

INTERPRETATION FOR DUMMIES

A horse walks into a bar. The bartender says, “Why the long face?”

A horse walks into a bar with jumper cables in his mouth. What does the bar tender say?

The long face is obvious. But what the bar tender says in the second case is not obvious, unless you have already heard the joke.¹

The long face of present Christianity is obvious. Is it because we have not really walked into the bar, the Son? Think of the first need of the interpreter: to understand the object. What is on the Son’s mind, in the Son’s minding? “May they all be one.”² Is “the greatest of all works”³ a success story? The success story is the object, poisoning us to see and seize any stage, paradoxically, as “something better than was the reality.”⁴ So, what is all this interpretation business about? It is about finding leads—**and effectively communicating them**—to attuning to that better reality. After a proper hunt of the seeing and seizing at any stage, the leads are identified at, and as at, the front end of the genetic road to understanding the object. I am making an obvious point—interpreting for dummies—that is taken for granted, say, in a bachelor degree in physics.⁵ Are you doing the equivalent of a bachelor degree in Christian theology? Then the dummy in front of the class should know that you need to tune into the front end of our grip on the object.

“Our”? The *bar* or *bat* at the front of the class needs to be capable of pointing to that grip, but now we come to a refined meaning of pointing, a meaning that requires the Bab⁶ at the front of the class to be in character in the sense given that word at the beginning of the *Magna*

¹ We shall get to the longer joke in *Interpretation 26*, “Interpreting *For a New Political Economy* for Dummies.”

² John 17:21. I note that I am quoting from the final short section of *Method in Theology*, p. 367.

³ *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWL 12, 491.

⁴ *Method in Theology*, 251.

⁵ There is a present problem here: see note 11 and the text there.

⁶ A shortened version of the Persian *Bab-ud-Din*, “Gate of the Faith.”

Moralia.⁷ I recall Fr. Fred Crowe once disconcertingly noting, in a Boston Workshop lecture, that such lecturing is, in some very basic sense, preaching. I shall put his point in a fuller context shortly, but Aristotle can be seen to be in the same ballpark. A soccer-coach does not spend his time reminiscing about Stanley Matthews or Pele: the focus is on getting the students poised for the game. If Beckham comes up as of student interest the focus is retained by pointing out how to “Bend it Like Beckham”⁸

I am expressing—C₉ style—a suggestion for classroom dummies: the teaching and learning of theology. It hints at a strategy of getting out of the “academic disciplines”⁹ approach and having a shot at teaching and learning a science. This most evident hint echoes Thomas’ remark about scattered non-scientific teaching sending the students off empty.¹⁰ The less evident hint regards the future bent of the whole ethos of the classroom activities, whether you think of those in terms of preaching or coaching. Its full context is a quite new view of science, even of the science of physics.¹¹ But it is poised over you, walking into a bar or a bab, wanting to find your pilgrim way. Or might I say, your deeper “all that is lacking”¹² self, wanting to shed the long face by grasping, and contributing to, the success story.

I add below a little appendix, a note sent out to some few during the past year.

⁷ I have regularly associated the first paragraph of *Magna Moralia* with the meaning of character as it occurs in *Method in Theology*, line 12 of page 356.

⁸ *Bend It Like Beckham*, originally a musical, is a 2002 British comedy-drama sports film produced, written, and directed by Gurinder Chadha, and starring Parminder Nagra.

⁹ *Method in Theology*, 3: final words. The approach is condemned on the turn of the page.

¹⁰ “If the teacher settles a question simply by an appeal to authorities, the students will have their certitude that the facts are indeed as stated; but they will acquire no knowledge or understanding, and they will go away empty.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones quodibetales*, IV, q. 9, a. 3). Lonergan quotes the passage fully on page 9 of *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWL 12, making the same point in his text there.

¹¹ A context is Terrance Quinn, *The (Pre-)Dawning of Functional Specialization in Physics*, World Scientific Publishing Company, 2017.

¹² *Insight*, 559.

APPENDIX: WHAT MIGHT BE.

The emergence of humanity is the evolutionary achievement of sowing what among the cosmic molecules. The sown what infests the clustered molecular patterns behind and above your eyes, between your ears, lifting areas—named by humans like Brocca and Wernicke—towards patterned noise-making that in English is marked by “so what?”¹³

This first paragraph of *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* gives a context. That book gives leads on the full functional reach of what in history. This note is a refinement and an advance, but an advance obvious if you have read the top of *Method in Theology* page 53 properly, particularly the claim: “Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities.”

So, we home in on our best grip of the emergent human ‘what’ and find it—after some labor—to be best expressed as “what might be?”

The ‘what might be’ attitude is already built into the Standard Model of the cycle: the heuristic FS + UV + GS has the supporting image of the Leaning Tower. But this fresh turn gives a lift to the implicit metaphysics of humanity. This is neatly suggested in noting that the ‘What might be?’ in primitive humanity’s attitude was gradually clouded by the emergence of an idea of science as focused on what is ‘there’ in the data. You get then, e.g. the poise—roughly from Aristotle to the moderns like Popper—criticized on the first page of the first chapter of *Method*. But it is also a poise that can hang over Lonergan’s Lonerganism: “what is that?” becomes heavily factual.

There is another poise in Lonerganism that is faulty, the one that I have criticized for decades because it treats too compactly the imperative “be responsible” of the end of that paragraph of *Method* 53. I combatted that poise by diagramming in a “what-to do?” question in various publications: e.g. *Wealth of Self*, 48; *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, p. 323. At the bottom of page 320 of *Phenomenology and Logic*, I make two points in two paragraphs that are worth revisiting. They begin with the point that “the distinction between the two types of what

¹³ *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History: Teaching Young Humans Humanity and Hope* (Axial Publishing, 2015), 3.

question is modal.” They end with the conclusion (321) that the positioning in *Insight* “and the historical analysis of *Verbum* needs to be lifted into a fuller thematic of knowing and being.”

The road to that thematic of the future might {?!} begin by a musing about the cook looking at some ingredients for a meal and asking “what might that be?” One can go larger in fantasy: think of Leonardo da Vinci looking at a piece of wood and thinking “that might fly!” and so you rise slowly to the possibility of reading Lonergan’s claim of the ninth line of *Method* 53: “an unbiased evaluation of short-term and long-term costs.” Think, for example, of the long-term costs of the industrial revolution and the global “benefits to oneself, to one’s group, to other groups.” (*ibid.*, line 10).

If nothing else this little ramble adds caution to reading, e.g., those ten lines of *Method* 53: how **might** you read it in the next year or ten?