

Quodlibet 7

Method in Theology page 250, for Beginners

7.1 Any Old Starting Point

The title may present a puzzle for those who have been on this road with me through the year, through Cantowers even, as well as 8 SOFDWARES and 6 Quodlibets. Yet there are senses in which this summer-ending of 2004 brings a fresh start, and indeed a fresh start for starters. The more subtle senses I prefer to leave to the next *Quodlibets*. Here I wish to hang in with the beginning for beginners.

The question of beginning in relation to an interest in “Dialectic: the Structure” as sketched in section 5 of *Method* was raised by different people in different ways at the Lonergan Centennial Conference in Toronto in early August, 2004. These different nudges pushed me forward towards a richer meaning of that section: the questions posed to me were, so to speak, only apparently simple. Let me illustrate; and here I like to think that I am meeting a broader audience than the few who posed this problem. I put the problem in terms that shift attention away from particular questioners, but it is a recognizable generic problem that should echo in all of us. How it echos; that we will get to slowly.

So, I pose the problem as it was given to me, but with a change of content: “Could I have a shot at page 250 by taking just a particular author or a particular topic: Hegel, or (the encyclical) *Humanae Vitae*?” It would be worthwhile here if you too could particularize: might you have a topic or thinker in mind that you could tackle, would like to tackle, in this way? My own struggle with the question posed to me was carried from Toronto to Dublin - to that I return in the following *Quodlibet* in a way that you might now anticipate - and the question blossomed into the particular existential question, “Could I have a shot at page 250 by taking just **Dublin**?”. I mention that here because this might well provide now an “in” for some readers.

The answer to the question has to be a ‘Yes’ or a ‘No’ or some shade of ‘I don’t

know', but I see little advantage in delaying sharing my eventual answer, an enthusiastic Yes. That, however, was not my first reaction: homing in on Hegel or Hanoi just didn't seem initially to cut it. Let us brood over what juggled me, what might jostle you, to a Yes, a Yes of course that is at its best if it becomes concretely operative.¹ *Quodlibet* 6 involved a pretty heavy bit of work, as you would find if you had the time and energy to attempt it. I really wouldn't expect the normal busy person to be in that position: I had to find a lot of time to do that blessed exercise on *Comparison* myself! But where the Yes leads here is in an odd sense relatively easy, though it can turn out to be quite discomfoting. But let us get on, first with sharing my struggle for an answer, then with some reflections on the type of "doing" of page 250 that may fit in with that answer.

At first sight taking Hegel or Hanoi or Heaney or Hayek or Hoenan or *Humanae Vitae* as the fruit of assembly just doesn't seem at all adequate. The page suggests that this is to be grand-scale work.² And it is destined so to become. So, how can one home in on Hayek or Heaney - one economist or one poet - and still consider that focusing to be a decent shot at dialectic as structured by Lonergan? The answer is that we can try this because our effort here is to do the thing badly, since it is worth doing. But would

¹Notice here aspects of foundational fantasy: it is a reach, a juggling, for future possibilities. In *Quodlibet* 9 I shall indicate how that juggling relates to the sweep of Thomas' consideration of evaluation.

²I have written of this in previous *Quodlibets*, and more broadly in chapter 4 of *Lack in the Beingstalk. A Giants Causeway*. This calls for heavy foundational fantasy, and I emphasize that by the heavy black of the next sentence, which throws us forward into working more details of the analogy with successful sciences. **In later stages of the process one is to expect a massive stable context of the recycling process, to which the cycling adds subtle shifts and lifts of meaning.** In the initial stages of applying the new paradigm, one must be ready for some large bumps, including the bumping of philosophy from center stage, and the bumping into the cycle of all types of cultural reflection. I suppose I should also mention here, since the topic is personal growth, the stabilities and instabilities of oneself. Cantower 9 gives a sketch of the twists of the growth process, and the final pages of *Lack in The Beingstalk* indicate the wondrous openness of the process through the later years of this life.

the effort be that bad? Indeed, it would not, as appears when that effort is figured out concretely, in concrete fantasy.

The effort looks better of course when the author or whatever is held in concrete context. Assembly, in the case of Heaney say, reaches out through the poet to present Oxford and Ancient Greece, across Europe, to the New World, to the Orient. It reaches towards problems of war and peace, birth and death, the place of poetry and philosophy. Indeed, it reaches out to Heaney's own shots at dialectic: but that is a complication we may slip past at the moment.³

Suppose, however, that your interest is narrower: Suppose you have been led - or forced! - into specialized work, on the late Wittgenstein, or on the fourth Gospel's use of light and darkness⁴, or on Einstein's view of statistics, or Dogen's view of tranquility. Then it would seem that the starting point is too narrow: how might you rise to a sweeping perspective that would fit in with the project of the page?

The answer brings you face to face with Lonergan's trickery, and indeed face to face with yourself. I remember writing, in the early 1970s, the Introduction to a little book from Darton Longman and Todd. I began by making the point swiftly: "What is Lonergan getting at? The uncomfortable answer is that Lonergan is getting at you and me".⁵ I recall Lonergan's amusement at the blunt twist, but now I sense his amusement at a higher level. Page 250 gets at you at the heart of your story as cultural thinker at a shocking level of self-exposure.

It is important to pause over the phrase "as a cultural thinker", and to note what

³In footnote 48 of *Cantower 8* I raise questions regarding Heaney's dialectic perspective.

⁴I cannot resist pointing the interested reader towards the magnificent reflection of Lonergan on this topic in *De Deo Trino I. Pars Dogmatica*, Gregorian Press, 1964, the concluding two dozen pages on the psychological analogy and scripture.

⁵B.Lonergan, *Introducing the Thought of Bernard Lonergan. Three papers from collection with an introduction by Philip McShane*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1973, 7.

it excludes and what it includes. To your great relief, perhaps, you may find, or conclude, that you are excluded: or at least you can come to a balanced view of your inclusion. I regularly find that this is an important point to muse over, especially for people in philosophy and theology. In those areas there seems regularly to be unwarrantedly high expectations. Consider the parallel with either tennis or music or physics. The top ten or fifty in world tennis are quite beyond the game of those of us who might be regarded as really good. Symphony writers are rare, and even great fiddlers consider that they measure up quite poorly to Heifitz. In physics, one can get a respectable Ph.D. without any serious original work, certainly without a paradigm-shifting achievement. In that field too, were it not for the crazy pressures regarding publications, most could settle to be competent teachers and be the better for that. Perhaps a reverent irreverence would help here. Jesus, let us say, was a competent teacher. Did he operate *qua* cultural thinker? What were his differentiations of consciousness? Would you be shocked to think of him as a commonsense Jew?⁶ So, if you find yourself excluded by the *qua*, you are in good company.

But you may find yourself included on some level, normatively. You are someone who speaks, writes, publically on the grounds of culture: then you are included normatively. This inclusion is equivalent, in our present culture, to the old classical distinction of philosophy from other types of discourse. In our present culture one can do physics, literary studies, whatever, without being a philosophic character.

⁶This in spite of his beatific understanding. Raymond Maloney's short article, "The Mind of Christ in Transcendental Theology: Rahner, Lonergan and Crowe", *The Heythrop Journal*, XXV (1984), 288-300, offers an invitation to a worthwhile dialectic exercise in this zone. He takes his stand, as I do, with Lonergan, as against Rahner and Crowe. In trying this I would refer you to the attitude of the next note, thinking "outside the box", thinking indeed, perhaps, "in the pew". The people in the pews of Reverend Sally, my wife,'s United Church of Canada have no doubts about Jesus being uniquely attentive to them, nor would they agree with the suggestion that He figured their individual loveliness out first in some post-Resurrection leap of concern. Of course, it leaves you and them with a lot of unfigured-out stuff: Jesus loves Einstein, but was He, and is He, and how is He, tuned into the general theory?

Indeed, in our present culture you can *do* philosophy without being a philosophic character⁷. One can acknowledge this existentially as putting you in the excluded group, and this acknowledgment places one at a level of self-exposure that is an exposure of the level of the times.

7.2 Self-exposure

We find ourselves in the deep water of Lonergan's trickery here. Am I, in some sense, a philosophic character, and does my culture support and develop that sense?

The culture in general supports an approach that is *voraussetzunglos*,⁸ and this is true even of Lonergan studies. That surely is a strange and provocative claim. Compact as it is, it is nonetheless a historical claim and a narrative stand. But it is a happy stand for some of my readers, who may get a clue here to identifying themselves in some commonsense fashion as victims of present culture. But the tricky and precise and self-explanatory identification is what Lonergan is "getting at" in the second half of page 250 of *Method*.

We must return, however, to aspects of the first half of the page, indeed to our initial question: how much do we need to **assemble**? The answer is that it does not matter in this exercise: for what counts is self-assembly. Nor does it matter that we are returning here to a complex topic previously considered. The point is that whatever the topic, one has some view on the topic, even initially, and on its context. One is

⁷*Character*, for me, is a loaded word - think of the beginning of the *Magna Moralia*, or the occurrence of the word in section 1 of chapter 14 of *Method*. [see note 22 of the SOFDAWARE mentioned in note 14 below]. But I would like you to think of character as in the phrase "quite a character". In that context I would suggest that you think "outside the box", as they say, of Lonergan's terminology, conversions, etc. Also, there is a question of being realistic e.g. regarding what I call "theoretic conversion". Your background education may well have cut you off from this e.g. from doing calculus seriously. Then think of conversion to "theoretic conversion" as communal i.e. how do you stand on wanting the community at large to acknowledge and foster that orientation, that stepping beyond *haute vulgarization*?

⁸*Insight*, 578[600].

voraussetzunglos only in its being unthematized, part perhaps of an unexamined life.

It is a help here to return to the simple presentation of interpretation that Lonergan gives in *Method in Theology*. Even if you are not familiar with it, it is an easy read. To understand, say, Peter Hoenan - some aspect of his thought - one must understand the object he is talking about. And even if it is a narrow aspect of his thought - say, his view on view on *quantitas*,⁹ there is a commonsense sense in which, you would agree, he is talking within his view of the world and you are reading within your view of the world. I won't enter here into the complexification of interpretation that occurs when one tackles the question of *his* view of the world, his *conceptus entis*, as it effects the functional specialty of interpretation: our interest is in *your* view of the world. Nor shall I dally over your view in any detail in its relation to the task of the second half of page 250. I simply draw attention to what I usually speak of as the last two chapters of your own, or rather of any dialectician's, book that is to result from the process: there is a second last chapter that speaks out a view of progress, and there is a final chapter that speaks out the grounds of that progress as envisaged by the speaker.

Now, isn't there a way in which you could write out a version of those two chapters just from your initial, or present position? On the question of *quantitas* it would perhaps be pretty slim: but take the question of quality of life in Hanoi. Even if you knew little about the near-million people in that city of north Vietnam, you could probably ramble a little on it, and certainly you could take a shot at speaking of the grounds of progress.¹⁰

⁹There is a lengthy discussion of *quantitas* in Peter Hoenan, *Cosmologia*, Gregorian Press, Rome, 1955. This is not, of course, his best work. Lonergan refers to him in various places e.g "A Note on Geometrical Possibility", *Collection*: the focus is of course quantity. A lesser known relevant text of Hoenan is *De Noetica Geometriae Origine Theoriae Cognitionis*, Gregorian Press, Rome, 1955. The topic relates to the canon of complete explanation, which I dealt with in my contribution to volume 4(2004) of *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*.

¹⁰In the next *Quodlibet*, "My Dialectic of My Town, Ma Vlast", we shall consider taking up the problem in regard to your local town or your native place, for me an enormously

Our interest here is in an entry point to the process of “doing page 250 badly”: does the entry point not now appear? The **assembly**, however slight, gives the nudge towards thinking out a little better one’s view of the grounds of progress, a last chapter that is the first chapter of your position. And the second last chapter may have a lead-up content: some elements of the topic stir up ideas of improved strategies.

Here I appeal to the work of the second functional specialty for some further light. The interpreter comes up with a factual result about an author’s view. This factuality is tricky, as is seen from the efforts of the group who collaborated in producing volume 4(2004) of *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis*, which focused on Interpretation. The facts of a person’s view can include errors in relation to current contexts, neglects of previous developments, etc. But the interpreter as interpreter does not go beyond such facticity in the interpretation, though he or she may well *complete*¹¹ the interpretation existentially. Then modal writing occurs: “the author **should have**,” or whatever. But that is the modality that is *per se* the luminous concern of dialectic and foundations.

That modality is encouraged in the present exercise. But I would note that it is turned towards *self-assembly*, *self-completion*, etc. Moreover, it is turned further in so far as one can turn to another: to a friend, to a friendly colleague, to an unfriendly colleague; such a turn takes the place of the clashing community of dialecticians. This is a suitable poor version of the strategy of the end of page 250. A point to note here is that the strategy involves written expression, a stability of *sic et non* that is conducive to leisured and discomforting mutual self-exposure.

I do not wish to expand further on this here - the following *Quodlibets* move on

enlightening exercise in metaphysics. Those familiar with the Cantowers will recall the concluding section of Cantower 14 that deals with the metaphysics of Manhattan. The discussion there lifts Lonergan’s somewhat remote reflection on method in metaphysics of *Insight* chapter 14 into a concrete context of implementation.

¹¹See the final footnote, 14, here.

from the previous expansion of the SOFDAWARES and the early *Quodlibets* - but I do suggest three contextualizing readings: in a sense, meetings with Lonergan as discomfoting colleague. They represent challenges in the climb to authenticity. The first text is *De Ex-sistentia*, a section of *De Constitutione Christi*, now available in English.¹² The second text is section 5 of chapter 20 of *Insight*, where now the word *collaboration*, which occurs 29 times in that section, is to be read with this discomfoting collaboration in mind, a collaboration within the context of the cosmopolis of functional specialization. The third text is *Quaestio XXX* of *De Deo Trino*, shortly to appear in English, where Lonergan points to the good of order as imitation of the Trinitarian community, “not just an imitation but a participation.”¹³ These texts help one to envisage the fullness of *Completion* which I touched on previously.¹⁴

¹²Volume 7 of Lonergan’s *Collected Works: The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, University of Toronto Press, 2002, 18-30.

¹³B.Lonergan, *De Deo Trino II. Pars Systematica*, Gregorian Press, Rome, 1964, a loose translation of a sentence in section 3.

¹⁴SOFDAWARE 5, “Care Reaching for *Completeness*”. Notes 10, 12, and 35 there point to the full richness of possible *completion* response.