

Quodlibet 10

A Simple Dialectic Positioning on Functional Specialization

10.1 General Reflections

Let me first state the simple positioning, my simple positioning.

It seems to me, after mucking round in various areas since 1966, that there is no serious group of global inquirers that wouldn't benefit from noticing how dividing up the work of the group functionally wouldn't help them along.¹

I first made this point in a reasonable simple fashion when I wrote of a family with problems of holiday planning.² It simplifies matters if the "situation" is handled piecemeal, and the handling is ordered functionally. Functionally? There is an obvious order from collecting timetables and maps to reading them and correlating them and so on, on through to selecting the where and the when of eventual arrival at a holiday spot. There is a functional, a directed, flow.

The need for the ordering shows up, as I illustrated in my standard story, when the holiday-going process deteriorates in a family or a group. Getting into details about that here would derail my effort at brief presentation, but it is better if you have time to pause and imagine situations. Consider even the situation of the usual holiday place

¹I put in the word *functionally* but you might leave it out initially. It is a pretty troublesome word: we'll make more sense of it as we go along, starting with the next paragraph. And you'll notice that I wrote only *notice* : just a move towards dividing up, but you will notice that "take note off" is in real life *praxis*-laden (to coin a phrase). That coined word is 'heavy' and it leads me to a comment on this essay and its footnotes: the text is meant to help towards an ethos of acceptable, obvious, minimalism. But some of my readers have been grappling with the question of specialization for a long time. The notes are meant mainly for those who share my broader puzzling: best skipped, then, for starters. Finally, I would point out that in the second short section I express compactly the core of my present suggestion regarding implementing the division of labor.

²The descriptive analysis is available in *Economics for Everyone. Das Jus Kapital*, 149-52, and in *A Brief History of Tongue. From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes*, 100-103.

and time being taken over: Whistler during the Olympics in 2010 (is it that year?). But it is better if you think of what could be called a complexifying situation: things were so easy for the couple before children, before teenaged children, before cell-phones, snowboards, computer games, whatever. Similarly, physics was easier when Archimedes messed with water, or Faraday juggled with wires.

Let me go back to my title. It is curious how a simple positioning can be taken for granted, and taken for granted as obvious, when it is not. The title, in that sense, is wrong in that the positioning that I think of now as simple only became simple, and simple in statement, after three decades of mucking round. But really it does seem so shockingly simple - or does it?! -when we brood over the next step: shift from the holiday business to the "serious group of global inquirers".

It may help **not** to go academic here. I mentioned Whistler in the mountains of British Columbia. It is where my step-son Jamie works, but his real interest is mountaineering. When I follow up his interest with him I find a "serious group of global inquirers", and quite a range of interests, orientations and disorientations, techniques, terrains, styles, quite a story of achievements and failures around the globe, very complex patterns of anticipation and detailed reasons for policies and definite projects. Perhaps you have a similar illustration in your family, in your neighborhood, complexities that swing you into a global net?

But we can certainly search out academic illustrations. For most of my present readers the key illustrations are in philosophy and theology, but some have other zones such as literature, various art-forms, economics, physics, whatever: and these are safer for my purpose here. What do I mean by that? I mean that they are less easily distracted from my simple pragmatic position.

What I mean can be brought out by first blocking theology and philosophy together under the broad title of methodology, where problems of philosophy or method are raised. But pause here: what are you thinking of when you think of such

problems? Are you not inclined to think of Aristotle or Plato, Hume or Kant, Scriptural {Christian, Hindu, whatever) or Idea-driven, tradition-driven, theologies? Yet I don't want you to go that way. I want you to think in a very material way about method: libraries, journals, gatherings of inquirers.³ Such "sources" bring together definite expressions of interest, global or not. What I wish you to puzzle over, is **how** the bringing together occurs, in the simplest meaning of **how**.⁴

This puzzling really does need personal concretion, whether you push an illustration from theology or from mountaineering. Perhaps keep the focus on resources, or even on the regular journals in an area. My own first puzzling about this, outside the contexts of philosophy and theology, was about the global group of inquirers regarding music. I found a mess in the regular journals, about which the folks involved complained in the articles and in private. And here is my push for "simple positioning". They were not generally complaining about "heavy stuff", like realism, objectivity, whatever: they were complaining about presentations, orderings of expressions and of interests.

The problem is ordering. Could *Dewey* help you here? Then you can think of leaving to one side Dewey the philosopher and think of the Dewey system of cataloguing. Our focus is on a certain type of cataloging. Again, I have a problem of avoiding diversions that seem to me to be helpful, yet may not be here. I think of Adam Smith, with the shift from pin to pen: thinking out Smith may help, but otherwise, pass

³I shall give this another twist in the third section when I introduce Mark Morelli's distinction between infrastructure and superstructure [see below, at note 23] but we stay quite simple here.

⁴Again, further twists are to be added later regarding the meaning of **how**, but they belong in the future and in more complex discussions. See note 22 below. The second chapter of *A Brief History of Tongue* is titled: "How-Language: Works?".

on.⁵ And the same can be said for the helpfulness of Wellek and Warren's book on literary studies,⁶ or Arne Noess's reflections on splitting up ecological studies and concerns.⁷ Perhaps think of the problem in terms that come from the end of the past paragraph: the ordering of expressions. You have probably had the experience from your own work: sorting out a project, not according to some meaning-order, but according to the order of use, usedness, usefulness. When you do that spontaneously you find, as you re-do it over and over again, that you eventually line up tasks pretty well in the order that we who have read *Method* recognize as 'the order of the specialties', but others would recognize as simply convenient and eventually obvious.

Back to my use of the word "mess" regarding music. Think of it as parallel to theology. Then, yes, you can note two types of mess: there is the meaning-mess that you associate with methodological viewpoints, views on what are acceptable, real, objective, whatever. But there is the "lighter mess" that is expressed by musicologists and musicians who turn to journals: How do I find my way through all this: great stuff maybe, but all over the place, and what I want are relevant selections helpful for my own interest and focus.⁸

Now let me carry this a bit further. Take a single article, or a single author, who somehow is in your ballpark. But, then, what is your ballpark? Let's not go there for the

⁵I am recalling Smith's remark in the first chapter of *The Wealth of Nations*: "The division of labour, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportionable increase in the productive power of labour".

⁶R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Harcourt, Brace and World, N.Y.

⁷Arne Noess, "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises", *The Ecologist*, 18(1988).

⁸On my mind here is the stuff in musicology, but you have to think out your own interests in your own area. In the previous *Quodlibet* I mentioned working on the area of Christology in relation to ten years of a single journal, *Theological Studies*. [The reason I picked that journal is that it is one of the few periodicals I receive: furthermore, that it is a reputable journal of high standards]. But take any single copy of it; or take a copy of a journal in your own area, and then move through it with an eye on your own present zone of inquiry.

moment, except that the question gives another angle on the mess. So, step back from your own ballpark into your general view of your own field of inquiry. See if you don't agree with the musicologist that I was thinking of in the last paragraph: "great stuff maybe, but all over the place".

Illustrating this "all over the place" business I leave to you, because my doing so here might distract you into contexts that are not helpful. Perhaps I might take story-telling as a broad instance, "telling it like it is". Think of the difference between a straight telling and a telling that deviates: goes into talk about story telling, or about how good the characters are, or how great the telling is, or how the telling, the characters, the, story, whatever might be improved? Such rambling story-telling certainly may have its place and can be enlightening or uplifting; but suppose there is the need for just the straight story? "I need to know what went on?" Why? Because, for instance, I am purposeful about it, in some way. The telling and the listening have a definite function.

So we wind back to the problem of function, functional. Functional collaboration occurs when each stage has its subfunction in a functional, and even efficiently functioning, whole.⁹ Think of smooth or flawed baton exchanges in a relay race, or the processes of making a car.

⁹This touches on a deceptively simple point which I return to regularly. It relates to an emergent shift in the unity, beauty and efficiency of metaphysics - a shift indeed of probabilities from products to sums (see *Insight* 121[144]). My regular reference in this matter is *Topics in Education* 160, line 16: "It is quite legitimate to seek in the efficient cause of a science, that is, in the scientist, the reason why a science forms a unified whole". This is the *ethos*, the mood, that I write of at the end of section 2 below. That is a minimal *ethos*. But it is worthwhile, in the context of the above *Insight* reference, which pivots on a re-cyclic structure, to point to a fuller heuristic *ethos*. In a simple way, one can fantasize about how the book *Insight* itself would be re-cycled, or any other worthwhile work. Chapter 4 of *Lack in the Beingstalk* develops a more complex perspective: the road to it lies in the implementation of Lonergan's later definition of generalized empirical method. See note 22 below.

10.2 Lonergan's Suggestion, Strategically Minimized

We could push the relay-racing parallel,¹⁰ or develop the parallel from production line work, but let's keep things simple: the motto would be 'do your bit¹¹ and hand on the result for efficient pick-up". Above all don't pause - think of a working production process - to think out improvements, to comment on other zones, to try to anticipate the work of other zones. Whether in a relay race, or in a car-factory, one can figure out a sensible way of getting from the past to the future, from starter's gun to final tape, from metal to mobile. Then stick with it, unless the coach or "creative research" comes up with improvements, and even then one does not change in mid-race, mid-production.

Am I laboring the obvious? You agree¹² about a minimum? So: there are muddled expressions of zones of interest in literary studies, musicology, linguistics, economics, whatever. Thinking them out functionally in this minimal way would lift the efficiency of scholarly work taken in its broadest sense, reaching from resources to the streets.¹³ So, can we not begin to share the sense that, as a sort of first

¹⁰I did this in some detail in *Quodlibet* 3, where I developed the image of race-track lanes.

¹¹This is a surprisingly important little suggestion. In developed sciences, like botany, it is taken for granted: one works away contentedly in some corner, literally, of the field. In philosophy and theology there are totalitarian ambitions and totalitarian pressures. Functional specialization helps us get away from that. Some of us delight in just digging up manuscripts. Some of us could be quite happy just teaching. Consider also the point made in the next note.

¹²I commented in note one of the meanings of *notice*. *Agree* introduces the same problematic. The agreement I would hope for is an operative agreement: let us get on with some implementation. But I would add a point that fits in with the previous note. The "us" need not be me. This is very true, for instance, in the matter of implementing Lonergan's view of economics, or Lonergan's respect for physics. One can take a stand on, be committed to, converted to, such implementation in the group, without tackling the job oneself. We must be gently realistic with the narrative of our lives within the larger patience of emergent probability.

¹³There are larger problems lurking behind this notion of reaching for the streets. Think of the opposition between the old saying "art for art's sake" and the new twist "art for improved

approximation, we can leave out the effort of dialectic and foundations and just order the other six groups so that the work flows better? The only “foundational” change is the minimum “ordering” of the stuff. This twist helps to remove “the threat” that people feel about “foundational interference”: indeed, the “conversion” to the order of research, interpretation, story, policy, planning, executive reflection scarcely merits, in people’s minds, the name “conversion”.¹⁴ But this, it seems to me, is the key strategic conversion that is needed, and this even inside the zone I have called methodology.¹⁵

Only gradually will the “conversion” blossom. I don’t want this to get suddenly “heavy” but it helps to notice that the first principle of the third canon of hermeneutics comes into simple operation in conversation, in reviewings.¹⁶ Deviations from the “useful ordering” - running the leg of the 6-sectioned race properly - can be noticed, sentence by sentence. How? We will learn that by trying, and the how of that learning is best left here under the old rubric *solvitur ambulando*.

In conclusion, however, I would note the centrepiece of minimalism that this short section highlights: the possibility of making “conversion to functional

Lebensraum”. Think of the mood of *praxis* that colors all specialization in this new view. Think of the non-maintenance poise of the word *improved*.

¹⁴The word *conversion* is not a happy word for general dialogue. *Re-orientation*, or some such expression, seems better. I myself like the word *displacement*. Lonergan uses it in his translation of Simmel’s *Die Wendung zur Idee*: “displacement towards system”(De Deo Trino I, *Pars Doctrinalis*, Gregorian Press, Rome, 1964, p. 10, note 10. Displacement can refer to conversion, reversion, perversion, etc.

¹⁵ All I have been saying about the six division and about maintenance in “ordinary disciplines” can be said of philosophy and theology. So, one can interpret von Balthasar or Derrida without criticizing, and one’s contribution would be the better for that.

¹⁶I refer to one of the few “homely” bits of those incomprehensible canons. “Though a contributor fails to present his results in terms of the protean notion of being, a critic can proceed from that notion to a determination of the contributor’s particular viewpoint... etc”(Insight, 588[611]). Instead of the protean notion, think of the notion of six functional zones.

specialization” a pretty harmless topic, indeed, a friendly topic.¹⁷ It could gradually give place to a taken-for-granted popular tradition, an *ethos*, even though it meshes in with and carries forward deep crises. Making the division a topic, or a tradition: that deserves the further reflections of the next section. But I would like to close this section with a mood-piece from Lonergan that I would associate with our present reach and with Lonergan’s origination of it in his flight of fancy of 1965:

“Popular tradition, whether it be poetry, fiction, or acceptable history, is something essential to human living. It is what an existentialist would call an existential category. It is a constitutive component of the group as human. It is an aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin. The aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin and story becomes operative whenever the group debates, judges, evaluates, decides, or acts - especially in a crisis.”¹⁸

10.3 Practical Strategies of Implementation

“Especially in a crisis”. Anyone who has read the end of chapter 7 of *Insight* or the early chapters of *Topics in Education* will have a sense of Lonergan’s view of a present crisis-situation. The emphasis here is not on crisis but on continuity, maintenance. There is an exciting origin in that shift of 1965, presented by his single marvelous existential page of that February which I reproduce here. I am now suggesting that it should be taken¹⁹ initially in some maintenance sense. This will strike

¹⁷See the concluding section of the Morelli article mentioned in note 23 below.

¹⁸B.Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 230.

¹⁹It seems good to recall here the early comments, in note 1 and note 12, regarding *noticing* and *agreeing*. Above I used the words *exciting* and *marvelous*. When Lonergan presented to me, in ten minutes of the summer of 1966, the results of his life-long struggle with the mess of theology - he put up eight fingers and began, “well it’s easy: you just double the structure” - it was exciting, marvelous. But somehow the marvel has yet to blossom into an *ethos*.

some as a curious suggestion, indeed one that seems to go against my own drive of years, so it deserves some preliminary airing.

It relates, certainly, to that old slogan, “if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly”, but it has new refinements. My old slogan lurked under a high aim.²⁰ Here the aim is non-threatening maintenance. Again, think of your own or someone else’s work, say, in history, in some particular area of your own zone. Examine a page or two for deviations from the story, but without a further critical reach for an improved view.

This is to be true also of “forward-looking” writing: the difficulty, for instance, of spelling out a plan without rambling back to the errors and advantages of previous ventures.²¹ The effort to “clean up” either the story-telling or the planning can be regarded as a type of maintenance, done without changing the story or the plan. But if you try this in any of the zones of division you will find that it is not easy, that it takes practice to notice and trim off or relocate “asides” like “the story is good”; “this character is important”; “this could have been done better”; “if only...”

But what about those last “asides”? First of all I would note again that in some

²⁰This is especially noticeable in my work on Dialectic through the 8 SOFDAWAREs and the *Quodlibets* up to now. What I have been struggling towards there is the fullest heuristic meaning of a single page, page 250, of *Method in Theology*. I continue to struggle. The following *Quodlibet* will focus on the six operations named in italics on page 250; *Quodlibet* 12 will place the entire effort and our present struggle into the context of chapter 17 of *Insight*.

²¹There is a great deal of work to be done on forward specialization, in all areas of culture, relating to the weakness of the general heuristics of implementation, which is intrinsic to metaphysics. It is very difficult to think forwards in a differentiated fashion, beyond the usual slogan regarding policy, planning and executive reflection which are normally conceived popularly. One gets a hint of this by puzzling over the meanings of the word *doctrine*: can one differentiate between a complex remote specialized doctrinal meaning and a commonsense meaning? Conceiving systematics in genetic adequacy is also a present block. And a further large issue regarding implementation is the absence of a heuristic elucidation of popularization as opposed to *haute vulgarization*. These problems will remain with us for some time: a matter of the *solvitur ambulando* just mentioned in the text.

areas they are, at present,²² of minimal importance. Equivalently I can say that in some areas there seem to be only six divisions relevant towards improved maintenance: research, interpretation, history, policy, planning, executive reflection. The asides do become more important as one moves “up” to human affairs: you might think of Marx and Economics as an evident example, or consider the importance brought out in the two works mentioned in note XX . The asides, in fact, regularly carry one into the “heavier” zone of methodology, which is to have its home in the other two members of the division, named by Lonergan *dialectic* and *foundations*.

Where does that leave us? It is helpful to use here a distinction which Mark Morelli develops in an article that complements the present effort.²³ Distinguish, then, in some vague fashion, between infrastructure and superstructure. Infrastructure is one’s spontaneity, lurking *infra* as it were. It leads or pushes you to inquire, to do history, make policies, whatever. Superstructure is talking out and thematizing that infrastructure. The six divisions named in the past paragraph can bubble on, or stumble on, spontaneously, and the ‘minimal’ suggestion above regards a shift to reduce stumbling that really doesn’t call for a lot of thematizing. Superstructure emerges when one begins to talk of what is being done, by oneself, by the community. I do not wish to repeat Morelli’s reflection here, but our suggestions parallel: get towards common ground and common operating as close to the infrastructure as possible.

Still, there is the question of the superstructure, the other two divisions that

²²Lonergan’s later definition of generalized empirical method points to methodology’s weaving into all areas of inquiry. It will have the effect of both centralizing and decentralizing the philosophic perspective. “Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness: it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject’s operations without taking into account the corresponding objects” *A Third Collection*, 141, lines 1-5).

²³Mark Morelli, “Obstacles to the Implementation of Lonergan’s Solution to the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning”, *The Importance of Rescuing Insight*, edited by David and John Liptay, University of Toronto Press, 2005.

particularly turn up in philosophy and theology: what of them? Part of the suggestion above is, keep them out of your talk in the other six. Furthermore, let your spontaneity guide you in doing those six except in so far as you try (I) to hold to work in one of the six, (ii) to keep superstructure talk out of that talk.²⁴

But what of the other, troublesome, two, regularly talked about as philosophical problems, or more particularly talked about as dialectic and foundations? These explicitly involve superstructure talk, and (ii) recommends their exclusion from the other six. This seems to show a larger oddness of the maintenance and exclusion strategy, since foundations are of major interest, are at the heart of the deeper crises. We may ask, then, at a fresh level, Why the strategy?

Because the strategy, besides having its own worth, helps to point towards a better identification of this seventh zone, and this in three ways. First, the exclusion identifies them as another, seventh, zone [or two: that can be left vague] of discourse, but one grounded in the other six: the superstructure is of the operating infrastructure. Secondly, that identifies the seventh zone as having a clear source of its development, and this adds (iii) to the list of the previous paragraph: “(iii) separately spell out your own superstructure.”²⁵ Thirdly, that clear source, in its tentative thematic, gives the proper accumulating data for the superstructural inquiry.²⁶

²⁴This is in continuity with Morelli’s reflections at the conclusion of his article. I would especially draw attention to the need to do one’s own thing without appealing to Lonergan for methodological language or propositional guidance.

²⁵The need for and possibility of doing this was the main focus of the previous two *Quodlibets*.

²⁶I am raising here a rather difficult topic that relates to Lonergan’s comments on three orders of consciousness in the unpublished file {Batch V.7} containing the page I reproduced here. A parallel helps: methodology is to methods as zoology is to animals. One can get a sense of the task and its empirical and on-going nature by thinking e.g. of the fact that method in either history or mathematics can be seen to shift through almost every decade of the nineteenth century.

Still, what of philosophy in general, or of dialectic and foundations in the particular style cultivated by Lonergan students? Mark Morelli's essay relieves me of the task of taking up the issue of a fundamental strategy in philosophic dialogue. I only add, then, a brief comment on practitioners of dialectic (or foundations) who claim to follow Lonergan. I would say that the key to progress there is number (iii) above: "(iii) spell out your own superstructure". Moreover, I would claim that this is quite clearly Lonergan's recommendation.²⁷ That the spelling out is to occur in two modes is less clear in his writings, but they are present: the mode of dialectic retrieval and the mode of foundational fantasy.²⁸ The present essay leans towards the latter mode: it is descriptive foundational fantasy regarding dialectic.

²⁷The challenge is clearly put in the second half of page 250 of *Method in Theology*.

²⁸I discussed foundational fantasy in *Quodlibet* 9.