

IS LONERGANISM FIDDLING WHILE HOME BURNS?

We carry on here from my rambling suggestions of the spring of 2016. My hopes were that some who read those rambles of *Disputing Quests* 14 would follow up the search for light on the transposition of culture that was its topic. The goal I have in mind is the structured effective cosmopolis that is to be the heart of the positive Anthropocene Age. What is at the heart of the present destructive continuation of the negative Anthropocene Age? Here, “I do not think there is any need to flog a whole row of dead horses; a flick at a particularly nauseating one is enough.”¹ That nauseating one comes under the apparently harmless name “academic disciplines.”² To illustrate quite precisely that nauseous behavior-pattern I recall a key pointer and quotation from [Disputing Quests 13](#), “The Ethics of Discernment.” It talks of Lonergan’s writings on feelings but here we lift Byrne’s point to all of Lonergan’s writings.

Vertin rightly notes that Lonergan’s writings on this topic are terse and open to many different interpretations. The correct determination cannot rest, therefore, upon Lonergan’s writings themselves. Ultimately, the question of the correct role of feelings in reaching correct judgments of value has to be settled by an appeal to self-appropriation of one’s own experiences of the phenomena themselves. Both Vertin and I have done our best to discern how feelings enter into judgments of value. It remains to the readers’ own efforts at self-appropriation to determine which, if either, of us, comes closer to a correct understanding of these phenomena.³

Perhaps my beginning is a little too solemn. I suggested the title of this essay at note 85 of the previous one, and recalled that I was writing a day after April Fool’s Day, 2017. My anticipated appeal was to have as a serious ethics of our discernment here that section of the ethics chapter of *Insight* that gives a role to “Satire and Humour.”⁴ Our horse is not dead but

¹ Lonergan, *CWL* 21, *For a New Political Economy*, 36.

² The two final words of *Method in Theology*, 3.

³ Patrick Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment. Lonergan’s Foundations for Ethics*, University of Toronto Press, 2016, 200.

⁴ “Possible Functions of Satire and Humor,” *Insight* 647–49.

racing round in circles, indeed I would hope—to recall Tom White’s comment on the Bauhaus Style, moving in ever decreasing circles, at ever increasing speeds till eventually it will disappear.⁵ Perhaps I should call the style I am talking about here the BauWau Style. In [Disputing Quests 12](#), “Interior Lighthouse II: *Insight* and Futurology,” I wrote of a fine article by Fred Lawrence, “Contemporary Economic and Political Disorders and Bernard Lonergan’s Macroeconomic Dynamics.”⁶ I wrote there of it illustrating what I am talking about here:

... a dense flow that indeed illustrates the standard ‘academic disciplines’ presentation. In such works, when a position is taken, it is usually attributed to a favored authority;⁷ the position taken is bolstered by abundant references⁸ and telling citations;⁹ there is regularly the addition of a historical perspective, but it is generally selective;¹⁰ there is rarely a bent towards effective scientific precision, but rather towards summary referencing the favored author.¹¹

Lawrence’s article was one of five in a volume commemorative of the sixtieth anniversary of Lonergan’s *Insight*, and I can say the same about all five essays, including my own. I can make my excuse about mine being the outreach C₉ of the eight functional specialty, but is that not really a cover for an old style? Do I not bow and wow like the rest of them? And what of the present article? Same old same mold. How are we to get out of it? In the long run we are

⁵ Tom White, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1981. As far as I remember, the remark referred to Gropius, and the allusion was to a mythic Australian bird that ended up nowhere.

⁶ *Divyadaan. Journal of Philosophy and Education* 28/1 (2917), 65–104.

⁷ Certainly, one can expect, in a Lawrence article, his allegiance to Lonergan’s stand. But the stand here is not given in *oratio recta*. Thus the article does not lean into the forward specialty ethos of such *oratio*.

⁸ I count here 60 authorities of different sorts cited. But the citing has not the coherence that would place the work in the *oratio obliqua* of the first four specialties. So Lawrence’s essay would seem to be in the zone of communications. To whom does he communicate effectively? This is the major issue faced in the turn of page 3 of *Method in Theology*. I would note, furthermore, that the turn effects the lopsided view of Aristotle named on that page, and indeed the entire tradition of science and its philosophy: but that is a much larger problem.

⁹ The ethos of such citation is captured in e.g. “According to Nicholas Boyle, a society of consumers-producers is no longer a civil society” (after note 10); “... has caused the political philosopher Pierre Manent to point out that with the eclipse of politics by the globalized economy, ‘the idea of acting for the common good has lost its meaning for us.’” (at note 56).

¹⁰ Lawrence’s historical contextualization is thus selectively sketchy in a manner that enriches his thesis regarding political disarray’s grounding in unenlightened economics.

¹¹ Scattered through the article are summaries of aspects of Lonergan’s economics, not greatly helpful in enlightening a reader not already in the know.

to be spun out of it by the vortex of functional collaboration. In the long run, too, we are to be spun out of our failure to turn to Lonergan's suggested heuristics of explanatory interpretation.¹² In this little essay I take a short run view, and a short old-style run at, a flick at, a particularly nauseating regular derailment of Lonergan studies. The derailment is a broad mess, perhaps most easily associated with the mis-reading, from its first page, of *Method in Theology*. But I don't want to get into that here. I keep my flick focused by giving a few blunt comments on the procedures, in the area of the heuristics of feelings, of Pat Byrne and Mike Vertin.¹³ Further, I maintain that focus, and its core invitation, by not rambling scientifically,¹⁴

¹² It is expressed densely in a single paragraph of *Insight* 609-10. "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. Secondly, there are the dialectic alternatives in which accumulated insights are formulated, with positions inviting further development and counterpositions shifting their ground to avoid the reversal they demand. Thirdly, with the advance of culture and effective education, there arises the possibility of the differentiation and specialization of modes of expression, and since this development conditions not only the exact communication of insights but also the discoverer's own grasp of his discovery, since such grasp and its exact communication intimately are connected with the advance of positions and the reversal of counterpositions, the three elements in the explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being fuse into a single explanation." Our response has been as he describes it: "One may expect the diligent authors of highly specialized monographs to be somewhat bewildered and dismayed when they find that instead of singly following the bent of their genius, their aptitudes, and their acquired skills, they are to collaborate in the light of abstruse principles and to have their individual results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results." (*Ibid.*, 604)

¹³ Michael Vertin's most recent work is "Deliberative Insight Revisited," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* n.s., 4 (2013), 107-41.

¹⁴ This would require filling out sections of *Insight* chapter 15, section 7: especially on chemicals' role in the tropic turns of plants, in the hunting leaps of great cats, in the intentionality of the amygdala, etc. That filling out is to leap forward in this century. Recall my 41-essay ramble, "[Field Nocturnes](#)," on the paragraph "study of an organism begins ..." (*Insight*, 489). Think then of the long haul of filling out the paragraph from *Insight* 494-95. I return to these issues in *Disputing Quests* 16, "Detailed Disputes: Doran."

biographically,¹⁵ or historically,¹⁶ much less into a geohistorical systematics.¹⁷ So: I simply present a paragraph of *Insight* for poised re-reading:

It remains that a word be said on the total development in man. Organic, psychic, and intellectual development are not three independent processes. They are interlocking with the intellectual providing a higher integration of the psychic and the psychic providing a higher integration of the organic. Each level involves its own laws, its flexible circle of schemes of recurrence, its interlocking set of conjugate forms. Each set of forms stands in emergent correspondence to otherwise coincidental manifolds on the lower levels. Hence, a single human action can involve series of components, physical, chemical, organic, neural, psychic, and intellectual, and the several components occur in accord with the laws and realized schemes of their appropriate levels. However, while the physical and chemical are static, higher correlations pertain to systems on the move and, quite obviously, there results the problem of formulating the heuristic structure of the investigation of the triply compounded development. What the existentialist discovers and talks about, what the ascetic attempts to achieve in himself, what the psychiatrist endeavors to foster in another, what the psychologist aims at understanding completely, the metaphysician outlines in heuristic categories.¹⁸

I ask you to muse over the key statement, in the paragraph context, in the chapter context, in the context of Lonergan's total search and then ask: Is the work of Byrne or Vertin or Cronin or Crowe or whomever weaved into the full empirical heuristics that Lonergan had in mind here, "the problem of formulating the heuristic structure of the investigation of the triply compounded development"?¹⁹

¹⁵ There is a little relevant biographical ramble in *A Second Collection*, in the Florida Interview which I edited. I recall him being asked about "finding feelings through Scheler." His quick reply, "I've got feelings too!" I edited that out, but he repeated the point later (222, second last line). The problem here is to figure out the meaning in the previous line: "... Scheler were a big help." If you play down, as most do, the achievement mentioned in note 19 below, then you have a strange earlier Lonergan who missed the pointing of, say, Thomas's "63 articles in a row" (*CWL* 1, 94) regarding sensibility's role in human intentionality. I recall now Fred Crowe's grin as he remarked to me "there's an awful lot more about feeling in the new index."

¹⁶ There is the usual swing through Aristotle, Damascene, etc. But this swing, if it is to be explanatory, raises the discomfiting question mentioned in note 12.

¹⁷ This is the much larger heuristic that sends us global: no need to repeat stuff about that here.

¹⁸ *Insight*, 494–95.

¹⁹ I cannot resist throwing in another context, a comment of Lonergan on pushing oneself for explanatory categories after he gives the list of "*Insight's* categories" in *Method in Theology*: "From such a broadened basis one can go on to a developed account of the human good, values, beliefs, go the carriers, elements, functions, realms, and stages of meaning, to the question of God, of religious

Is Lonergan fiddling while Home Burns?

In the next essay, *Disputing Quests* 16, I return to delve into the fiddling in the area that concerned us in *Disputing Quests* 14. I do so under the title “Detailed Disputes.” But the aim now, this autumn, is a positive turn. The detailed disputes can blossom into honest detailed disputes within a larger context, the context of serious and effective empirical concern for the present flow of global misery. It is an empirical concern that, from the get-go of research, is to aim luminously at positive changes in the daily ways of lonely abused undifferentiated humanity. “Never has adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater.”²⁰ Might you envisage sharing in the shocking climb to which the few Lonergan paragraphs I have quoted here invite?²¹ Read them again and shudder with me at the challenge.

experience, its expression, its dialectic development.” (87) He had thus gone on in writing *Insight*. It had come about in him “that the extroverted subject visualizing extensions and experiencing durations gives way to the subject oriented to the objective of the unrestricted desire to know ...” (*Insight*, 537, lines 29ff). He was “free from the morass of pseudo problems” (*Ibid.*, last line).

²⁰ *Method in Theology*, 99.

²¹ We are back, I hope, re-reading the paragraph at note 18, but shuddering at its placement in the context of note 12. Can we at least come out in the open about our total failure? And note that the failure has nothing to do with *Method in Theology* and its suggestion of functional collaboration. It is a failure to take the invitation of *Insight* seriously.