

Low and Beholden

I wish you and I, here and now, to start simply: Low. I wish your attention to be held by what seems a simple ardent suggestion of Lonergan: what I call *The Lonergan Overture*. It is an Overture that points to overcoming the problems noted by both Max Plank¹ and Thomas Kuhn,² but don't bother following up this pointing unless you find it persuasive in holding your attention. So: here you are: Lonergan's suggestion.

Investigators are urged both to expand what they consider authentic in the followers of a religion they are studying and, as well, to reverse what they consider unauthentic. The result will be a projective test in which interpreters reveal their own notions of authenticity and unauthenticity both to others and to themselves. In the short run both the more authentic will discover what they have in common, and so too will the less authentic. In the long run the authentic should be able to reveal the strength of their position by the penetration of their investigations, by the growing number in the scientific community attracted to their assumptions and procedures, and eventually by the reduction of the opposition of the hard-line dogmatists that defend an inadequate method no matter what its deficiencies.³

The volume quoted indicates that the paper was written in the winter of 1977-8, and its editors claim that "it is among the most important pieces Lonergan ever wrote."⁴ They do not give their reasons for this claim, but I would put this paragraph at the center of my reasons for such a claim. By the end of the second page of his struggle with the suggestions for the symposium he twists those suggestions towards being a request that turns neatly round the paragraph that I just quoted: "if I understand them correctly, I am to be my little self."⁵

Let's take it from there and go "low" in reading his paragraph. Forget about the subtleties of investigating religions, but yes, think of your "little self" as investigating something, the better if

¹ See *Insight*, 549, at note 4.

² See *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, CWL 17, "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon," 403–4.

³ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 392.

the investigation is shared.⁶ A favorite suggestive topic of mine in lecturing was a Toronto family that has been going north to a lake for summer holidays for twenty years, the latter years, so to speak, going south.⁷ They decide to investigate together, in functional bits, both the depressing reality of their holiday stories and the possible shifts each can come up with to rescue their togetherness. The rescue is indeed to be recognized as a mutual gift: they move on, beholden⁸ to each other. The rescue is not to be expected to be all sweetness and light: think of a hard-liner member who needs to be near a liquor store. So: there you have a pointer towards a ‘general *Assembly*’: what do you think a group in on-going trouble might do to effect improvement?

I wish to make no further suggestions here, beyond adding the earlier disturbing lines of Lonergan, lines which make the same set of suggestions the form of a cyclic dialectic.⁹ And I wish it, obviously, to hold your attention, perhaps even letting this little overture of my little self nudge you to muse about some group project, even get members of that group to share the musing in both amusing and discomfoting forms.

⁶ The sharing is to mature in a variety of related ways. There is the distant way pointed to in note 10. But in this century we can expect a maturing that places, e.g., the task of *Assembly* in a reasonable regularity such as is witnessed in the cycling of a mature Standard Model in physics at present. The cycling suggested by Lonergan, of course, will lift particular cycles to a quite new global statistical efficiency. A beginning of sharing the task is at present being organized, titled by James Duffy: the contact is James Duffy <humanistasmorelia@gmail.com>

⁷ I present the illustration at the beginning of chapter 1, “The Turn-Around” of my *Futurology Express* (Amazon, 2019).

⁸ This is a quite difficult complex of suggestions, especially in this shabby ending of the negative anthropocene. The reach for an integral perspective on the suggestion will help towards getting to grips not only with our title and our stumbling sequence but with the entire cyclic project envisaged by Lonergan: the emergence of characters of progress (“Essay in Fundamental Sociology,” *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research*, edited with commentary by Michael Shute, University of Toronto Press, 2010, 20) and characters of charity (*ibid.*, the entire page 43). “Blessed are they” A quite different culture is needed to lay all cards on the table and be bluntly, if kindly, corrected, and end up climbing forward as “beholden.”

⁹ The cyclic dialectic was a poise of Lonergan at 30, including the realism of statistics. “What is progress?” “It is a matter of intelligence. Intellect is understanding of sensible data. It is the guiding form, statistically effective, of human action transforming the sensible data of life. Finally, it is a fresh intellectual synthesis understanding the new situation created by the old intellectual form and providing a statistically effective form for the next cycle of human action that will bring forth in reality the incompleteness of the later act of intellect by setting it new problems.” (see the essay referred to in the previous note: p. 20). On the shift of statistics through cycles see *Insight*, top of p.144.

Horizons.

The results, accordingly, will not be uniform. But the source of this lack of uniformity will be brought out into the open when each investigator proceeds to distinguish between positions, which are compatible with intellectual, moral and religious conversion and, on the other hand, counterpositions, which are incompatible either with intellectual, or with moral, or with religious conversion.

A further objectification of horizons is obtained when each investigator operates on the materials by indicating the view that would result from developing what he regarded as positions and be reversing what he has regarded as counterpositions.

There is a final objectification of horizon when the results of the foregoing process are themselves regarded as material, when they are assembled, completed, compared, reduced, classified, selected, when positions and counterpositions are distinguished, when positions are developed and counterpositions reversed.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Method in Theology*, 1972, 250(2018, 234). I lay it out in a handy format of the lines 18-33 of the 1972 edition. Line 18 begins with the end word of a sentence, *horizons*, which poses the question nicely for each of us. I would note that I have considered this piece of text in various useful contexts. For example, there is the context of chapter 12, “Dialectic and the Notion of Being” in *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, where the text is reproduced on pages 145–46. There is a comprehensive treatment of a full context of the text in “The Coming Convergence of World Responsiveness,” *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* vol. 29 (2018). There is the context of the disturbing essay, “[A Paradigmatic Panel for \(Advanced\) Students \(of Religion\)](#).” My recent venture lifts the text into the quite new context of effectively engineering the global future: [The Future: Core Precepts in Supramolecular Chemistry and Nanochemistry](#) (Axial Publishing, 2019).