

All learning is, not a mere addition to previous learning,
but rather an organic growth out of it.

Method in Theology, page 237.

Rather than getting into the spread of components in my own positioning, I want to pick up on a point made by Phil McShane in a communication sent Saturday, November 5, 2011 at 8:42 AM to: 'lonergan_l@skipperweb.org'--re : positioning in philosophy and economics.

But before I pick up on it, I wish to relate McShane's point both to this series of seminars and also to my own, ongoing work. Again, I would like to establish these relationships in such a way that they bring out: first, the legitimacy of the topic of dialectic being set forth in this fourth of our seminars; and secondly, how McShane's point contributes to our common drive to understand the condensed invitation on page 250 of Method in Theology to participate aptly in the deeply novel method of dialectic collaboration.

Very wisely, McShane encouraged us to stay with the second half of page 250 in this seminar. He added that by the time we have reached seminars 12 and 20, we slowly will have circled our way back to the top of that page. But Phil's recent correspondence is important, pressing, novel and 'inciteful.' And I suggest that its citation should not be delayed until later discussion.

Might I note that my previous paragraph is a positioning? For in it, I, Frank Braio—am “indicating the view that would result from what he regarded as positions and reversing what he regarded as counter-positions” (250, lines 26-28). Further, might I ask my reader to think of this positioning concretely, in the manner in which McShane has been envisaging it for many years? For concretely indicating lines of development is what dialectical analysis reaches for--whether in these early stages of its implementation or in its own mature developmental flowerings in later centuries. Again, McShane, in the concluding section of Cantower 8, “Slopes: an Encounter,” envisages a group of ten dialecticians struggling in the concrete with their practice together. Here, perhaps, ‘we’ are such a group—some twenty or thirty of us? And, perhaps, also I can claim – and this too is a positioning – that there are perhaps ten of us here,

¹Having missed Mark Morelli's conference last summer in honor of his '80th, this paper is only a meager, abbreviated, tardy effort at homage to my long-time teacher and friend, Philip McShane.

working through FuSe 17, who are sufficiently familiar with Lonergan's work to get a little further into the top half of page 250 in this seminar. Am I opposing McShane's positioning regarding this seminar? No. I merely am inviting, here, the addition of a "tincture of systematic meaning"² as it emerges from the 'double cycling' dialectic mentioned on lines 24-33 of page 250.

Again, I would prefer not to enlarge on this topic in relation to the seminars so far. Still, I do want to mention the full challenge of *Assembly* (the concluding word of *Method*, 249) that relates to the positioning I am suggesting. So, regarding clues that can be found in those earlier seminar texts, in this brief positioning--I simply will attach them as footnotes to my main text. The major point I will be assembling here, then, is only a single pointer given by McShane. Still, for me it remains both rich and dense in meaning: a density that is the result of decades of dialogue with him on the meaning of the canons of hermeneutics.

Here is McShane's text from Skipperweb:

> Hello All,

>

> A recent discussion between Adrial and myself was unsatisfactory and

> it is as well to try to point out, even in popular form, why it - and

> other discussions of that form - are dated in the context of the new

> method of collaboration provided by Lonergan. I think that it is

> worthwhile giving at least a brief notice of the problem, since it is

> part of the complex of problems that are surfacing here regarding

> economics. The big issue is the emergence of new scientific methods,

> or in the case of economics the emergence of science for the first time. In our

> economic discussions at the moment we are making progress, but I sense

> that some of the beginners are baffled by more advanced references.

> BUT if we accept that we are into a science, then we are not surprised. For

> instance, the meaning of CONCOMITANCE is, let's say, a third year economics

> topic of future economics. It is to involve eventually a serious understanding

²*Method in Theology*, 329, last line. It is worth noting parallel references in *Method*: 278, "a slight tincture" of theoretical consciousness; 309, "a slight dose of systematic meaning." See notes 3 and 12 below for further sophistications.

- > by a large scientific community of a two-layered oscillatory dynamic right round
- > the globe, with micro-, meso-, and macro- estimates of flows, innovations,
- > controls, etc., etc. This is way-out-stuff for the commonsense economics - at
- > present overlaid with statistics and undermined by mistakes about the
- > meaning of CREDIT - that we practice at all levels at present. Now we have a
- > similar remote context fermenting towards emergence in the area of
- > positionings in philosophy. An old style of positional discussion would have
- > people expressing their positions to each other and then entering into dialogue.
- > Such a procedure has all the flaws that Lonergan identifies at the beginning of –
- > "The Problem" - of section 3 of chapter 17 of Insight. What is the transition that
- > we are vaguely anticipating? I was trying delicately to intimate the transition by
- > keeping to page 250 of Method, but the top half of the page is the context of the
- > second half, and that top half is way too compact as a scientific intimation.
- > Hiding behind it is the scientific heuristics of Insight 17.3.
- >
- > Is there some other way of intimating the new view?
- >
- > Think of two people describing a flower that they have picked. Unless they are
- > really up on evolutionary botany - quite beyond Linnean classifications -
- > identifications and comparisons are vague, sometimes helpful, sometimes not;
- > but they do not fit into a science looking for "cumulative and progressive
- > results" (Method, pages 4, 5). What is needed, and indeed operative in good
- > botany, is an evolutionary classificatory structure that would get the two folk
- > out of description and into a scientific location of the flower.
- >
- > O.K. the flower we are picking is the spontaneous operative positioning of humans.
- > The advanced evolutionary control of the flowering human position is to be given by
- > the second canon of hermeneutics, itself bred by a culture of that difficulty
- > classificatory heuristic "the universal viewpoint." If you and I wish to get beyond
- > endless disputes about the statement of our positions - a flowering that is talk of
- > our spontaneity - then we have to move into the new method which finds where
- > that flowering is located in the genetics of positioning. I don't want to go further,

> but it is worth noting that the full evolutionary heuristics of positioning rests on a
 > geo-historical-imagined controlling structure of genera, species, and varieties of
 > positionings, quite remote from the present culture of philosophy.
 >
 > And we can benefit from the parallel with economics. The new context of
 > economics that is to emerge is way beyond us now, much worse than Faraday's
 > dabblings with electrical oddities prior to the genius-lift of Maxwell. We are,
 > indeed, like people intrigued by the fact that the comb run through one's hair
 > snatches up bits of paper. So, what are we to mean by Concomitance, Credit,
 > sane monetary flows, by the end of this millennium? We have little idea. But
 > at least now we have a suspicion that it is a two-flow thing, a two-story human
 > house, and that we cannot continue to play monopoly-money games in the attic.”

I have quoted this McShane text at length because it points towards a significant piece of a future science of dialectic; and because it is claiming that such a dialectical science is to blossom forth out of Lonergan's dense methodological sketch of *Method*, 250. This helps me to realize, and I hope it will help my readers to realize, that there are to be complex positionings about the various conversions of human consciousness; and that these positionings are to achieve a level of refinement that is absent from the contemporary Lonergan literature on the topic. Again, I would claim that the lengthy text I quoted from McShane represents a pastiche of such complex positionings; a pastiche that ultimately will go beyond the “tincture of systematic meaning”³ I am hoping for here. And it will move toward full systematicity, once we have moved towards a greater maturity concerning what McShane often talks of as a Standard Model or *acquis*.

My own meaning here is minimal. Still, I have brought to this reading of McShane's text decades of work on the canons of hermeneutics and on this page of *Method*. Yet his comments were pointing me, were pointing us towards a new, higher way of reading, linking and implementing those texts. What comments can I make here on those pointers and on the needed shift to future developments?

³This note, recalling note 2, above, refers to *Method in Theology*, 278, 309, 329. McShane has been inviting for some time us to reach towards a full heuristic thematics of this tincture or dose. Think, perhaps, of the flower as the history of bio-chemistry has moved past vague convenient description to, for example, medical classifications and weight determinations all the way through to a tentative, contemporary explanatory context.

McShane's recent *FuSe 21* throws light on this problem: there needs to be, at this stage, a kind of redemption of our undifferentiated renditions and applications of both Lonergan's (and of our own) differentiated insights--in order to invite a following of his suggestions. Or else it needs what I am going to do here -- a modest sharing of one's own search. My notes will come from reflections on parts of McShane's text and from my interest in the meaning of *Comparison*, the third word in Lonergan's series of six words constituting the operations of dialectic on that page. Also, they will come, to some extent, from my familiarity with "The Problem" Lonergan sets forth in Chapter 17 of *Insight*; and his answering set of canons—especially the second. I will share with you here my own notes in order to invite others to stumble along similarly.

In his text, McShane is pointing something out about the operation of 'comparison.' He is noting that the comparisons of the dialecticians' understandings of the flower to each other would remain unnecessarily vague unless grounded in the best contemporary biochemical theory of the flower. By 'comparison,' then, McShane is thinking of the third operation in the series 'assembly, completion, comparison, reduction, classification, selection' presented on page 250 of *Insight*. And he's thinking of the second application of that series--when the community of functional dialecticians reflects on its own first application of that series of operations to the question of the flower. Now they are 'comparing' their own first set of geo-historically assembled 'comparisons' to each other.

In the best case, each of the dialecticians, then, is relating the accounts to each other--on the basis of his or her own understanding of the best contemporary biochemical understanding of the flower. That will lead them to array their set of best understandings of the flower to each other in terms of each one's actually best contemporary biochemical understanding.

What will result⁴ is a genetic ordering of systematic understandings--arrayed as heading towards that best contemporary understanding. As I once thematized it, and as Pat Brown recently found in the Lonergan Archives,⁵ that will take the form of something like:

$$SSn-6 > SSn-5, SSn-4 \dots SSn > SSn+1 > SSn+2 > SSn+3 \dots$$

In this symbolism, '>' signifies successive higher viewpoints; 'SS' signifies something like a systematic understanding of the flower; and the subscript 'n' signifies the dynamic state of that understanding, beginning, say, from the Linnaean descriptive system (SSn-6) and progressing through to SSn+3--the best, contemporary biochemical, understanding.

It should be noted that the entire comparison process is 'open;' and that it will have to be revised and re-thought out with the emergence of 'SSn+4'--the next best biochemical understanding emerging at some geo-historical point on the globe at some future time. Without some such structuring of viewpoints relative to SSn+3, the comparison is unnecessarily vague, descriptive, nominal and infertile.⁶

The task of shifting out of descriptive vagueness into an explanatory, genetically oriented ordering of viewpoints, associates to the discussion of the organism in chapter 15 of *Insight*. That discussion is, of course, grounded in Lonergan's discussion of "genetic heuristic structure." But, the larger point about dialectic that I am making, here, is that that novel understanding of the organism of *Insight*, Ch. 15, now will have to be transposed into the dialectical context of "the organic dynamic of meaning."

That transposition of dialectical method into the context of the organic nature of meaning will be complicated. And it would seem that I, and all of us, need to collaborate in attempting to bring it about. Indeed, that is, perhaps, my central positional affirmation. I will continue here in the manner of someone trying to do one's best, in the mode suggested in the first seminar.

⁴I am holding off for later discussion elsewhere the problems that have emerged in previous seminars on this point; and that are touched on only passingly below. In any event, the result of the process described above will be a cyclic and progressive achievement generating new contexts for further, more refined results.

⁵ See FuSE 14 B, which is Patrick Brown's Los Angeles paper of April 2011 on the neglect of *Method*, 250. I am thinking, especially, of his archival work on *Comparison* in the concluding pages of his paper.

⁶I am avoiding bringing in considerations of the other words in the list of six on page 250. One might get into the topic of *Reduction* here--this would force me to discuss the problem of a pervasive 'reductionism' in contemporary biology; and the possible moves beyond positional vagueness. See note 12 below.

First, I think of the question of whether the best contemporary integrator of the contemporary biochemical understanding of meaning is positional in me; is positional in us; i.e., is it situated in an “aggreformic context”? This would position me and position us within the context of the meta-word W_3 ; within the integral heuristic structure of being—and invite our positioning within the integral heuristic structure of the being of meaning(s). Can I, can we at least in a broad heuristic way, trace the interlocking development of the flower on successive, interacting chemical and organic levels? And, much more difficult, can I, can we place that understanding in the context of the flower's environment and the interaction of its schemes of recurrence with those of other schemes operative in the environment--the schemes of other things: insects, other plants and flowers, human beings and their technologies; nitrogen, oxygen and metabolic cycles, etc. And, even more difficult, can I, then, can we in doing this, set the conditions for a novel, dialectical, structured engagement with and comparison of the historical meanings of the flower?

The latter comparison, thus, will need to avail itself also of the best contemporary “expression” of the biochemistry of the flower, i.e., the biochemical understanding of the flower admits successive, improving sets of technical biochemical expressions.⁷ But this “expressive” aspect of the drive for adequate comparison invites still further questions. Before turning to them, let me note that Lonergan gives other heuristic leads for the needed transposition of dialectic into an explanatory context--in Chapter 5 of *Insight*. These leads point to another aspect of the further advance, for Lonergan speaks, there, of different interpretations.⁸ But, more broadly, Lonergan give us there the idea of successive, improving perspectives on (and expressions of) the geometry of space-time: not an area I am at home in. But one may recall descriptively the movement up through Riemannian, Minkowski and other differential geometries that were pre-Einstein; and then people like Herman Weyl and David Hilbert whose work in mathematics led, dialectically, to a notion of a further genetics of understandings, perspectives and expressions of space-time beyond Einstein's.⁹

⁷This is an extraordinarily complex topic. It turns on the analysis described in that dense paragraph on *Insight*, 489. In fact, McShane has devoted 41 *Field Nocturnes* to it. The main point to bear in mind is that, while I am emphasizing the biochemical level here, it is the actual operative and integrative botanical forms with their recurrence schemes that are the focus of our interest. Again, in the dialectic of the understandings of the flower, there will be the actual operative and integrated forms of meaning, positioning and expression that will have to be related to each other integrally from such a higher achieved functional viewpoint.

⁸ I would note that this important first mention, “a problem of interpretation arises” (*Insight*, 186) needs to be added to a later Index of *Insight*.

⁹ Cf. *Insight*, 186-188. A context here is provided by Philip McShane, “Elevating Insight. Spaced-Time as Paradigm Problem,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 19 (2001), 203 -229. See pps. 213ff. On page 213, he references the key dialectic work on the topic: Lochlainn O’Raifeartagh, *The Dawning of Gauge Theory* ((Princeton University

Notice, in this last illustration, that we are helped by the symbolism of the process that I gave above:

$$SS_{n-6} > SS_{n-5} > SS_{n-4} \dots SS_n > SS_{n+1} > SS_{n+2} > SS_{n+3} \dots$$

Indeed, for some of my readers this last illustration, even though it comes from physics in which neither I nor, likely, they are competent, may be a good bridge to our reach for a fuller meaning of *Comparison*. And it may throw accents on the problem of better connecting *Method* 250 with Lonergan's canons of hermeneutics.

Let us think briefly, then, of the pieces of these comparative operations as they point us to the "canon of explanation," the second canon of hermeneutics, in Chapter 17 of *Insight* (p. 609-610). That canon invites us to think of the heuristics of an adequate explanatory hermeneutics by specifying three dimensions or elements of developing meaning in history. Again, I am here sharing my effort to read the second paragraph of the canon, one on which McShane focused us in the second seminar.¹⁰ McShane makes a great deal of this paragraph. In fact, he draws from its last line where Lonergan argues that the three elements of meaning "fuse into a single explanation." Again, McShane prefers the title *Fusionism* to the older term *Lonerganism*. What of these three elements?

First, there is the development of insight in a given field, the genetics of understanding. We might think, analogously and concretely of a field of flowers; but now we are thinking of the interpretation, i.e., the understanding of flowers, or indeed of a particular flower. We might recall, here, McShane's early work on buttercups as they are distributed statistically on the field in Oxford called Port Meadow.¹¹ Some few of you might find it useful to go with the simpler venture of the development of the physics of space-time! Mentioning that this venture is simpler is a definite positioning, one that is far more important than it would seem. It is an implicit positioning of the book *Insight*: flowers are too difficult to introduce as a major topic prior to Chapter 15. But the difficulty still shows up here, for the space-time example leaves us grappling only with one genetic dynamic of meaning; whereas the developing interpretations

Press, 1997). I leave further references to this text to qualified readers of it such as Terry Quinn, Pat Byrne and Professor McShane, etc.

¹⁰Again, *Insight*, 609-10.

¹¹ See Philip McShane, *Randomness, Statistics and Emergence*, Gill McMillan and Notre Dame, 1970, 71-76.

of a flower give us a multiple, aggregatively layered problem of meaning. Let me very briefly turn to it now.

The flower, the buttercup, is a genetic dynamic from seed to maturity and fertility.¹² But also, the understandings of the dynamic of the flower are a genetic dynamic. And it is explanatory study of that genetics of understanding that is the topic of this first element of the paragraph. This dynamics of understanding is normally a product of what Lonergan writes about in the second element of this paragraph. The understanding of space-time, of molecules, of flowers and dogs, is – and was more so in past times - a business of random, un-related ventures on different parts of the globe, mistaken suggestions, etc., etc.

Let us move on to the second element of the canon with this suggestion in mind. There are the dialectic elements of an explanatory heuristic of meaning--and woven together here are what Lonergan calls the positional and counter-positional aspects of meanings. These aspects orient us towards the problem of the meaning of the fourth and fifth words on page 250 of *Method: Reduction and Classification*. I've entered the occasional comment on these in footnotes, but I would prefer that here we stay focused on this paragraph and on *Comparison*; so I am going to leave for another discussion the complexities involved in applying these two further operations. Furthermore, here I do not intend to delay over the question of "expression," which is the third element of an explanatory heuristics of meaning set forth in that paragraph: but it must come up as a central topic later.¹³

Let me stay focused on the flower and its developing interpretation or understanding in history. I wrote, above, about up-to-date biochemical understanding. But, of course, the bio-chemicals – as Lonergan lays them out on *Insight*, pps. 489ff – are the "lower aggregates" of botanical forms. Furthermore, these higher botanical forms not only are integrative but dynamic. And their dynamic becomes twofold, threefold and finally fourfold when one seeks to understand the participation of the flower in the

¹²A good personal exercise is to locate oneself comparatively in the full positional heuristics of W_3 , i.e., with respect to the meaning intended by McShane's symbolism (Pi; Cj; Ok; Zl; Im; Rn); and to orient oneself in relation to *Comparison* in regard to this meaning. Such a re-orientation is part of the challenge of the second half of *Method*, page 250. How, for instance, does one stand in relation to *Insight*, 275: "No doubt, I can imagine the plant as seen, as related to the senses, as described. But "

¹³ A few random citations relevant to the problem of an explanatory dialectic of interpretive expressions must suffice here. Cf. *Insight*, pps. 18-20, 42-43, 67c, 544-552, 576-585, 592-595, etc.; Lonergan's lectures on logic in *Phenomenology and Logic*, especially his notes on the view of Kurt Goedel; also see pps. 111-114; and Philip McShane, *Lonergan's Standard Model*, chapter 1.

supernatural order. Again, this issue will have to emerge in a mature contemporary dialectic—with its implications for the future of the botanical sciences. But, for now, we had best stay here with the flower and its bio-chemistry—at the very least we will have only the two “layers” to keep in mind, i.e., to control the meaning of:

[a] above, we mentioned the complexity and needed refinements of positional analysis; and its role as the second element in the hermeneutic canon of explanation. Let me add here that such analysis—will emerge from reflection on the developing understandings or interpretations in a field such as botany; and that these reflections will yield a much more refined system of distinctions between developing positions and opposed and opposing counter-positions than one finds, for example, in the ‘Introduction’ or on page 413 of Insight. Further, that system of distinctions for controlling reflection on the dialectic of self-understanding in history should be expected to approach the relative invariance anticipated in physics; even to converge towards a relative a-historicity. Again, the seventh functional specialty is to be a genetic systematics, i.e., in McShane’s symbolism ‘GS.’ That would involve sequencing the historical development of understandings in, say, botany with its counter-positions reversed. Besides the conversions, then, there are as well ongoing, diverging perversions, diversions, regressions, etc.; and, paralleling the system of positions and counter-positions, these, too, are to be expected to be in a certain sense ahistorical. On the other hand, one also can have distorted understandings of the flower (even if they are positional in form).

[b] there is the dynamics of the flower, with its hierarchic and its genetic aspects. Two points are worth raising here: can these two aspects of the flower be merged in a single symbolism; and can even the deviant development of the flower be handled in some dialectical fashion? But again, these questions are diversions from my chosen focus.

So let us just attend once again to the growing understanding in history of the buttercup; and we can think of it in terms of the series already used:

$$SS_{n-6} > SS_{n-5}, SS_{n-4} \dots SS_n > SS_{n+1} > SS_{n+2} > SS_{n+3} \dots$$

I do not wish to get us lost in the actual complexity of the understandings. Rather, I would prefer just to arrive at several simple – yet, indeed, complex – points. Think of X’s understanding of the flower. Do we wish to compare it to Y’s understanding? How do we do we dialecticians do it, according to Lonergan?

This is the important question, one that beautifully brings together the second canon of hermeneutics and the meaning of the word *Comparison* with the operations it entails.

How do we “compare” X’s understanding and Y’s understanding?

We do so, scientifically, by locating X and Y’s understandings of these understandings within the full ‘genetic’ sequence of understandings of the flower.¹⁴ Both may be correct in that they are understandings belonging to different times and contexts. But here a problem arises. What of erroneous understandings? This is a difficult question that needs further work. The solution, I believe, would come by relating it to the general heuristic suggested by McShane: FS + UV + GS.¹⁵ A corrected erroneous understanding has a certain isomorphism with a reversed component in the fuller genetic systematics, in GS. And both the correction and the reversal would inform, would go into a developing GS. On the other hand, is it not necessary to maintain a richer dialectical viewpoint in order to identify the location and content of the non-counter-positional, erroneous view?

I’ve gone as far as I want to for the moment; so let me pause with this positional invitation—one that, I think, is in harmony with Pat Brown’s reflections on *Comparison*, already mentioned.¹⁶

My notes open up here, in a non-systematic fashion, to broader comments on the task of *Comparison* in relation to both the ‘universal viewpoint’ and the full, doubled set of tasks of page 250 of Method. They open up, further, to the problems that arise when one thinks of the geo-historical, organic process of human meaning-making; and the problem of controlling the inner word of such meaning creation in terms of the notion of contexts—contexts of meaning that are related as ongoing, overlapping, merging, etc.—a notion introduced in Lonergan’s later writings. My suspicion is that to move forward in this set of topics will require a serious communal dialectical engagement with the relevant sections in Insight and Method, in A Third Collection and – as Pat Brown’s scholarship has shown us - in the Archives.

¹⁴ The implementation of the second canon of hermeneutics in dialectic, then, would seem to presuppose the ongoing search for the ‘complete explanation’ of the flower. On the other hand, understanding that search would seem to presuppose the dialectical implementation of the second canon of hermeneutics. Cf. Insight, 107-108 and 609-610.

¹⁵ FS + UV + GS is the topic and title of Section 3 of FuSe 10: “Contexts of Functional Interpretation.” Implicit in this formula and the point underlying this paper, is the need to bring Lonergan’s collected works into the context of functionally specialized study. Perhaps the reader and I both share the view that this will be a tall order.

¹⁶ See note 5, above.