

## ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

I face now the task I gave myself, back in [Vignette 9](#) at footnote 2, and indeed way earlier in various places, of writing briefly about these two words at the end of the first page of the original *Method in Theology*. Shortly I will suggest that you go back to read some of that note 2, but first I recall a piece of the previous Vignette, where I am identifying the stages of meaning involved in the reading of those first two paragraphs of *Method in Theology*. My problem is the sheer obviousness of it all, the shocking mess, in relation to it, that is Lonerganism.<sup>1</sup> Is there room here for satire and humor? That, indeed, is a topic worth pausing over: I'll return to it in [Vignette 18](#).

There is the discomfoting matter of the “existential gap”<sup>2</sup> between the excellent<sup>3</sup> and the slum.<sup>4</sup> Yesterday I was brooding over this in the context of the little poem of Tennyson that Lonergan points to so neatly in his late thirties as he weaves the idea of value round the idea of excellence.<sup>5</sup> Might I succeed in getting you into that poise, that seed of regret, of repentance? If I did, and if “you” were sufficiently plural, even if a “not numerous center,”<sup>6</sup> then I could quit vignetting and we could begin to get into the job of “a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process.”<sup>7</sup> By now perhaps you, like I, need not look to the reference below for that oft-repeated appeal. It is Lonergan’s radiant plea for us to rise to “techniques of human communication that can have maximum diffusion.”<sup>8</sup> Here, at any rate, is the paragraph from the previous Vignette that I wish you to read freshly.

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<sup>1</sup> The mess, of course, is not just Lonerganism but the tale and tail of the Axial Period or the negative Anthropocene Age. What to write, so so briefly, about that tale that you, yes, you might contribute, re-tail, re-tell? I gave a brief pointer in the end-note of the previous Vignette and repeat that note at the end here: step in it thus twice. It is the challenge of global religiosity in our time, and if we fail then in a later providential time.

<sup>2</sup> See *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 281 ff.

<sup>3</sup> “Moral education is impossible without the constant vision of greatness,” *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>5</sup> See *For a New Political Economy*, CWL 21, 30–31.

<sup>6</sup> *Collection*, “Dimensions of Meaning,” CWL 4, 245.

<sup>7</sup> *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 306.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

Let us leave *Insight* aside and catch a glimpse of our miserable reading of the first page of *Method*. To those familiar with my writing this is a familiar nudge. Is it not embarrassing to find that you misread the page in such a gross fashion that you missed the pointing of the entire book? The first paragraph bows to the goodly goings-on of compact consciousness. Toynbee and Sorokin hovered over Lonergan's dancing fingers. And then, in the second paragraph, there is the memory of Thomas being short-changed by the axial boldness of Aristotle, who cut off 5/8<sup>th</sup>s of effective human science and eventually let loose the idiocy of academic disciplines.

Turning the page brings you to sniff the need of the massive straining we need to bring us to the third stage of meaning. But back we go again—pause, pause—to the struggle to the horrid self-discovery of our axial reading. Our meaning for the third stage of meaning and its structured 8/8<sup>th</sup>s is not even an initial meaning.

Did you perhaps float on through the book, grounded in this initial misreading?<sup>9</sup>

You see my deeper problem? If you had not floated through the previous Vignette, I really would have no reason to write this one! “What, then, is being” a floater? Let me push us on, in a good-humored *Assembly* of that note 2 of the previous Vignette.

Is there a mess? Both inside the academy and in the grim ‘outside world’ there is the abuse of humanity sweetly established by centuries of idiocy and malice and greed (See *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 232). The mess in the academy is nicely disguised in ways I shall touch on in *Vignettes* 16–18. I have some optimism about *Vignette* ‘twenty three’ as a ‘setting free.’ How long need I plead for the “Lonerganites” to break with the dishonesty—till now perhaps just invincible ignorance—of dodging his plea of sixty years about interpretation? Perhaps it will take the rest—194—of my *Vignettes*? But there is a chance that my efforts of, say, 2018–2020, will seed a sapling shift, a 2020 vision that is a sliver of a glimpse of what is to be done in the next seven millennia.

The deeper problem and the mess that is present is that these last paragraphs, this series of *Vignettes*, the series of series listed on my website, the plea of Lonergan's entire life and writings, is something not halting you here and now, no more than the climb down through the second paragraph of *Method*, from the mistake of “bolder spirits” to the destructive idiocy of “academic disciplines” stopped you from turning the page casually, undiverted,

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<sup>9</sup> See page 4 of the previous Vignette.

unconverted, to page-turn skim past the next thirteen words, “Clearly enough, these approaches to the problem of method do little to advance ...” Clearly enough: *mon cul*.<sup>10</sup>

So, I turn these final three Vignettes in a saner direction. Would a lengthy “academic disciplines” discourse on the academic disciplines approach—“these approaches”<sup>11</sup> approached singularly in different disciplines, in different essays of my colleagues, whatever—do anything towards a “comeabout” of my readers and the misreaders of that first page of *Method*? Better just wiggle my tale end: indeed, might not my bum deal cause a laugh and a shift of fear to funny bone? Let’s leave that to my “final” 18<sup>th</sup> Vignette.

What is that academic disciplines approach? It certainly has to do with what Lonergan points to as opposition to his suggested genetic approach, a suggestion I add in after the next paragraph. But what does it look like when it comes from and in his disciples, including me?

Well, it regularly has in it—or is totally—comparisons of Brown and Black and Grey on some topic. That topic is not well-defined: is not that part of the ill-defined hunt in the “academic disciplines” comparison? The part and heart of the enterprise is a fogginess about the topic, the object, the objective. Quite foggy, of course, is the writer’s own position on the object and the objective. And that repeat of “object and objective” clues you into the real trouble, the settled disagreement. Footnotes to authorities abound. Part of the book or article may note that the enterprise is a dialogue with some school that deals with the subject, but of course there is rarely any conversation with any member of that school. Need I go on in my brief venture into this topic? But at least I did not add footnotes, or mention a spectrum of authors. I am just chatting—should I use the solemn phrase *in dialogue*?—with you. I am chatting with you about what you and I have been doing despite Lonergan’s blunt comment. And so we now can read, and identify ourselves and others. How do you take the self-identification? I risk footnoting, a downer in our dialogue but does it not lend something? Does it and all my paragraph make you red or blue or green? “Satire becomes red with indignation, humor blushes with humility.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The French for the Empire’s rejection of a positioning, “my arse”; the English might have made some readers loose their cul!

<sup>11</sup> Third and fourth words of paragraph three of *Method in Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> *Insight*, 649.

Might you pause in whatever color, calmly poise, rise to “repent,” and to plan effectively to join a “not numerous center,” even go so far as that crazy Irishman, Stephen McKenna,<sup>13</sup> saying, about the second canon of hermeneutics, or now, in a focus on its second glorious paragraph, saying and writing to self or friend “this is worth a life?”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Discovering *The Enneads* he wrote in his diary ‘this is worth a life’.

<sup>14</sup> [I repeat the note that ended the previous Vignette, added there after my ‘cut-off’ decision of this and the 24th Vignette.] Recall my repeated quoting of Lonergan’s appeal for “resolute and effective intervention”; the previous page leads you, I hope, to your own practical possibilities. “The existentialists believe in intervening in this dialectic. And they do not write simply for professional philosophers; they write novels and plays, and they are ready to use those techniques that can have maximum diffusion. . . . Just as each individual can choose to be himself or, on the other hand, merely drift, choose to be like everybody else, so there is a historic authenticity” (*Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 305–6). Think, perhaps, of my website essay, [Prebious 1](#), “Teaching High-School Economics: A Commonquest Manifesto.” Think of little interventions that could slowly generate a committed community instead of a cargo of some religious orientation. Think . . . But the thinking is your challenge, seeding in your corner, against all present odds, a massive global heuristic of all situations, isomorphic with all psychosocial analyses and their referents, that would uplifting with statistical effectiveness the lives of ten billion people per generation in future millennia. Such is the full pragmatic cast of “relevance to empirical human science” (*Insight*, 766). To help you in your struggle with this giant project of the next millennium you could try to reach into the psychosocial problems that belong in the global network of analyses and practices of the pharma industry or the arms industry.