

THE ETHICS OF DISCERNMENT<sup>1</sup>

The focus of my attention here continues to be the shift to functional collaboration, but there is the added focus of the book referred to in note 1. The previous essay [Disputing Quests 10](#) “Paul’s Epistles and Functional Systematics,” presents my perspective on scripture studies, and it is also my presentation at the *West Coast Methods Institute* at Loyola Marymount University, April 20–22, 2017. I was quite cheered to find that Mark Morelli required in the papers some identification with a functional specialty. Perhaps this is a new turn to begin that work in theology, philosophy and culture? But I was somewhat put out when I heard that the panel discussion of the conference was to be centered on the book named in footnote. The book is a challenging read that, indeed, shrinks and derails the seeding of functional collaboration.<sup>2</sup> The discussion of that topic is relegated to the final short<sup>3</sup> “Part V: Method in Ethics” of the book, with two chapters, “Method in Ethics I: Preliminaries” and “Method in Ethics II: Dialectic and Foundations.”

There are, however, three previous references in the book to functional specialization—pages 9, 296, and 404—and pausing over them helps us forward in the struggle to locate the book’s content in the flow of progress. Pages 9 and 296 make the same point but it seems best to quote the two referencing paragraphs fully here.

These accounts<sup>4</sup> of the good and of ethical knowing and acting provide a basis for entering into the very difficult ethical disputes of our time. Part V (chapters

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<sup>1</sup> The obvious reference is to Patrick Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan’s Foundations for Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). The book is referred to below as simply *Byrne*.

<sup>2</sup> A blunt statement, “but is there not room for a measure of bluntness at this stage?” F.E. Crowe, “The Exigent Mind,” *Spirit as Inquiry: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan S.J.*, edited by F.E. Crowe S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 28. Fifty years later Crowe’s bluntness is even more relevant. However, such bluntness, providentially, is built into Lonergan’s science of dialectic in those glorious last 16 lines of *Method* 250. Readers may puzzle about my reasons for not getting into details about the content of Byrne’s book. Such “getting into” would fit nicely into the tradition of “academic disciplines” (see note 16 below). But to be effective my blunt statement has to lead us together into the shockingly discomfiting personal bluntnesses of the end of *Method* 250. Later you may climb towards glimpsing this by weaving together my comments here with those of notes 8, 14 and 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Byrne*, 413–48. Chapter 15 is pages 413–31; chapter 16 is pages 432–48.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to Part IV, accounts of Lonergan’s “ideas about the good.” *Ibid.*, 8.

15 and 16) therefore, explain how Lonergan’s idea of the “eight functional specialties” can be used to make unusual but much needed contributions to those disputes. I argue that this is a method that integrates these functional specialties and meets the challenge Lonergan set himself in *Insight* but never fully met: a method in ethics that would be comparable to his work in metaphysics and theology. Those final chapters do not, however, actually apply the method to such disputes, but rather offer tools that can be used fruitfully by those engaging in such controversy.<sup>5</sup>

I also hope that the brief examples<sup>6</sup> offered in these sections can serve as models for entering into the more erudite contemporary debates and conflicting views about what is and is not ethical. Ethical and moral debates are taking place in a wide variety of academic, cultural, political, and religious settings. Many people have come to despair that they are capable of any sort of resolution. Chapter 15 and 16 explore the fruitfulness of Lonergan’s idea of a method of “functional specialties” for entering into such debates. Behind the idea of a method of ethics stands the idea of ethical authenticity – that is, morally converted thinking, valuing, deciding and action, which takes place within a horizon of feelings converted and faithful to the immanent norms of the unrestricted notion of value, unrestricted being-in-love, and the normative scale of value preference. The method of ethics outlined in the concluding chapters shows how self-appropriation of converted ethical intentionality can clarify and refine and it at least some cases resolve otherwise intractable ethical conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

Before musing over the poise of these two paragraphs, I need strategically to point to the content of the third reference to functional specialties. That reference is to disagreements with Robert Doran, and Byrne’s reflections on related issues carry through seven pages, ending with the following paragraph.

These difficulties may not be insurmountable, nor may be difficulties with Doran’s suggestion of rooting the scale of value preference in the five levels of human consciousness. But for the moment I do not see clear resolution of the difficulties. It is for this reason that I return to this question once again in chapter 16.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Byrne*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> They are 8 examples of stands on what it means to be ethical.

<sup>7</sup> *Byrne*, 296.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 410. The return seems to be the single page 446. The issue is an “academic discipline” debate over the scale of values. As I conclude this little essay—in finishing this footnote as I do here and now—I think of possible distractions from the main issue that could occupy a panel for an hour. This would be one of them. Then there is the distraction of the debate about feelings, or perhaps a ramble

Disagreements with others are raised throughout the book, but let me just indicate one before I muse over Byrne's general strategy in the book.

Byrne has his own take on the place of feelings in discernment, but there is "an alternate interpretation,"<sup>9</sup> that provided by Michael Vertin, who "agrees with Cronin and me"<sup>10</sup> on some points. Where does the discussion and the dispute lead?

Vertin rightly notes that Lonergan's writings on this topic are terse and open to many different interpretations. The correct determination cannot rest, therefore, upon Lonergan's writings themselves. Ultimately, the question of the correct role of feelings in reaching correct judgments of value has to be settled by an appeal to self-appropriation of one's own experiences of the phenomena themselves. Both Vertin and I have done our best to discern how feelings enter into judgments of value. It remains to the readers' own efforts at self-appropriation to determine which, if either, of us, comes closer to a correct understanding of these phenomena.<sup>11</sup>

We may pause now together over Byrne's strategy in the book. The pause could well be a lift-off into another book, but my own strategy is to make it just a lift-on into a single page. Here my effort is pedagogical. So I ask you to read now a piece of that single page, beginning with "**they**" read by you now as you and me and Vertin and Cronin and Byrne and Doran and: anyone else you might think of inviting in.

**They** will be operating from within different horizons. The results, accordingly, will not be uniform. But the source of that 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, counter-positions, which are incompatible with intellectual, or with moral, or with religious conversion. A further

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round Part II of the book and the "Three More Questions" for ethics that parallel the usual three questions of Lonergan about knowing. But the real issue is the distraction that Byrne's misdirected foundational effort places in the way of a serious start to global functional collaboration. See note 2 above. Perhaps you might muse over a remark of Schumpeter that is right on regarding academic disciplines and their inevitable schools: "I have never tried to bring about a Schumpeter school. There is none and it ought not to exist. ... Economics is not a philosophy but a science. Hence there should be no schools in our field." From a farewell address to his students at Bonn, p. 47 of Gottfried Haberler, "Joseph Alois Schumpeter: 1883–1950," in Harris, (ed.), *Schumpeter: Social Scientist*. Quoted thus in the Introduction by John E. Elliott to Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), xlii.

<sup>9</sup> Byrne, 199.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Byrne, 200.

objectification of horizon is obtained when each investigator operates on the materials by indicating the view that would result from developing what he regarded as positions and by 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.<sup>12</sup>

Our next pedagogical move is to invite you and **them**—perhaps “cajoling or forcing attention”<sup>13</sup>—to view the two paragraphs comparatively.<sup>14</sup> No: I can’t force you, or perhaps even get you to pause seriously. Still, there may be some who would pause over a single sentence of Byrne’s paragraph, and think in its terms of that wonderful end to *Method* 250, one I call **Loneragan’s 1833 Overture**.<sup>15</sup> The single sentence is: “The correct determination cannot rest, therefore, upon Loneragan’s writings themselves.” I am asking you to consider a shift from Byrne’s meaning there of the writings of Loneragan on feelings. Cannot the correct determination rest on and rise from another writing such as **Loneragan’s 1833 Overture**? Heavens, what if you and I and **They** took Loneragan’s sketch of Dialectic at its face value and thus stopped messing around in the conventions of “academic disciplines”?<sup>16</sup> That, sadly, is

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<sup>12</sup> *Method in Theology*, 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Insight*, 423.

<sup>14</sup> In this introductory nudge I must skim past the huge mess that Loneragan cleans up brilliantly in section 3 of *Insight* chapter 17. I would note that this solution is pre-functional collaboration. Even if Loneragan students continue to dodge functional collaboration, **they** have to confront their more elementary dodging of the challenge of the genius-paragraph of Loneragan that I call 60910. I was tempted to quote it here, but decided eventually to simply add an Appendix, at the end, which includes that paragraph of *Insight* 609–10. It is a report I sent to the Loneragan leadership gathering in Boston, June 25, 2016. No harm in repeating it: “repetition is the mother of convention,” and this perspective needs to become a convention of scientific interpretation if we are to stop arrogant messing. Far more “difficult and laborious” is the convention of the full meaning of *Comparison* (*Method*, 250) within theology that is to lift theology to a genetically successful and effective science in a solution to Loneragan’s puzzle (*Insight*, 763–4) about the treatise on the mystical body. On this, see my *The Road to Religious Reality* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2012), 18–22. Recall the context suggested by note 2 above.

<sup>15</sup> I am referring to the 16 final lines of *Method* page 250.

<sup>16</sup> *Method in Theology*, 3: the final words. Grappling with their meaning calls for serious thinking and fantasy to which one is thrown back by the powerful paragraph to follow on the top of the next page. What is this academic discipline approach? It is all around, especially in literary and philosophic studies. Instead of dropping names, there is the name-dropping of various opinion-holders. Perhaps

what Byrne's book does. He and **They** fail to get the point of the turn of the first page of *Method in Theology*.

But I am tired of repeating this pointing to the sick conventions of my older Lonergan colleagues. I am tired of watching them corrupt the next generations. Perhaps you might step aside, and face the task of self-discovery lurking in the first three paragraphs of *Method in Theology*? The "third way ... difficult and laborious"<sup>17</sup> will eventually reveal globally that the ethics of discernment or the discernment of ethics is identically the cyclic reach of a global community of care the asks our leaders to face and intussuscept the purgation of **Lonergan's 1833 Overture**.

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you might just go back and muse over the text at notes 8, 9 and 10. Add the context of notes 2 and 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## APPENDIX

### REPORT SUBMITTED BY PHILIP MCSHANE FOR THE JUNE 25<sup>TH</sup> BOSTON MEETING

I send this report as a private person, although I am included in the SGEME report: perhaps being senior Lonergan scholar and editor of some of his trickiest works are grounds for an allowance for this exception?

The report concerns a dismal failure needing a serious discussion. We have all failed to take the challenge of Lonergan's canons of hermeneutics seriously: instead we putter along in the mode of "academic disciplines" (*Method*, end of the first page of chapter one), condemned by Lonergan on the next page of *Method*. The leadership leads in the stale outdated way. Doran swoops thus on *CWL* 11 and 12; Lawrence sweeps thus through German thinkers; McShane swaps thus one discipline for another repeatedly without tackling the genetic hermeneutics of any; etc. etc. Is it not time that we paused to be effectively embarrassed by a central doctrine? ("Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company." *Method*, 299) The embarrassment is in finding ourselves among those mentioned by Lonergan on *Insight* 604, in the flow of presenting his view of the needed serious science of interpretation. Being diligent and specialized is not enough.

One may expect the diligent authors of highly specialized monographs to be somewhat bewildered and dismayed when they find that instead of singly following the bent of their genius, their aptitudes, and their acquired skills, they are to collaborate in the light of abstruse principles and to have their individual results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results.

The issue, the central doctrine we have dodged, is the emergence, across the board, of genetic systematics, an emergence packed into the genius paragraph (*Insight*, 609) of the second canon of hermeneutics:

The explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being involves three elements. First, there is the genetic sequence in which insights gradually are accumulated by man. Secondly, there are the dialectic alternatives in which accumulated insights are formulated, with positions inviting further development and counterpositions shifting their ground to avoid the reversal they demand. Thirdly, with the advance of culture and effective education, there arises the possibility of the differentiation and specialization of modes

of expression, and since this development conditions not only the exact communication of insights but also the discoverer's own grasp of his discovery, since such grasp and is exact communication intimately are connected with the advance of positions and the reversal of counterpositions, the three elements in the explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being fuse into a single explanation.

I note, in conclusion, first, that the point is made clearly in my two-page essay [HOW 6](#), "The Pullet's Surprise"; secondly, that the issue I raise is not one of functional collaboration, but of a blatant dodging of Lonergan's pointers, in *Insight*, regarding genetic development.