persons working their way through the three objectifications as outlined on page 235 of *Method in Theology* (CWL 14). See [volume 14 of the Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis](#) for the various efforts by groups of collaborators expressing their efforts of the three objectifications. My group of three were attempting to unravel why Chapter Five of *Insight* is a natural bridge from an examination of science to that of common sense. It is no easy task, as I have tried, but then, that has always been Phil's and Lonergan's point, that understanding within an explanatory context is never easy, and yet it is what is required if a shift in culture is to occur.

One of the struggles of being at home in transcendental method is living in this life with its tension in existence. As much as I know Phil lived with it, he also found ways to direct that tension into advancing his thought, his creativity, his hope for humanity. His many works bear this out and would be of great assistance to the implementation of Lonergan's genius. Most recently, Axial Publishing has republished two of what Phil considered his better books of the more than twenty-five, that he published in his life, *Randomness, Statistics, and Emergence* and *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*. They were reissued in January of this year and anyone interested in a deeper grasp of the self, of Lonergan's thought and scientific method, would profit from a gradual ingestion of these two works.

Not that quantity is always a sign of quality, but for those who like numbers, Phil has written 30 books, 25 published and 5 on his website. He has edited six books, two of which are numbers 18 and 21 of Lonergan's collected works and 3 volumes of journal articles. He has published 60 articles in various journals and 522 articles on his website. Phil's self-understanding, and of the shift in history that Lonergan was positioning for the sciences, for human progress and a livable life, is of a quality that was rare and that rarity and need motivated both his quality and his quantity. Phil's energy, emerges out of his commitment to the historical shift of what Lonergan's work would potentially bring to the academy and to history. When Phil was writing his Cantower series, I was printing them off and trying to read them as they appeared on his website which was almost daily. He eventually asked if I would place them in binders for easier reference. When I gave him the first binder I said to Phil: "You are writing for some distant future." He replied: "Yes". I sensed the word "unfortunately" was contextualizing his reply. In terms of Phil's quality, I never found

him in conflict with Lonergan's thought as I am still slowly coming to understand it, or in terms of my own self-appropriation as I am still slowly coming to understand myself. If I experienced conflict, I usually found out later that I was "not there yet". The depth and extent of Phil's thought is something for a future by those more adequate than I.

It has been said that Phil's writings are difficult, and a friend recently emailed me with that comment. I suggest that the difficulty lies with us, the readers, and not with the author's words. If one has the energy and patience, his many works would be worth the effort. There is sufficient data in Phil's online writings for a few dozen thesis or research projects to keep people busy for more than a few decades. It will be no easy task as Phil was at home in the explanatory zone and he offers the same view of Lonergan in his book *Economics for Everyone*. I quote from page 127-128 of the text.

Lonergan was, above all else, a man who was extremely comfortable in the world of theory: which, of course, left him living in a Proustian discomfort. By theory here I do not mean broad scholarly activity or vague theorizing. I mean a world of seriously explanatory relating mightily distant either from the world of common sense or from the mentality of post-systematic and post-theoretic meanings. He took a stand on Butterfield's claim regarding the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that that revolution "outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements, within the system of medieval Christianity."[†]

Lonergan's presence in, and respect for, this central horizon shift of the last millennium is the hearty ethos of both of his heuristics and of his castigation of the pretensions of commonsense speculation.[‡] Regularly he noted the role of the explanatory development of the elementary science of physics in the genesis of precise self-knowledge.²

Phil often mentioned that "intellectual conversion" is a very rare thing at this time in history, and he described it as luminous theoretic conversion. Phil was convinced that self-appropriation or intellectual conversion cannot be achieved with any precision without experience of theory. And they are ongoing processes, but more importantly, no theory means no implementation of the new science of functional specialization. I think Lonergan's encouragement to read Lindsey & Margenau's *Foundations of Physics* and Phil's continual encouragement of theory held similar views, and I have gradually come to that same view.

In Phil's online essays *Field Nocturne* 41: "What are we up to now?" he quotes from Lonergan: "Theoretical understanding, then, seeks to solve problems, to erect syntheses, to embrace the universe in a single view."³ Following the quote Phil writes: "This is not the theoretical understanding of present axial conventions: it is a loving mindful embrace of particles and plants, pain and poverty, peace. ... There is the issue of love leading to repentance, to sorrow, to joy, to fresh operative good will."⁴

² *Economics for Everyone*, 3rd edition (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2017), 127–128. The two inner references: [†] Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, 1965, vii; [‡] *Insight*, CWL 3, 441–45, 560–67.

³ *Insight*, CWL 3, 442.

⁴ This essay is available at: <http://www.philipmcschane.org/field-nocturnes>.

Phil was an admirer of James Joyce's view of life and style of prose. It has been said of Joyce that he held the entire structure of the *Wake* in his mind while writing it. I believe Phil held and holds in his mind a similar image of Lonergan's life work and its possibilities for the future. He could move about within Lonergan's full works and vision it seems with ease and quote from numerous sources from memory. I believe that this full image was contextually present in his life and in all his work and living.

I found Phil's creative and intellectual energy beyond any I have ever encountered. We worked on a few articles and projects together over the years, one that comes to mind was in the early 1980s. We were working on Jasper's notion of *existenz*. He got an insight through our readings and discussions and I witnessed, for the first time, his excitement. I sensed Phil experienced each insight, specifically that one, as a glimpse of God. This was not a philosophical position, but an existential one contextualized by his grasp of emergent probability—he was mingling with the divine creation, and he knew it. Through his writings he still is.

And there are other dimensions to this man.

Phil enjoyed life besides his academic work. He enjoyed a healthy social life as he enjoyed people and music, so we often took in local Irish music here in Halifax when we could. Phil enjoyed hosting a good dinner party to be followed by music and his often comment; "What will your next song be?" His love of Chopin and Beethoven often filled his home. And every home had a piano. Phil also enjoyed hearing and telling a good joke. I think he and Prof. Galan, better known as "Paco" to many, were rivals in this area. I recall Phil telling a joke during one of his classes in 1979, and upon finishing, he added: "Well, you can at least say you experienced one insight while at the university."

In November of 1984, Phil called me after he received the news of Lonergan's death. We spent the rest of the day with a bottle of scotch, piano music, and talk of Lonergan's legacy. I asked Phil if he would attend the funeral. He replied: "Bernie's not there." Phil had lost, not only a dear friend, but an intellectual companion whom I suspect Phil felt understood by. The few times I met Lonergan and spoke to him by phone, he would ask how Phil was. I never sensed he was being polite. I suspect Lonergan too, felt that Phil understood him.

In 2009, following our conference at SMU in Halifax, before driving Phil to the airport on his way home to Vancouver, we stopped for a last dinner of Chinese. We were discussing the future of Lonergan scholarship and Phil asked me; "What's going to happen?" I responded; "If things remain as they are, Lonergan will be included as just another philosophical view among many." This was not new to Phil, but perhaps hearing it struck him differently. He said nothing and his silence left me feeling he wasn't finished yet.

On June 27th of last year three days before Phil went into the fullness of life, he wrote a final letter to me. In it he outlined probably the shortest advice in history on controlling the meaning in history. In that one-page letter he scribbled what he considered two central components necessary to move forward in Lonergan Studies and Scholarship; that there is the need of an emerging focus on a luminous genetics, seeded in Chapter 15 of *Insight*, and the heuristics of the completion of a full cycle outlined in Chapter 10, section 5 of *Method in Theology*. On page 60 of Phil's last book, *Interpretation from A to Z*, published just a few months before he left, he expressed his own struggle with genetic control: "It remains beyond me but I struggle on with a startled open mind." If Phil struggled with this, then I suspect that most of us do.

Phil's contribution to Lonergan scholarship and Lonergan studies is best exemplified in that he continued for six decades to expand, build upon and refine Bernard Lonergan's thought, in ways quite unique within the follow-up to Lonergan's achievements. As well, he was critical of how such follow-up was occurring. His writings attest to his position on this matter.

It has been said that genius is rare and history seems to prove that. Phil once shared with me: "That he was no genius, but he knew one when he met one." I believe Phil's self-description was on the mark. He was one of those who not only recognized genius but was able to build on such work. In 1979, Phil had been invited to assist in the opening of a Lonergan College at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. I would like to read a bit from Phil's book, *Lonergan's Challenge to the University and the Economy* published in 1980. He presented the opening lecture and ended with a quote from Leo Strauss:

Just as the soil needs cultivators of the soil, the mind needs teachers. But teachers are not so easy to come by as farmers. The teachers themselves are pupils and must be pupils, but there cannot be an infinite regress: ultimately there must be teachers who are not in turn pupils. These teachers who are not in turn pupils are the great minds or, in order to avoid any ambiguity I a matter of such importance, the greatest minds. Such men are extremely rare. We are not likely to meet any of them in any classroom. We are not likely to meet any of them anywhere. It is a piece of good luck of there is a single one alive in one's time.⁵

After quoting Strauss, Phil writes, "In Canada, in Quebec, we have had a piece of good luck." He was, of course, referring to Lonergan, but I think the same can be said of Phil. Persons who recognize genius also seem to be very rare in history. In Philip McShane, we have had a piece of good luck.

Phil was hoping to prevent history from repeating itself, in that it took Lonergan's genius to unravel the conceptualism that had dominated Thomism for 8 centuries.

Let me recall Phil's first thought after his first reading of *Insight*. **This stuff is not going to take.** Phil spent the next six decades of his life attempting to prove himself wrong. But he was usually patient with anyone who was questing for better understanding. His view of history was one of patience, offering that perhaps by the year 9011 humanity might enter the third stage of meaning. Although such a date seems too much, it speaks of his view and perspective on history, emergent probability and human growth. It also elicits images of many struggles ahead. This appreciation of the human slowness in growth and of history, I think helped Phil appreciate just how great the challenge is, the existential gap between what we are and what we think we are.

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⁵ *Lonergan's Challenge to the University and the Economy* (Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1980), 143.