

August 3, 2018

Public Challenging of *Method* Board IV

As can be seen from the previous three essays, the problem of challenging not just *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* but the entire present predominant tradition of Lonergan studies and operations was shared by me with the group that collaborated in writing the work, *Seeding Global Collaboration*, (Axial Publishing, 2016). I noted in my communication to them that the particular issue of the exchange with the *MJLS* was just a providential trigger. This emerges clearly in the conclusion of my communication to them:

This *Method* vs. McShane thingy is simply an instance in a larger paradigm of inswinging “institutions, roles, tasks” of present Lonergan studies out of the dark. Over to you to find and effectively exploit, perhaps, in interpersonal discomfort, further stale destructiveness of classrooms, essays, theses, papers, conference-organizations. Yes, we can reach beyond this little pool and its foggy froggy croaks. But would it not be better to have the ocean, the notion, of being, debank it?

What the group does about this, together or singly, is of course up to them. My own decision is to continue for seven essays with the focus of and on the providential instance. I am, on the face of it, thus breaking Lonergan’s rule: “Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company.”¹ But the rule is tongue-in-cheek, a mild nudge regarding what is pointed to on the first line of that same page: “may have no real apprehension of what it is to be converted.” I maintain my focus by making precise the conversion I have in mind. It is a conversion to understanding and implementing the dialectic strategy of *Assembly* (end of *Method in Theology* page 249) and triple objectification (end of *Method in Theology* page 250) in the process of journal assessments of contributions. To that I shall return in the sixth essay. Here my attention is directed to the task of a minority group in dealing with a mistaken establishment.

¹ *Method in Theology*, 299. This is a powerful page, worth a long pause. The venture to which the sixth essay invites you obviously gives an uplifting context.

I committed myself earlier, strangely, not to get into explanation, especially what I might call densified explanation. One needs a high level of refined education to tackle such densified explanation. Perhaps a few footnotes could help, to which you can return later, thus arriving by a discomfiting dialectic at a glimpse of serious patterns of adult climbing? You may recall the contrast between the nun's story and the none story?² You may pause over my own experience of the discomforts involved.³ You may get to the astonishment of finding that *Insight* is densified explanation.⁴ Thus, you may come to bow existentially to Lonergan's pointers about *haute vulgarization* as referring to one's own life and times.⁵

My *Seeding Global Collaboration* group have decent glimmers of all this from decades of my nudgings.

But those glimmers, too, are subject to deeper luminosities, deeper discomforts. The matter is illustrated handily by some of their reactions to my communications about the present problem. Some of my colleagues, indeed, took off gaily into sketching possible

² The nun's story was introduced in [Vignette 5](#), a true story of a nun in an honors class of mathematical physics. (My notes for the class are available on my website at: <http://www.philipmcschane.org/website-articles/>.) Her culture placed her beyond the entrapments of *haute vulgarization*. I could sketch a point from a graduate course without her having any illusion about the climb in explanatory growth ahead. The none's story? See [Vignette 20](#).

³ My own undergraduate work was a climb into the explanatory world of mathematics and physics, having the same bent as the nun mentioned in note 2. Yet it was only in graduate courses of 1955–56 in these areas that I became self-luminous regarding serious reading. There was Joos *Theoretical Physics*, a doctrinal book of the size and poise of *Insight* that has been a regular topic in my writing about the challenge of reading *Insight*. (See the next note). Then there was Schrödinger's classic, *Space Time Structure*: of biblical significance in venturing into general relativity. Finally, there was the classic by Whittaker and Watson on complex variable theory, the central source of a shock of illumination. I recall reading chapter one, then later opening the end-of-chapter exercises. They were incomprehensible, and I look back to see had I skipped to a later chapter! Thus, I learned to read luminously. In the autumn of 1956, I began the *Verbum* articles. But there was a further enlightening shock when, in 1957, I faced *Insight*. Schrödinger had left me quite unprepared to read *Insight's* chapter 5, "on the same topic." Might you track back to find parallel experiences? In their absence, might you not create them?

⁴ For decade's I have drawn a parallel between the doctrinal poise of *Insight* and that of Joos. I brought the problem into focus in my "Insight and the Interior Lighthouse 2020-2050," *Diyadaan. A Journal of Philosophy and Education*, 28 (2017) 277-300. There (290ff) I carefully compared the problems of reading page 722 in the two books.

⁵ Recall note 1 of the previous essay.

ways of breaking through the wall to that 99% majority of Lonergan students who are blindly content living in and with the “gap.”⁶ Our exchanges sobered the sketchings. Let me illustrate the sobering both for the group and for you by our re-reading of the dense paragraph of the Epilogue of *Insight* that begins, “First, theology possesses a twofold relevance to empirical human science.”⁷

Pause, in some degree of luminosity about the *haute vulgarization* dancing in your neuromolecular patterns’ prisonings, over the word “possesses.” Is “possesses” not problematic? Twenty lines further on there is the statement, “the systematic treatment of the solution itself is theological.”

The problem that faced Lonergan, indeed that he faced all his life, was the problem of possession: charity’s back-up⁸ to the prayer of Jesus, “. . . may they all be one . . . ? (John 17, 21)”⁹ that would “be an effective and resolute intervention in this historical process.”¹⁰ Recall now, with freshened perspective, the fourth question mentioned in note 2 of the first of this series’ essays: “(4) How effective is our story-making?”¹¹ The question is the question of the eighth functional specialty. “Without the first seven, of course, there is no fruit to be borne. But without the last the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature.”¹² The curious strengths and weaknesses of Lonergan’s final chapter 14, on “Communications,” is a large and difficult topic, but it is pretty evident that it did

⁶ See the end of *Insight* page 565, “It is through this gap . . .” and put the problem in the context of *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, chapter 13, which deals with dread and the existential gap.

⁷ *Insight*, 766, rolling on for 27 lines into the next page.

⁸ I am thinking especially of the conclusion of Lonergan’s “Essay on Fundamental Sociology”: “Charity is an eternal fire of optimism and of energy, dismayed at naught, rebuked by none, tireless, determined, deliberate; with deepest thought and unbounded spontaneity charity ever strives, struggles, labours, exhorts, implores, prays for the betterment of the unit of action of man, for the effective rule of sweetness and light, for a fuller manifestation of what charity loves, Wisdom Divine, the Word made Flesh.”

⁹ *Method in Theology*, 367.

¹⁰ *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 306.

¹¹ The first of the four central questions (at note 6 there) of [“A Paradigmatic Panel for \(Advanced\) Students \(of Religion\)”](#): “(1) Where are we in the story of our venture? (2) What are our strategies of answering that or any question regarding our story? (3) What is the place of serious understanding in our story? (4) How effective is our story-making?”

¹² *Method in Theology*, 355.

not solve the problem of effective “possession.”¹³ To begin to solve it is to face some such climb as I did in my grappling with the heuristics of nine layers of situation rooms, of a positive contravalent isomorphic fullness effectively opposing all psychosociological analyses of such genera of situations, and of the topological geohistorical weave of both heuristics Bell-curve effective in proximate and distant glocal complexes. This climb is the central climb of theology in this millennium. So much, then, for “possesses.”

There, now, you surely have a sobering paragraph that places our dealings with the splinterings of Lonergan’s meaning in a proper *Praxisweltanschauung*. And it places the task of our little minority in a cool zone, but at least a zone that it can begin to share with others who have been made curious by this strange series with its suggestively offensive title, “Public Challenging *Method* Board.” So it seems strategic that our minority home in on this instance of the majority’s wall, home in, for example, through discomfiting one-on-one outreaching.¹⁴ Surely the *Method* Board cannot remain silent as we “cajole and force attention”¹⁵ on its ways of assessment that dodge Lonergan’s doctrines? And might others of that majority not come to puzzle—even puzzle with us 1% eccentrics in the wonderland of *Method* 250—what doctrines drive their various enterprises?

¹³ I have commented regularly in these essays on the problem, in these next millennia, of pushing towards an effective meaning of “theology possesses” (*Insight*, 766).

¹⁴ This is a massive challenge. Here I think of my own failures. I have colleagues from the 1970’s who remain friendly while still being quite blunt in their refusal to consider my suggestions of either pausing seriously over our missing the point of *Insight* 609–10 or over the value of shifting to a collaborative effort. So, future generations, I wish you blessed luck. The present generations in Lonergan studies are very firmly locked into that old comparative stuff Lonergan and Husserl, Hegel, Heidegger, Houdini, Hoe-down-it. Might they be persuaded in these next decades to show some respect for those two wonderful spots in *Insight*: the paragraph that turns the page at 609–10, and the great kick-in-the-ass of the turn of the page paragraph at 603–4.

¹⁵ *Insight*, 423.