

METHOD IN THEOLOGY: ASAFACT

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My odd title should make more sense to you at the end of a reading, more still at the end of the decade beginning 2020.

There is the challenge of this century for some one or some group to re-write Lonergan's frail effort of *Method in Theology*; indeed there is the challenge of re-writing the frail effort of Thomas in his first question of the *Summa Theologiae*.¹ What can I do to seed the meeting of that challenge? The "Paradigmatic Panel" essay is certainly pretty clear on hints from Lonergan, yet it was dumped by the leading journal of Lonergan Studies.² The dumping is quite comprehensible, since the Christian tradition into which the work of Lonergan fell was and is one, as Lonergan himself quipped in 1961, of "big frogs in little ponds": a settled rich sophistication of commonsense debating of details of past achievements, achievements made under the shadow of Aristotle.

I would surmise that my best effort since the "Panel" article to intimate or, perhaps better, symbolize the character of the challenge is the final essay in my relevant series, *Æconomics*: [Æconomics 17](#), "Engineering as Dialectic." It symbolically hints at a quite new chapter 17 of *Insight*, one that indeed would shake up the meaning and strategy of the entire book: think of the replacing of the word *metaphysics* throughout the book by the word *engineering*. Should I write meta-engineering? There is no need for such metatalk if Lonergan's fullest description of generalized empirical method weaves, in this century, into the minding of the minding of humanity.³ So, I may speak and write meaningfully to later generations—and to a few evolutionary sports in the 2020 decade—of, let us think, "An Effective Method of Engineering Progress." Think of humanity coming into possession of what Lonergan writes of in frail hope in the Epilogue of *Insight*: "Theology possesses ..."⁴ In fact it doesn't thus possess. What does

¹ A pointing in that direction can be discerned in Lonergan's quoting of the first question of the *Summa* among his scribbles of February 1965.

² The rejected essay, "[A Paradigmatic Panel for \(Advanced\) Students \(of Religion\)](#)," is article 10 of my [website articles](#). I discuss the rejection of this article in the series of essays "[Public Challenging Method Board](#)."

³ I refer to the top lines of page 141 of *A Third Collection*. In the positive Anthropocene epoch it will be accepted as simply normal empirical method.

⁴ *Insight*, 766, line 29.

the genuine possession involve? A full statistically effective countervailing heuristics of behavior in global situation rooms. Think of a new version of the Pope's recent address to Big Oil.⁵ I write that "Think" with a sad smile in and about "functions of satire and humor."⁶ It was only after the long struggle up to and through my articles of *Divyadaan* volume 30, no. 1 (2019) that I became luminously pushed to begin to think effectively of the massive manifold of heuristic diagrammings involved in the "think,"⁷ the think-tank, the think Tower of this century, the global think-ethos of 9011 A.D.

Certainly another imaging can help here, but it requires that you take Lonergan seriously in his reply to a question to Lonergan raised in the 1970s about how much physics a theologian should know. "Well," he replied, "he should be able to read Lindsay and Margenau." How many took his challenge seriously? LOL. That book still remains an excellent challenge but I wish you to muse over another such book and indeed its suggestive title: *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*.⁸ It is 1000 pages on the most elementary of all scientific inquiries. I suppose I should write there not "scientific" but "engineering," to remind you both of the new bent and of Penrose's entrapment in the worn-out ineffective Axial view of the laws of the universe and of a complete guide to them. But let's not get into that, nor into the obvious benefit of moving up through such 1000-page surveys of the sciences up through chemistry, botany, etc. You surely get my point, and my pointing to the global challenge to the present shabby poise regarding "what counts."⁹

⁵ "[Pope Francis declares 'climate emergency' and urges action](#)," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2019.

⁶ What I write of here, to quote that section in *Insight*, "is without the settled assurance and efficacy of form; it tends to be shouldered out of the busy day, to make its force felt in the tranquility of darkness, in the solitude of loneliness, in the shattering upheavals of personal or social disaster." (*Insight*, 648).

⁷ It was only in the struggle of the last of the essays there, "Finding an Effective Economist: A Central Theological Challenge," that the issue of "possession" blossomed into a mature heuristics. See *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education*, 30 no. 1 (2019), 107. The drive of those essays was towards active convergence in religions towards having *Insight* as a book of common prayer: so the central issue was implicit conversion to the two canons of explanation of *Insight*. In this little essay I add a strategy that would lead easily to the blossoming of the three functional zones: Dialectic, Foundations, Communications. The road to the clear emergence of the other five zones is not difficult to imagine, even if only from a poise of a notional ascent.

⁸ Roger Penrose, Vintage pb 2005.

⁹ I quote the fourth line of the first chapter of *Method in Theology*. Wrap it round the first sentence of the second chapter. Think of future global engineering as "on the ball in every hall." Recall the linguistic roots of "engineering" and the echo in the word *ingenious*.

Yes, I refer by those last two words to the first pointed paragraph of Lonergan's frail effort to rescue theology. I think back again to the summer of 1966 and our conversations about the daunting challenge. I had no answer to his puzzles about what to do. In the decades afterwards I sometimes mused over such an answer as, "You wrote your essay on the structure. Skip the book." In that summer, after he sketched his ambitious division of labor to me, I spent time wandering the local fields poised, as it were, between the past and the future, trying to envisage the successful cycling forward of humanity.¹⁰

But the problem of such trying and its success is the communication both of the grounds for trying and the achievement of the effort. The grounds of trying I have written about "clearly" in my most recent effort. The achievement of my effort? That has been documented, indeed at times month by month, over the past sixty years: a documentation that leads me to sing along with Robin Gibb.¹¹ The deep problem is the problem Lonergan mused over when he touched on *haute vulgarization*.¹² For me, at present, there is the notion of real ascent as opposed to the notion of notional ascent. Yes: ascent. This is not a Newman reference but the memory of good students in my classes that introduced them to physics. Might I note that even Roger Penrose's 1000 pages, however seriously read, is not a real ascent?

Should I try another tack? Earlier this week I jotted down the following:

Conception affirmation and implementation of an engineering of progress: three cyclic "cumulating" branches. Ass, Affirm, Act. Centerpiece 60910 upped to genetics of effective philosophies of history and, in theology, a genetics of effective theologies of history. Strategy: action + two-way feedback-and-forward re increasing need of mediation of explanation.

How much sense does this make to you? You recognize the implicit reference to Lonergan's revolutionary lift of the meaning of metaphysics? But what are these three

¹⁰ The poise of the previous note was strangely and darkly obvious to me, the beginning of the "great ascent" (recall the subtitle of *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*) to our task of becoming a lust for history's Molly blooming burst into the poise of "going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes."

¹¹ [Economics 6](#), "I Started a Joke."

¹² CWL 6, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, 121, 155. MY position is that Lonergan studies is "lost in some no man's land between the world of theory and the world of common sense" (*ibid.*, 121), the between especially of sophistications of initial meanings. No doubt the perpetrators of this ongoing "arrogance of omniscient common sense" (CWL 17, "Questionnaire," 370) will take offense at my claim (quoting CWL 6, 155) that they "have no real grasp of theory of any kind," were "never bitten by theory," have "no apprehension of a mind at work in an entirely different way from one's own."

cumulative branches? And, what do you make of—yes, now, in notional ascending—effective philosophies or theologies of history? The real problem is what does it make of you: does it make you tilt towards a real ascending?

Ease up! I am advocating much less for this next decade. For that decade it seems to me a good strategic move to, well, cut back on the grand and grandiose project of *Insight*. Just reread chapter 7, skip chapters 8–16, and replace chapter 17 with the little “guide to the laws of the universe” that is the last paragraph of *Method in Theology*, Section 5. You are to bend, yourself and others, towards the emergence of a seeding community of an effective engineering of, e.g., climate change and kindness¹³ and demonification.¹⁴

The skipping of chapters 8–16 should annoy many Lonergan students, but it is not central to the effort proposed.¹⁵ The center of that effort is on ongoing series of essays of the type already begun by James Duffy et al, Assembly essays that ask participants to follow Lonergan’s Overture to serious dialecticians: that last paragraph of *Method* 10.5. What will slowly emerge from that is a poise of “understanding the object”¹⁶ or the objective of our engineering: the remoteness of its Bell-curve success. The poise is to be a cherished foundational affirmation of the seeding of “a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process.”¹⁷ Yes, *this*, this herenow factual mess of global greed and ineffective commonsense interventions. Are you getting clues about the odd title’s tail and tale: ASAF ACT, AS AF ACT? But “the third, ACT” is the immediate

¹³ I think of Lonergan powerful 1934 *Essay in Fundamental Sociology* talk of “a mildness of manners and temperament” (Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research*, last line of page 42) and—thinking of the money-madness of the next note, “they have to be fitted out with a mentality that will aim at and be content.” CWL 21, *For a New Political Economy*, 98, lines 8–9.

¹⁴ This is a massive topic that must be weaved into the absent ethos indicated in note 12. Money-making and money-mention haunts our neuromolecules.

¹⁵ Lonergan studies has at its present center considerations of conversions of various types for which *Insight* chapters 8–16 form a context. The adequate discussion of these conversions is to be a luminous topic of the positive Anthropocene age, when the primary conversion that concerns me, and concerned Lonergan in *Insight*—conversion to theory—will be an evident feature of a global ethos of engineering progress. See note 12 above.

¹⁶ *Method in Theology*, 156. Curiously this invitation could be taken as the heart of this effort to point to a new three-pronged twist on the move into collaboration. The exercises of ASS invite you to find that you are at the genetic beginning of a new science; the effort to AFFirm ends that exercise and points to a humble foundational push; the push includes the push to ACT, and thus, yes, have some effect, but also, in the decades ahead, find “all that is lacking” (*Insight*, 559, line 24) in our effective understanding of the object and the objective.

¹⁷ CWL 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 306.

catch, “general history, which is the real catch.”¹⁸ You need to get yourself and others—might we get to nudge all the students of Lonergan?—caught up in effective reaching for effective action, something massively alien to conventional metaphysics.

It is in this Third Act that you meet yourself and others uncomfortably in this next month and year and decade. Some of you may well move on in learned articles relevant to the distant future, but do remember that the learned article, *Insight*, had no serious effect in the past six decades. How might you intervene effectively in this room or that Raum? Only by trying will you find that effectiveness is a matter of thin luck. Is it a matter of nudging a teacher to find and apply the ChildOut Principle, or nudging a friendly scripture scholar to get out of the conventional silly empiricism?

Perhaps a list of little achievements will emerge to show the road ahead. Without them, Lonerganism will go the way of Thomism and the like: the arrogant pretense of the reach beyond Rome into a post-modernity of a “constitutional monarch.”¹⁹

¹⁸ CWL 10, *Topics in Education*, 236.

¹⁹ CWL 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 126.