

“SELF-CONTROL” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IN THE ECONOMICS OF THE POSITIVE ANTHROPOCENE AGE

*An open town, and without defenses:
such is the man lacking self-control¹*

My very large problem is to wake up misdirected Lonergan students to the difficulty of reading and implementing Lonergan’s works. My central problem in this and the surrounding essays is to interest some few in building a bridge between the old and the new in “The Search for the Historical Jesus.” My immediate problem, in this essay, is to find my way towards writing effectively the third essay, “Scripture Studies: Turn Wright III, the second being *DQ* 5. *DQ* 6 was a first step in that direction.

So, my bright idea is to take-off from the end of *DQ* 6, leaving Kansas for OZ at the last word of Lonergan’s essay, “Mission and Spirit”: “self-control.”² That previous essay illustrated reading Lonergan by homing in on bits of pages 106–7 of *Method in Theology*, and the word self-control occurs in the only piece of scripture mentioned there, the piece from *Galatians*, already mentioned at note 1. Best present that text to you now, and with it two other texts where there occur the word “self-control”, the usual English translation of the Greek word, *egkrateia*.

Gal. 5:22: “What the spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Acts 24:24-26: “(Felix) sent for Paul and gave him a hearing on the subject of faith in Christ Jesus. But when he began to speak of righteousness and self-control, Felix took fright and said, ‘You may go for the present: I will send for you when I find it convenient.’”

II Peter 1: 6-7: “But to attain this [v. 4: ‘he has given us the guarantee of something great and wonderful to come] you will have to do your utmost yourselves, adding goodness to the

¹ *Proverbs* 25:28.

² Ending a quotation from *Galatians* 5:22.

faith you have, understanding to your goodness, self-control to your understanding, patience to your self-control, kindness to your fellow men in your devotion, and to this kindness, love.”

I selected three of the four occurrences of the word, self-control, in the New Testament. The poise needed to self-control the meaning of it there reminds me of my recent adventure in Jonathan Bernier’s doctorate work on the three occurrences of *apodynamogon* in John’s Gospel. In thinking on that, and in struggling to write effectively about Wright, I have been pushing for, and been pushed towards, what I called above the positive Anthropocene heuristic of interpretation. That sounds pretty weird but it is a help, and I enlarge on it in the lengthy footnote below rather than getting us focused on it immediately here. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to pause over the occurrences of *egkrateia* in the New Testament, indeed reaching back to its equivalent in the Old Testament, muse about whether it would be a helpful pre-thesis project to figure out contexts of its meaning in the New and Old Testaments. To help us on, I think it is useful to add a parallel secular literary question: think of the meaning of *pious* in the Aeneid: perhaps even focus the quest on the coupled words, *pious Aeneas*. I could well title another essay, paralleling this one, “*Pious* in the Aeneid and 20th century Irish Catholicism.” From note 1 you can figure that I am dealing with two slices of the negative Anthropocene Age. As it happens, this is a problem that occurred to me first when, at 16, I read in school sufficient of the *Aeneid* to glimpse the gap in quite an unfavorable light. How might I tell you about that gap, or about the gap between Proverbs’ or Peter’s or Paul’s meaning of *self-control* and a distant meaning of that dashed word?

But now I must add the context from which the second half of my title comes. I do this best by quoting a final note from the Third Part of my recent book, *Profit. The Stupid View of President Donald Trump*. It is a note regarding the meaning of promise in the global economy of some later millennium. The promise is of a new vortex-controlled self-control of self-control. The vortex, of course, is to be a mature global functional collaboration. Best put the quotation in immediately here.

Might I not end this Part Three on a high note, pointing to a name, *promise*, as the Greeks used the name *element* in identifying 4 elements, an identification vastly distant from the identification of elements given by quantum chemistry. My meaning of *promise* is altogether more remotely distant from the meaning to which we must needs climb. Money is a promise, but what do

we mean by *promise*? We mean, 99% of us, nothing more than an initial meaning, even if at times it is rich with feeling. Its full meaning is to lift self-interest and self-control into global promise: and what is that? Lonergan ends the first-page “Outline of the Argument” of his 1944 essay on economics with talk of the needed leap away from Keynes’ nominalism of self-interest continued in our brutal and stupid times: “The exchange economy is confronted with the dilemma either of eliminating itself by suppressing the freedom of exchange or of certain classes of exchanges, or else of effectively augmenting the enlightenment of the enlightened self-interest that guides exchanges.” *For a New Political Economy*, 232. The core crisis in the middle daze of the negative Anthropocene Age is to tackle the task of effectively discovering the self-meaning of self-control. Meeting that crisis is at the heart of the “vast task” Lonergan wrote of at the end of his 1942 economic essay. For further guidelines see *Disputing Quests 7: “Self-Control in the New Testament and in the Economics of the Positive Anthropocene Age.”*³

Am I not confusing the venture considerably? Bear with me: you shall find that the venture here is, in a sense quite elementary and briefly stated. One more context then.

“Self-control” is the last word in Lonergan’s essay on “Mission and the Spirit”—it ends his quotation of *Galatians* 5:22.⁴ We get a convenient bridge to the meaning we are musing about here by quoting the starting sentence of that same essay.

“As man’s being is being-in-the-world, his self-understanding has to be not only of himself but also of his world.”⁵

This start is certain, surely, to give you pause, but now I would have you focus that pause on the oddity of the meaning of “self-understanding of his world,” an oddity perhaps slipped over even in a first prolonged pause. Might you climb to glimpse the twist towards a luminous self-control that is identically world-control? Might you thus meet the call and enter the terror of kataphatic contemplation. Then, then, then, “so it comes about,”⁶ so you come about in an X-Mansion to reach a self-control more adequate but never adequate—so there is the haunting of the seventh gift of the Holy Spirit—to pay forward an increasingly effective interpretation

³ Note #25, pages 112–113.

⁴ “Mission and the Spirit,” *A Third Collection*, edited by F.E. Crowe S.J., Paulist Press, 1985, 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23. I shall return comprehensively to this opening line in *DQ* 9, early in 2017, hopefully nudged on by suggestions from you. Its present meaning for you is worth a long serious contemplative pause in the months between. Indeed this entire article provides a great lead into the problem of adequate interpretation that haunts these present essays.

⁶ *Insight*, 537, 11th last line.

of the lonely muddling of anyone reaching towards the meaning of “‘Self-Control’ in the New Testament and in the Economics of the Positive Anthropocene Age.”

What more might I, should I, write here? The climb to glimpse challenges you to mesh chapter 7 of *Method in Theology* with the third section of *Insight’s* chapter 17. It would, then, be foolish of me to go on summarily here. But you might well, be well, taking a start from the mesh of my chapter 7 of my recent allure, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, with chapter 17 there.