

BEGINNINGS: LONERGAN'S FIRST THEOREM AND FERMAT'S LAST THEOREM

This seventh vignette, with the simple title of “Beginnings,” emerged initially as a ramble that paralleled Plato’s famous Seventh Letter.¹ My objective was to make available some pointers that might help our panel effort in Los Angeles at the end of April.² The core pointing of that panel is/was towards the misreading of *Method in Theology* that has prevailed for the past 46 years. Eventually it seemed to me best to cut back from the rambling in this pre-panel essay and make a key point about misreading in as startling a fashion as I can manage. Signs of the initial larger essay hover over my writing here, but the full content—including a consideration of the question it poses at the end—is to flow forth only slowly, in the vignettes to follow. In that flow you will find the answer to the point made at the end of the first vignette about the minor and major aspects of full challenge.

¹ In 366 BCE, Dionysius II became tyrant of Syracuse, and his uncle Dion advised him to invite Plato to come to Sicily as a worthy adviser. Early in the letter Plato mentions Dion’s poise. “What opportunities,” he said, “shall we wait for, greater than those now offered to us by Providence?” The problem of the authenticity of the letter does not matter to us. Rather it is the situation of it, the promise of philosophy, the ramblings of Plato regarding the character of his own life and of the forms that, so to speak, were on his mind. My poise can be parallel to that of Dion, perhaps: we are just at a later stage of axial tyrannies. But might Lonergan’s First Theorem, now offered to us to be solved by Providence, not be an opportunity for a modular curve towards the positive Anthropocene Age?

² I eventually decided to put some elementary suggestions into an appendix here, Appendix B. There is obviously a prior Appendix A, which relates to a further complication in my efforts to focus attention on what I call *Lonergan’s 1833 Overture*. That complication is my decision to address a larger audience of Lonergan students about what I consider the present crisis of such students: they being trapped in old ways of viewing and doing theology and philosophy, and needing a shocking leap of imagination to sniff out the patterns of a multi-layered paradigm shift related to the general move into a positive Anthropocene Age. So, in Appendix A I simply put the letter I addressed to that portion of the Lonergan community that I could reach through various lists. Obviously, I would like the letter and the project to reach all interested people, especially beginning students. Appendix B will serve as a help both to those coming to the WCMI 2018 panel presentation, Saturday 21st of April, 2:25 p.m., (Wilkins, McShane, Duffy, Zanardi), “Recycling *Method in Theology*,” and to those who are stirred to respond to the letter of Appendix A.

So I start the promised startling by recalling Fermat's Last theorem.

Back I go to Fermat and his scribbled claim of 1637, that he had a marvelous proof that $x^2 + y^2 = z^2$, $n > 2$, is impossible in non-zero integers x, y, z, n . Think, now, of that early essay of Lonergan, "The Form of Inference" and the manner in which the achievement of an understanding that bounces one up to saying "yes!"³ I have to hand at the moment Andrew Wiles "yes" grounding, ground out by him over more than a decade: 109 pages: "Modular elliptic curves and Fermat's Last Theorem" (*Annals of Mathematics* **142** (1995) 443-551). Let us pause over his first two sentences.

An elliptic curve over Q is said to be modular if it has a finite covering by a modular curve of the form $X_0(N)$. Any such elliptic curve has the property that its Hasse-Weil zeta function has an analytic continuation and satisfies a functional equation of the standard type.

Groovy, eh? Lost, eh?

Now let us turn to pause over two sentences that begin the unwritten central last theorem of Lonergan. That it is such is something we'll come to later.

The explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being involves three elements. First, there is the genetic sequence in which insights gradually are accumulated by man.⁴

³ The very early article, "The Form of Inference," is the first in *Collection, CWL* 4. It points to the elusive binding poise that flames forth when one is in the *eureka* of Yes-noising. Elusive? How clear are you on the yes-saying's "borrowed content" talked to you as your eyes rise from the end of *Insight* 300? How clear are you on that print-talks massaging of your neuromolecules? Perhaps we should turn, in one of the next vignettes, to the elusiveness of that piece of your "*moi intime*" that is imaged as "mibox"? But it is too soon for that foray. Let's leave it to *Vignette* 22. Meantime, you might try [Disputing Quests 16](#): "Detailed Disputes: Doran." I recall now, two weeks of evening conversations with Lonergan in Dublin 1971 during which I raised the topic of "is? is! is." "When did you get it right?" I asked him. His reply, "when I got that far in *Insight*." A task of my seventh letter poise in these vignettes is to help seed the exposure of a cult of the obvious that is chattering away round and about and out-there and about Lonerganism.

⁴ *Insight*, 609, the beginning of the final paragraph that I name 60910. As the reference at note 7 intimates, it is also the beginning of a heuristic of the genetic sequence of perspectives that, in secular terms, may be named a geohistory of operable philosophies of history, in theology it answers the problem posed at the reference of note 7. Later we will find that Lonergan's Last Theorem may conveniently be identified as the meaning of *Comparison* on page 250 of *Method in Theology*. On this you may follow through with my *The Road to Religious Reality*, Axial Publishing, 2012, 9, 13-4, 19-24, 37-8.

Groovy, eh? But, be honest, you really don't feel that lost.

I, on the other hand, think that you are quite lost.

I have assembled a pair of beginnings: of a proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, of a proof of Lonergan's First Theorem—which strangely dangles before us like Fermat's scribbles of 1637. Might I be gentler by just having in my *Assembly*⁵ the two beginnings, Fermat's scribble about having this great proof but not having room on the margin of his text to write it out—"hanc marginis exiguitas non caperet"—and Lonergan's parallel Theorem typed 300 years later, awaiting the curve-climb to "a functional equation of the standard type" that "has a finite covering." Fermat's Last Theorem relates to the restricted patterns of our finite geometries as yet unfulfilled in its magnificent references. Lonergan's First and Last Theorem relates to "the possibilities of those simultaneous multiplicities named situations"⁶ of which the "formal element remains incomplete as long as it fails to draw upon a theory of history."⁷

You surely are now wondering what this first seeding of a Last Theorem of Lonergan is. Well, here you have it, from 1934.⁸

But what is progress?

It is a matter of intellect. Intellect is understanding of sensible data. It is the guiding form, statistically effective, of human action transforming the data of life. Finally, it is a fresh intellectual synthesis understanding the new situation created by the old intellectual form and providing a statistically effective form for the next cycle of human action that will bring forth in reality the incompleteness of the later act of intellect by setting it new problems.

Isn't that just as readable as Fermat's scribble about his magnificent proof? Fermat's scribble is a long way from the first two sentences of Wiles' proof. And it seems best

⁵ *Assembly* is the final word of page 249 of *Method*. You may well find it useful to view this sequence of Vignettes as starting with some assembly—a detail of progress, a perspective on decay, whatever—and moving you to invade *moi intime* with dreadful existential poise. With providential luck you may sometimes rise to Molly Bloom's final words in Joyce's *Ulysses*: "his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will yes."

⁶ *Insight* 195: at the end of chapter 5, "Space and Time."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 764.

⁸ Lonergan, "Essay in Fundamental Sociology," in Michael Shute, *Lonergan's Early Economic Research*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, 20. For the dating, see page 19.

now to halt with the question for you, for and about your poise over the *Assembly*, asking you to position yourself, with some degree of luminosity, even perhaps pushing into the triple objectification named in *Lonergan's 1833 Overture*.

The question is, why do you—if you do, and to the degree that you do—find the two sentences he wrote in 1953 no more demanding in your reading than Lonergan's 1934 magnificent non-proof?

Appendix A: A Letter Sent Out on Easter Sunday, April Fool's Day

Easter Greetings!

Some of you may find this outreach foolish, even offensive. But as I move through my 87th year it seems progressive to try for “a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process” (*Phenomenology and Logic*, 306). I recall now this first week in April of 1961, (Easter Sunday was April 2nd), walking and talking with Lonergan in Dublin, Ireland. There is a vivid memory of his voice rising when he talked of the state of theology: “big frogs in little ponds”.

His following that goes by the name *Lonerganism*—I slide here past some solid and serious efforts in different parts of the world—has become a set of such ponds.

I have previously tried communicating, in various ineffective ways, on this matter. It is not just that functional collaboration is dead in the water: it is that the clear pointing away from the ramblings of “academic disciplines” (last words on the old first page of *Method*) that were given in *Insight*, summed up in the paragraph that turns the page *Insight* 609–10, have been dodged by all of us, including myself.

But best get to my present pointing: the really strategic dodging is the communal avoidance of the challenge of the three objectifications central to dialectical progress and to global redemption: the final 217 words of Chapter 10, section 5, “Dialectic: the Structure.” In the English version of *Method* they begin with “horizons” on line 18 of the old edition, and end on line 33. I have called these 16 lines *Lonergan's 1833 Overture*.

The attached Easter essay is the sixth of an anticipated 217 essays (<http://www.philipmcshane.org/217-vignettes-2018-33>) pushing for the dreadful adventure of taking Lonergan serious in that brilliant overture of his.

Might some of you join me, or join together, in tuning into his plea?

Phil McShane

Appendix B

Let us, you and I now, as slow as you like, think ‘things’ out, not unlike a primitive group stumbling into weir-fishing.⁹ Lift the stumbling a bit and yet a strange great lot.¹⁰ We are not, then, stumbling but seeking a weird view that will help us grow up out of the shambles of the our story, us individually and us as a human group—you may think of the compacting words *ontic* and *phyletic*.¹¹ The stumbling has, say, to be done with primitive mastery. We are in the first paragraph of *Method*. And we are not looking for a view: we are stumbling with modest success from facts to acts, not knowing what facts and acts are. We are stumbling, two-packed, round a six-packed pattern, pack-muling.

I won’t go on with this pedagogy here: we shall get back to it after *Vignette* 10. We have to slowly uncover in ourselves and our story “all that is lacking,”¹² including all that has been lacking in the entire negative Anthropocene Age,¹³ in order to be open to the shifting from the six-pack to an eight-pack in the global growth problem. We still have a long-group group-way to go “to prepare our statement”¹⁴ about growth.

⁹ See Michael Shute, “Real Economic Variables,” in a volume devoted to beginning a science of economics: *Diyyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 21(2), 2010. Right through this short Appendix our interest—including yours now, if you have been stirred to the task of finding some personal zone of implementation—is to get things going in me and my group. You could even start by annoying your present department, but tread softly if you are in thesis or tenure mode!

¹⁰ “One can go on to a developed account” (*Method*, 287: that troublesome paragraph!) of primitive compact consciousnesses, only slowly and with enormous difficulty. As we putter in these simple shots at beginnings there is obviously nothing to prevent you venturing into much heavier musings and searchings.

¹¹ And you may well think of the works of Voegelin, Sorokin, and such, delving into early and recent sensate cultures. From Lonergan I would recommend the personal nudgings of the last two chapters of *Phenomenology and Logic*.

¹² *Insight* 558, line 24. I intimate that, yes, we can reach in these years 2018–2020 for a vision of the “all” but my focus is not on all, but on finding little zones of shifting. There is the obvious central zone of Lonergan’s *1833 Overture*, and yes, making it a topic and an annoyance to Lonerganism. But we need to find little zones of personal interference in history, and thus find that implementation and change are massively difficult.

¹³ You would find useful Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, Monthly Review Press, 2016.

¹⁴ *Insight*, 484. Here we have the key: hear Lonergan freshly: “to prepare our statement of the integral heuristic structure that we have named metaphysics, attention must now be directed to

So let's begin—you may think oddly—with a two-pack: sniffing out flawed and successful flows in going from past to future.¹⁵ Our world leaders, our educators, our economists, our religious leaders are at present well-endowed with flaws. Recall page 2 of [Vignette 6](#), “brood on the horrid characters of present statecraft: Putin and Trump, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-Un,” and add in Pope Francis and other religious leaders.

I am asking you to hover weakly and weekly over *Loneragan's 1833 Overture*: brood simply on the flaws and on the flawed brooding. Each of us can thus begin to see and seize what we might do about those flaws, and especially important is to face up to the flawed brooding and flawed street-action of the disciples of Loneragan. Let me illustrate a flaw by talking about that honest hunter Fred Crowe: his culture led him to simply miss that “implementation”—“fruit to be borne” (*Method*, 355)—was the center-piece of Loneragan's life-work. It did not find its way into his first index of *Insight*.¹⁶ Such is our intellectual culture, caught in a axial superego:¹⁷ the culture of *Method*, paragraph 2.

This entire series of 217 essays is directed to detecting flawed brooding and flawed acting and seeding remedies. A beginning can be made as I suggest here. Pause over “my” and “my (various) groups' ” flawed broodings and actings. Are there little ways forward?¹⁸

genetic method.” We shall begin to see this better slowly, sniffing our way to finding the center of the “third way, difficult and laborious.” *Method*, 3rd paragraph.

¹⁵ This seems to me at present to be the key to starting up some functional collaboration. It cuts down to immediate practicality the full cycle that starts with a first functional specialty poises, “this is worth recycling” (where *worth* is either because something working well has been found in some village or the opposite) and swings through the 8-pack. In this effort you, now, need to have an effective shot at envisaging the effective interference of some immediately available remedy, even a thumb in dyke business. Of course, you are also invited to envisage the full effort of the poise, “this is worth recycling” as I present it in the ten website essays [FuSe 0–9](#) on the first functional specialty.

¹⁶ Fred and I joked occasionally about our flawed indexings. His indexing effort in *Insight* was in fact an extraordinary achievement. But the point I am making is that the best of us can be culturally trapped in old ways.

¹⁷ See the two website *Humus* essays: [Humus 2](#), “Vis Cogitativa and Defective Patterns of Anticipation”; [Humus 6](#), “Repatterning the SuperEgos' Molecular Religiosity.”

¹⁸ You would find it useful to venture into the beginning of my *Futurology Express* (Axial Publications, 2013, 7–10) and find the Toronto family in trouble regarding their annual holiday's deterioration. But what we are reaching for here, in our two-pack approach, is a simpler intimation of remedies.

But I ask for patience with these first ten essays. On May 20th, *Vignette* 10, “A Place in the Son: Rise With Me,” will put in the *Assembly*¹⁹ line *my* view of growing, which is what the first two objectifications of *Lonerger’s 1833 Overture* are all about. By then will others have had a parallel shot at horizon-expression? Will we be able to move into the third objectification? We must wait and see. But what I wish for now is a simple, almost primitive poise of active concern, about and round about modern misery, greed, mindlessness, industry, us all “together swept in a swirling mass down the cataract of life to the serene pool of a green churchyard.”²⁰

¹⁹ See note 5 above. In the notes to this little Appendix I have pushed different aspects of the task of *Assembly*. In the later mature dynamic of the 8-pack this task will be one of adding successful refinements to a successful global cycling and recycling. In our present state of betrayal of Lonerger, even small assemblies—tasks or groups—are a relevant seeding. Try thinking in terms of the array at the top of *Method* 48: mustard-seeding little “institutions, roles, tasks.”

²⁰ “The Mystical Body and the Sacraments,” *Shorter Papers*, *CWL* 20, 78.