

August 6, 2018

Public Challenging *Method* Board VII

Referees: Let us begin again.

This series might indeed go on indefinitely. But surely its continuance in this form is not necessary? Surely there are students among the lost majority who have sufficient sense that all is not well with the movement? So I have decided to end, but with a final appeal to, yes, the board referee who—probably in invincible ignorance—trivialized my project, or perhaps I should say damned it with the faint praise of it being “Prophetic.” He brought that invincible ignorance years ago to his reading of the beginning of *Method in Theology*, and he has lived a rich and shrunken life of Lonergan scholarship since.

Is this not extremely harsh? I am poised in my Crested version of the third objectification in *Lonergan’s 1833 Overture*, identifying counterpositional doctrine, even though the “character” identity escapes that referee, and perhaps you.

All my readers are now referees, even if only in the most lightweight sense that can be associated with the realms of the genus C₉, that needs desperately some larger sight of **The Light**,¹ some hope-filled sense of humanity’s calling and Cauling, some emergent

¹ The final footnote to the previous essay was Lonergan’s powerful appeal for adequate imaging. Might you image, a strained fantasy, The Light, e.g. lifting my little book, *The Road to Religious Reality* (64 pages), imaging Christ’s Symphony, into the length of book that inspired it: Roger Penrose’s *The Road to Reality. A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (Vintage, 2005, 1099 pages), parallel its plethora of equations and images with effective Jesus’ poises? Think, then, we pre-Faraday people, of lifting into **The Light** Maxwell’s little starting equations for light:

$$\left(\frac{\partial^2 E_x}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_x}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_x}{\partial z^2} \right) = \frac{1}{c_0^2} \left(\frac{\partial^2 E_x}{\partial t^2} \right)$$

$$\left(\frac{\partial^2 E_y}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_y}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_y}{\partial z^2} \right) = \frac{1}{c_0^2} \left(\frac{\partial^2 E_y}{\partial t^2} \right)$$

$$\left(\frac{\partial^2 E_z}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_z}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 E_z}{\partial z^2} \right) = \frac{1}{c_0^2} \left(\frac{\partial^2 E_z}{\partial t^2} \right)$$

ethos of a “yes I said yes I will Yes”² to my fundamental question: “Do you view humanity as possibly maturing—in some serious way—or just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?” Do I have to remind you that “The Cargo Pants”³ Are you part of an uncaring crew?

But let’s get to this final exercise from the third section of the rejected article, “Certain Problems of Beginning.” It is, of course, from the beginning of *Method in Theology*: the first three paragraphs of the first chapter, and yes, I still remember Lonergan pacing his room pondering over his problems of beginning. So, here we are in our seventh haven of publically challenging the *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* Board and in particular that anonymous referee who would seem to be a member of the board. We ask now, what did he make of those three paragraphs as they occurred on page 13 of the article? We ask, too, what are we making of them now, and how different is that making from our first reading. Here we are:

Thought on method is apt to run in some one of three channels. In the first, method will be conceived more as an art than as a science. It is to be learnt not from books or lectures but in the laboratory or in the seminar. What counts is the example of the master, the effort to do likewise, his comments on one’s performance. Such, I think, must be the origin of all thought on method for such thought has to be reflection on previous achievement. Such, also, will always remain the one way in which the refinements and subtleties proper to specialized areas will be communicated.

There are, however, bolder spirits. They select the conspicuously successful science of their time. They study its procedures. They formulate precepts. Finally, they propose an analogy of science. Science properly so called is the successful science they have analyzed. Other subjects are scientific in the measure that they conform to its procedures and, in the measure they do not, they are something less than scientific. So Sir David Ross remarked of Aristotle: “Throughout the whole of his works we find him taking the view that all other sciences than the mathematical have the name of science only by courtesy, since they are occupied with matters in which contingency plays a part.”⁴ So too today the English word, science, means natural science. One descends a rung or more in the ladder when one speaks of behavioral or human sciences. Theologians

² The concluding words of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, spoken by Molly Bloom.

³ See [Vignette 19](#), “The Cargo Pants.”

⁴ W.D. Ross, *Aristotle’s Prior and Posterior Analytics*, Oxford, 1949, p. 14. Cf. pp. 51 ff. [Lonergan’s note]

finally often have to be content if their subject is included in a list not of sciences but of academic disciplines.

Clearly enough, these approaches to the problem of method do little to advance the less successful subjects. For in the less successful subject, precisely because it is less successful, there is a lack of masters to be followed and of models to be imitated. Not will recourse to the analogy of science be of any use, for that analogy, so far from extending a helping hand to the less successful, is content to assign them a lower rank in the pecking order. Some third way, then, must be found and, even though it is difficult and laborious, that price must be paid if the less successful subject is not to remain a mediocrity or slip into decadence and desuetude.⁵

I have been musing over these paragraphs for decades, musings that have moved in an accelerating genetic pattern, so that I leave my view and myself of, say, last month behind. Have you mused on that odd character of normative adult growth? It is to be a thing of the distant future, but at present there is the gloomy facticity of the view proposed by Maslow: less than 1% of adults grow.

But think of Lonergan growing towards those three paragraphs, putting aside his dilemma of how to weave *Insight* into the chapter, into the book. Indeed, there is a sense in which the problem did not affect the emergence of those first three paragraphs. The Graceful optimist in him knew how he would swing into the third paragraph. There you have it seeding splendidly in his writings of the mid-1930s so that he can write thus to the reader, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye: he had found the bones of the needed third way ... difficult and laborious. From the fourth paragraph on, he is into his dilemma: How might he get the reader to find it, and bring that finding to be “a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process”?⁶ I watched his moves carefully as I worked my way through the publisher’s galleys in December 1971, producing a rather shabby index. There were many hints of the need of an explanatory lift to reading efforts that were trapped in description, but for me the big thrill was getting to what in that edition was pages 286–7, where he listed abundantly the text *Insight* and then went on to what surely was typed with some glee.

⁵ *Method in Theology*, 3–4.

⁶ *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 306.

Such differentiation vastly enriches the initial next of terms and relations. From such a broadened basis one can go on to a developed account of the human good, values, beliefs, to the carriers, elements, functions, realms, and stages of meaning, to the question of God, of religious experience, its expression, its dialectic development.

Perhaps I am leading you to read the paragraph freshly, with astonishment and humility? He clearly is running you through the table of contents of the first four chapters and pointing to what he didn't do but what could be done: by whom? "One can go on," indeed!!

But I wish to distract no further from the challenge to read his second paragraph of *Method in Theology*, reproduced above. Here we have the key to a jump-start, if we ask ourselves seriously—at best with the seriousness of *Loneran's 1833 Overture*—where do I, do we, stand in relation to this paragraph? The bolder spirit, the bourgeois Aristotle, reduced humanity's science to a neat three-pack that moved into modernity under some such a name as *theory verified in instances*. Lesser areas of inquiry stumble about in foggy imitation. But the real deal is an 8-pack that he points to vaguely in the third paragraph, that he is obviously less vague about in the fifth chapter of *Method in Theology*, first published in 1969.

Our problem is an effective ontic, communal, and phyletic self-identification of where we are at now as readers of the challenging, heavily descriptive, and doctrinal book, *Method in Theology*. The question for all of us is, where are we in the period that is being described so compactly in that paragraph? Yes, there are two times of the temporal subject, talked of by Lonergan in the late 1950s.⁷ What lies between them is not only the incarnation of Jesus, but also the twist of the nature of human science and care given to the transition by Aristotle and the millennia since.⁸ There is a vaguely-described second

⁷ In 1957 there was the early version of *CWL 12*, published in the Gregorian University sufficiently named here as *Conceptio Analogica Divinarum Personarum*. The text referred to is in *The Triune God: Systematics*, *CWL 12*, 403–413.

⁸ This is a large topic involving the critique of Jasper's suggestion regarding an axial period in history between 600–200 B.C. Toynbee remarked on the oddity of leaving out Jesus; Voegelin saw little difference between the king listings of Babylon (2000 B.C.) and the westward ho of Hegel. (On this see McShane, "Middle Kingdom : Middle Man (T'ien hsia : i jen)," *Searching for Cultural Foundations*, edited by P. McShane, University Press of America, 1984, pp. 9–11.

stage of meaning, the axial period mentioned in the previous note, which leaves us in the 21st century, literally, gasping for air and life. “Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater.”⁹ Our central difficulty as his followers is to admit effectively that to speak adequately of human sciences and arts and, with similar adequacy, “to speak of the dynamic state of being in love with God, pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of interiority has been made the explicit grounds of the worlds of theory and of common sense,”¹⁰ and “we are not there yet.”¹¹ Is there some way in which we can rise up, in theology, to an admission paralleling that of Robinson and Eatwell about present economics. Despite centuries of sophistication, “it is time to go back to the beginning and start again.”¹²

⁹ *Method in Theology*, 99: the last words of chapter three.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107. This text, on an enlightened re-reading, can be a massive cultural shock, giving “first page” Light, indeed, on our place in our battered axial version of the Kingdom. The enlightenment can climb into dark yet effective wisdom in the poise of *The Interior Lighthouse*.

¹¹ See the third essay of this series at notes 19, 22, and 23. The paralleling in these notes and in the following note 12 are extraordinarily useful psychically. The future will weave the present messes of economics and theology into a powerful effective global vision. Will it take us until 9011 A.D., or might we lean into the task to hasten our “[Arriving in Cosmopolis](http://www.philipmeshane.org/website-articles)” (a paper available at: <http://www.philipmeshane.org/website-articles> in English and Spanish, delivered in Puebla, Mexico, 2011: I look forward in it to the operating patterns of The Tower of Able after seven millennia).

¹² Joan Robinson and John Eatwell, *An Introduction to Modern Economics*, McGraw Hill, 1973, 51.