

INTERPRETING¹ THE CANONS OF HERMENEUTICS

Although you may not have noticed, we have spent considerable time in these essays on the second canon of hermeneutics, occasionally lifting our reflections to the transposition mentioned in note 1 of *Method in Theology* 153.² Now I wish us to spread our wings and fly towards the sun, or perhaps towards the sunflower and the Sonflower. You'll glimpse a little of what I mean by that previous sentence's dangerous journey as we putter along.

Puttering is the name of the game now. Pause over the second sentence of the first canon. "It demands that the interpreter begin from the universal viewpoint and that his interpretation convey some differentiation of the protean notion of being." What in heaven's name did you make of that on a first reading, and what, even, do you make of it now? Read it again, with brighter I, after reading the final sentence of my footnote 1 below, and LOL. It certainly can help you realize that there was some wisdom in my skipping over the topic "universal viewpoint" in my previous essays. How might I convey a working notion of the universal viewpoint? Well, it seems that I would need to have us work at that new discomforting zone, dialectic.

¹ This first footnote is in fact my final footnote here, a comic gesture, like naming the groups-structures relevant to the present standard model of particle physics. So, how do we solve the problem of the second note here? My colleague James Duffy posed such a question and I joked that, well, it is good to think in terms of the page number: 153. Why not aim at a solution in the essay *Interpretation* 153, "Interpretation's Group-Structures of Operations." Thus we would arrive at a "net full of big fish, one hundred and fifty three of them" (*The Gospel of John*, 21:11). "The answer is easily reached" (*Insight*, 195). Skipping past the concrete details of the global outreach of the 8-by-8 matrix C_{ij} , there are at present nine genera of interpretation, eight of which are isomorphic with the eight specialties.

² Best repeat that note here, in its relevant substance, as our second note in this new phase of our enterprise: "One of the advantages of the notion of functional specialty is precisely the possibility of separate treatment of issues that otherwise become enormously complex. . . . See my own discussion of the truth of interpretation in *Insight*, pp. 585–617, and observe how ideas presented there recur here in quite different functional specialties. For instance, what there is termed a universal viewpoint, here is realized by advocating a distinct functional specialty named dialectic."

Objections to this move of mine abound, perhaps even now in your own poise here. What, you may say, of the move of Lonergan, who, having pitched the problem at us in a couple of pages, launches us into reading about “the notion of the universal viewpoint,”³ where “by a universal viewpoint will be meant a potential totality of genetically and dialectically viewpoints.”⁴

Off Lonergan goes then with the next short sentence: “Our present concern will be to clarify this notion.” Surely we can trust him here, that there is to be a climbing achievement in the next four pages?

We are back with the problem that we whirled around in the first of the essays on interpretation, *Interpretation 1: “A Fresh Start.”* Perhaps we should also go back to Lonergan’s problem of the summer of 1953, when his presentation was battered by him being transplanted to the Gregorian University in Rome.⁵ But let us leave that large sore topic aside, and LOL, as we suggested in that first essay, notice the trickery of the demand he makes of the interpreter when he gets to writing about it in *Method in Theology*: “understanding the object.”⁶

Let us go back to the topic of the sunflower, or daisy, or Californian Redwood.

Suppose now I settled in to “clarify the notion” of the viewpoint needed by a botany doctorate student who wished to get into a precise growth problem related to smog-induced defective carbon-exchanges associated with nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate.⁷ Or perhaps you would prefer me to envisage something simpler, like Feynman’s doctoral thesis?⁸

³ *Insight*, 587.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ It is still too early and discomfoting to face the many facets of the religious decay involved in the ethos of this treatment of genius. The letter mentioned in the final footnote here is one of Lonergan’s early cries in the wilderness of his student days there. See the cry at the end of note 10.

⁶ *Method in Theology*, 156.

⁷ One may get glimpses of the problem of climbing to the universal viewpoint by noting that it inclusively sublates the heuristics of the genetics of the tree, (see *Insight*, 488–92) and the genetics of understanding the genetics of the tree, or the genetic heuristic of mathematics (See “*Early Works on Theological Method 2*, CWL 23, 175–77.) You might muse over how all this twines round W_3 .

⁸ *Feynman’s Thesis—A New Approach to Quantum Theory*, edited by Laurie M Brown (*Northwestern University, USA*), 2005. A magnificent neglected piece of creative work, but much simpler than grappling with a new approach to sunflower-growth. There is to be a massive cultural shift in these next centuries that is to turn upside-down the popular view of degree of difficulty decreasing as one moves up through the sciences till one arrives at the pleasant commonsense solemnity of the social sciences and—yes, God help us!—religion.

This is all very frightful. Take your fright to page 260 of *Method in Theology*, which begins by naming “consciousness,” an object, your object here, as you perhaps take my invitation to read that page 260 freshly, poised, I suspect, fairly unclearly, in your mibox.⁹ Read the middle words of that first line—“through them we have advanced”¹⁰—in the mood of Lonergan’s 1833 Overture: did the man not write: “what there is termed a universal viewpoint, here is realized by advocating a distinct functional specialty named *dialectic*”?¹¹ You would like to speak clearly and accurately to students and to the future in a break with present common sense that is humongously shitshaped by an entire ethos of common nonsense? “Such speech, however, is found clear and accurate and explanatory only by those that have done their apprenticeship.”¹² Thus begins the next paragraph, which I claim as my own, a feeble mibox compared to the writer’s mibox, and I bring that claim into our conversation here, in your sharing of line 20 of *The 1833 Overture*. Please, please read that paragraph of page 260 now, and find in the dreadful climb to its end, Lonergan’s version of my claim: “To say it all with the greatest brevity: one has not only to read *Insight* but also to discover oneself in oneself.”¹³ My version? My version is longer, coming at you under the title of “The Interior Lighthouse.”¹⁴

⁹ The discomfiting and subtle image of mibox has haunted these essays since it was introduced in *Disputing Quests*. See, e.g., [Disputing Quests 14](#), “Doran Versus Wilkins,” p. 14 and [Disputing Quests 16](#), “Detailed Disputes: Doran,” p. 1.

¹⁰ Them? Well, them by which we are “impelled to migrate from the world of theory to find a basis in the world of interiority” (259, lines 6–7), an impossible task for those “never bitten by theory” (*CWL* 6, 155), contented in the illusion that endless scholarship of initial meanings is some sort of respectable theoretic.

¹¹ *Method in Theology*, 153: note. We are back with the clear pointing of the quotation given in note 2 above. “Advocated”? It is a massive paradigm shift in all sciences that has been—not too cunningly—ignored by Lonergan’s disciples since 1970. We must face this low-level behavior: perhaps even in this year, where there has emerged, all too clearly, “room for a measure of bluntness” (F.E. Crowe, “The Exigent Mind,” *Spirit as Inquiry: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, Herder and Herder, 1964, 27.) So, the essay to follow will pursue some initial answer to the question with which I end this one: “What on earth is to be done?” However, to Crowe’s bluntness regarding interiority I add bluntness about dodging serious explanation, living in a haven of pious common sense, “big frogs in little ponds” as Lonergan remarked to me in Dublin, Easter 1961, with not a little feeling. He had escaped “The Greg” for a week.

¹² *Method in Theology*, 260.

¹³ So ends that frightful paragraph of page 260, *Method in Theology*.

¹⁴ [HOW 13](#), “The Interior Lighthouse” introduced the topic under that title. [Disputing Quests 12](#), “The Interior Lighthouse II” continued the reflection, as did [Disputing Quests 13](#), “The Interior Lighthouse Zero.” Those essays were followed by [Interpretation 4](#), “The Interior Lighthouse III,” [Interpretation 16](#),

It is a matter of breaking forward, in shocking discontinuity, to seed a contemplative core of the positive Anthropocene Age.

Is there, then, much point in my going on here? Read that “First” paragraph on the canon of relevance and its demands. It is quite beyond your reach and my reach—though I do have some decades start on you—and that of our entire global culture. “What on earth is to be done?”¹⁵

“The Interior Lighthouse IV: Twenty Seventh Lea,” and [Interpretation 17](#), “The Interior Lighthouse V: Interpreting God.” The topic, however, goes back to [Process: Introducing Themselves to Young \(Christian\) Minds](#) (1989: a website book) and the broad challenge is made explicit in the five essays, [Prehumous 4–8](#), on “Foundational Prayer.” It is the heart of the matter in my recent book, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* (Axial Publishing, 2015).

¹⁵ I quote the end of a ten-page 1935 letter, a cry of Lonergan to his Jesuit superior in his student days at the Gregorian University. The letter is quoted fully in Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, Axial Publishing, 2010, 144–54.