

*Joistings 13***Did Lonergan Abandon Metaphysics?**

Perhaps a curious preliminary comment is worth making.

If Lonergan did abandon metaphysics in the legitimate sense that we are trying to develop, then of course we abandon Lonergan in that zone. Do I make sense? The marvel of metaphysics as an enterprise is that, in its core zone, it minimizes belief. It is **my (i.e. your 'my'!)** effort at objectifying my, and the human group's, orientation, within the cosmic story.

Here, of course, I am jumping ahead, but I have no worries about thus moving round. I presume you have already read chapter 14 of *Insight*, which I parallel with the next Joistings. The paralleling business is really only a secondary help, keeping you alert to the re-cycling process towards which Proust nudged us. At all events, I am jumping ahead in the sense that this essay is someway parallel to chapter 13 of *Insight* and the paralleling can help you forwards, or perhaps help you to go back to *Insight* and see the entire book quite freshly. We are already in the world of "Method in Metaphysics" (chapter 14) and have been all along here. But there are puzzles related to this. For that reason I have decided to split what follows into five sections. The first section locates chapter 13 as a piece of Lonergan's road, or rather guided trip, towards metaphysics. The second section will help us refine our own meaning for the word metaphysics, methodology, whatever we call this thematic. The third section winds round about the question of the title. The answer to the question is, of course, No!, and the fourth short section is uncomprehensibly clear on its grounds in you.

## 1. An Odd Unpositioned Search

The first article that I wrote about Lonergan homed in on this topic.<sup>1</sup> It relates best to that section of chapter 13 of *Insight* that talks of *the given*. But I am not, at present, leading you back to that article, or indeed immediately to any other related article. My hope is to stir you to notice whether we share a stance about the writing and reading of *Insight*. Certainly, the stance connects with those three questions Lonergan later wrote about regarding the book, but let us not go there.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps best to come with me in my initial reading of the book.

In that first reading, in the winter of 1957, I missed the point quite grossly. The big jump then was self-affirmation. I suppose I was helped to miss the point by a first year of philosophy that consisted of two solid but traditional courses, one in epistemology where the key was a view (from a chap called Boyer I recall) on De Veritate 1:9. The problem in epistemology was finding one's way out of the isolation of self, and the way was through a strange subtle reflection on self as minding. That broke the isolation: one reached "the other". That background nudged me towards over-reading chapter 11 of *Insight*. Then there was the next chapter, on the notion of being. Again, helped perhaps by the semi-Marechalian stuff of my metaphysics course, the key was to define being properly: and, of course, being meant real being. Lonergan, then, could be seen to rescue my two first year courses. We had, so to speak, nailed down the subject and we had nailed down being.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Contemporary Thomism of Bernard Lonergan", Philosophical Studies, Maynooth, Ireland, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>"What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it?" (*Method in Theology*, 25). Try identifying the pieces of the book *Insight* to which the questions refer. When you have digested these next two Joistings you may change your divisions.

But then came chapters 13 and 14, and in particular the turn of that page, from 387 to 388.<sup>3</sup> What was that all about? It seemed a key turn, and it was and is a key turn, or if you like a possibility of a “come-about.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is obvious to different readers, but I have never heard anyone talk about it, never read any expert treat of it, never found it as a topic in introductory writings. The question here is, How do you stand on this view of the book, or rather the view to which I am trying to point in the next paragraph?

The problem of isolation is not thematically solved in chapter 11 of *Insight*. For a serious reader it was raised brutally in chapter 8.<sup>5</sup> What comes out of chapter 11 is an answer to the question, What is this odd ‘stuff’ that I as organism do, apart from just digesting, mating, etc? I use all the usual words about the stuff: *thinking, knowing, affirmation, planning, choosing, whatever*. I may, in my reading, feel the pressure from chapter 8 to over-read the result: then I have escaped into the world of the **real** typewriter, or fifty years later, a real computer, which may well be accepted as comfortable “out there”. Or are you reading this on the screen out there? What about under-reading chapter 11? THAT is what I am advising you to do. You are a blind organism<sup>6</sup> afloat in the sea of the ‘beyond your skin’ but now you have some grip on you as CUEt, a cute thing that does CUE-ing, and can do it for, well, for the **digestive** thing that is within your skin.

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<sup>3</sup>It was a great symbolic turn in the first edition, from the problem to the invitation “It will be a basic position ...”. It occurs in the fifth line of page 413. Sadly, the editors saw fit to put Lonergan’s list into the block of a paragraph, blocking the challenge somewhat.

<sup>4</sup>I recommend that you pause long hours or months over that dense challenge, “So it comes about...” (*Insight*, 514[537]). The come about is the radical and rare come-about of enlightenment, the meaning of which we have some marks towards in *Joistings 14*.

<sup>5</sup>For me, coming to grips with chapter 8’s notion of the notion of a thing was a struggle of the winter of 1964-65. “Coming about” cannot be hurried.

<sup>6</sup>You may think of Helen Keller here, but it is useful to imagine yourself - at least I do - as one of those strange sea-creatures that is just a living tube, blindly in being.

So: there you have the key problem paragraph of this essay, or of the entire history of Western muddling about human DOING. Our question is, how did you and do you stand regarding being-thus at the end of chapter 11 of *Insight*? Then you are into chapter 12, and if you have found your way to my minimalist suggestion, you know that all that is going on in the core of chapter 12 is a naming. In that first article of mind, written in the spring of 1961, I proposed that it would have been more helpful if Lonergan had not used the word *being*, but, say, *oompa*. What is the result of the doing called affirmation? What do you reach? **Oompa! Reach?** Or better, reach for: as an objective, something to *get at*. But the minimalist attitude here is that all you have - forget about Aristotle and Thomas and Cajetan and company - is a nominal definition of a word, a word unfortunately used in the tradition. *Being*? Really, better use the word *oompa*.

Now we have grist for another chapter: what do we mean by talking about oompa in relation to the words *objective*, *goal*, *object-ivity*?<sup>7</sup> Well, we can start with the bottom piece of the CUE activity. E? It is just, you might digestively say, the surface stuff where the surface stuff is not just the outside of the organism, but rather includes surfaces 'within' which shall be nameless. That is a key aspect to notice with serious intent. The blind organism has space-time surfaces, unidentified by E. The twisted attention, over weeks and years, that identifies dispersed givenness, is a central note of the scales that I talked about previously, when I compared myself to Burl Ives at the age of 74.<sup>8</sup> It must remain a permanent exercise of the human organism that is **I, I** finding ever-better yet paradoxically ever more darkly, the organism that floats through the whatever the Hindus talk about, that is a unique **Song of the Adorable**, floating in a

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<sup>7</sup>Useful to brood here over *Method in Theology* 263-5.

<sup>8</sup>An interview with Stereo Morning, CBC Radio, November 1983; repeated July 1984.

Brahmawomb.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Subtleties of Objectification

So, chapter 13 drives on, in a massive elusiveness, giving refinements - are they merely nominal? - to the "reached by CUE". And somehow it is the U-bend of you, and I, and I, that is the measure, the *nomos*, the Brahma-bend, the Brahmaputra reaching for the Sea beyond the *Wake*, that is the heartbeat of the organism. "Carry me along, taddy"<sup>10</sup> "Cold mad feary father"<sup>11</sup>, cold like the heat of poetry,<sup>12</sup> the nerves of sacred song, "broader than the measures of the mind, the heart of the Eternal most wonderfully kind."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The website book, *Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minds*, brings in the context of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Song of the Adorable. Two sections of the book have this title: section 4 of both chapter 1 and chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup>The last page of James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>We may profitably join with Seamus Heaney in his reflections on Yeats's view that by means of the poem one "arrives at a place where, in Yeats's word, 'cold winds blow across our hands, upon our faces, the thermometer falls.' Yeats, however, considered these things to be symptoms not of absence but of the ecstatic presence of the supernatural. Writing near the end of his life, in 'A general Introduction for My Work', Yeats told of his aspiration to a form of utterance in which imagination would be 'carried beyond feeling into the aboriginal ice'. Which ice, needless to say, was the antithesis of the stuff to be found under the mortuary slabs. It represented not so much a frigid exhaustion as in ultimate attainment. It was an analogue of that cold heaven where it 'seemed as though ice burned and was but more ice'" (Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1995, 156-7). It was from this title that I came to my book-title *The Redress of Poise*. Poetry just will not do the trick, work the magic, make the catch, solve "the problem of general history, which is the real catch". (*Topics in Education*, 236). The poise is a poise that includes the metaphysical words and a creative centre that fosters in continued adult growth their meaning and operation. The "come about" becomes a community that can tower over the pressures of decline, a whirlwind system in the clasp of spirit.

<sup>13</sup>I quote loosely from the last verse of Frederick William Faber's hymn, written in 1954, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy".

“What, then, is being?”<sup>14</sup> But we are invited here to plumb the what that is the U-bend, the abyss<sup>15</sup> that reaches within and beyond your “joy or sadness, hope or fear, love or detestation”<sup>16</sup> towards an Eternal unfolding infolding of molecular beings escape-artist. Yet, mysteriously, a transitional escape that is an escapade answering the call of the primal radiation, “carry me along, taddy”.

Am I lifting a little the page or so of print in *Insight* on normative objectivity? “Normative objectivity is constituted by the immanent exigence of the pure desire in pursuit of its unrestricted objective,” the battered exigence that is U and I.

Yet we are still struggling - is it not a life’s work and eternal adventure? - with the normativity, the nativity of norms, the measure beyond the measure that is within finality’s measure, organically distributed after four billion years of the biosphere.

It is a measure that blossoms in what we name words, inner named long long after outer, but inner occurring round the Rift Valley of Early hominidic Africa, inner almost unnoticed right through these last three millennia, yet outer noticeable wonderfully unique<sup>17</sup> as the wombat that each of us is, a bear beyond all beasts that bears being. But what, still, is meant by *being* in this blessed book *Insight*?

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<sup>14</sup>The key question of the book *Insight*, posed at the end of the third paragraph of section 4 of chapter 19, “preliminaries to Conceiving the Transcendent idea”.

<sup>15</sup>I am recalling the quotation used at note 67 of *Joistings 10*, from Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 49. Is it not worth another read or three, self-read? “If by ‘abyss’ we understand a great depth. Is not man’s heart an abyss? For what is there more profound than that abyss? Men may speak, may be seen by the operations of their members, may be heard speaking: but whose thought is penetrated, whose heart is seen into? What he is inwardly doing, or what purposing, what he is inwardly wishing to happen or not to happen, who shall comprehend? Do not you believe that there is in man a deep so profound as to be hidden to him in whom it is?”

<sup>16</sup>First paragraph of the section on “Normative Objectivity” in chapter 13 of *Insight*.

<sup>17</sup>Chapter 40 of *Introducing Critical Thinking* is a useful mediation, tied in with Helen Keller’s reach, on Aristotle’s remark in the *Poetics*: “Indivisible sounds are uttered by the brutes also, but no one of these is a letter in our sense of the term” (*Poetics*, 1456 1, 23-4).

Helen Keller bore inner words long before her patterned neurochemicals turned the capacity- for-performance of Annie Sullivan’s hand exercises into a capacity beyond bears, bearing within that neurochemical urgency an inner word bursting with normative agony. What, then, is *water*?: Helen’s song without words. Then “world’s wildfire .... in a flash, at a trumpet crash, I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am”<sup>18</sup> now, with the word made fresh, inner word and waterword mesh pointedly. Pointing, yes, the primary evident cosmic business. But here we focus on the less evident. The waterword is secretly compendious. With Parmenides, if oompa is one, then that one might be just patterns of water. But later and less profound Greeks would noise *water* but echo *fire air* and *earth*. And people still later, caught in a cultured cultural joke called reductionism, pretend happiness with a little more than a hundred, including the three bits of which water is just a front-name.<sup>19</sup>

So the inner urgency that is Helen or Hellenic or Heisenberg “begs no questions”<sup>20</sup> as Lonergan thematizes it: it merely nudges us to identify the urgency, and the nudge can well be a massive life-longing inquiry into that urgency. We self-affirm a patterned urgency.

### 3. Answering the Question about Objective Metaphysics

So, in our odd way, we are back and forward, in the end paragraph of chapter 13, at the beginning: MI “Human knowing, cyclic, cumulative”<sup>21</sup> reaching for an absolute, the topic of the second section of the chapter. What of the first section? That is just a

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<sup>18</sup>I quote from Gerald Manley Hopkins, “That nature is a heraclitean fire and of the comfort of the resurrection”.

<sup>19</sup>I am using the chemical system her but one might move to the hundred odd bits that present physics struggles to systematize.

<sup>20</sup>*Insight*, 384[408].

<sup>21</sup>First words of chapter 13 of *Insight*.

madness, like the madness of Archimedes wondrous first paragraph about floating bodies, the powerful synthetic blossom of cyclic and cumulative walking, an organism with an attitude, round the waterworld of Sicily.

Why not quote Archimedes mad assertion, his Postulate 1 of his treatise *On Floating Bodies*? "Let it be supposed that a fluid is of such a character that, its parts lying evenly and being continuous, that part which is thrust the less is driven along by that part which is thrust the more; and that each of its parts is thrust by the fluid which is above it in a perpendicular direction if the fluid be sunk in anything and compressed by anything." It is dense and final, as Lonergan's principal notion is. Either of the two positionings, Archimedes notion of water or Lonergan's notion of objectivity, can become yours only "by a commodious vicus of recirculation back"<sup>22</sup> to your organic urgency's stumbling thematic of what you used to mean by the goal or object of your trans-organic digestive minding. Take the 48 year old Lonergan seriously. He steps out of his pedagogic self and bluntly states his stand on what he means by the cumulative reach of minding. It is a stand<sup>23</sup> that might be understood as such by all the types represented, say, by the thinkers he treated of in his lectures on logic and existentialism.

The stand is expressed in a system of judgments about judgments. Is there a connection between this stand and a stand on truth? That is another issue, this issue of truth. So, existentialists, phenomenologists, logicians and mathematicians, and all the ladies and gents in between, can keep boggling about truth, but still, can entertain this stand of Lonergan on the meaning of objectivity.<sup>24</sup> But can you do it with them and

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<sup>22</sup>First page of *Finnegans Wake*.

<sup>23</sup>Later, in the text at note 28, the word *system* occurs, and the text there will help you note that system is a cousin to stand. The Greek, too, can help: *histania*, to cause to stand; *syn* + *histania*, *synistania*, adds the togetherness that shouts from *system*, but that lurks in *stand*. In each our words we take a stand: the project of page 250 of *Method* is to bring all of us forward to stand together before the future.

<sup>24</sup>On the muddles regarding truth that haunted, and still haunt, these and all other areas, see my Introduction to *Phenomenology and Logic*, xxii-iii, and follow up from the index under

him? Resting therein your organic oddness of self-affirmation, that self-affirmation that reached objectivity in the sense defined in respect to self and typewriter - or computer.

Again, I am here pushing for a minimalism; don't get caught up in Lonergan's talk of publicity. Stay, if you like, walking with Joyce on Sandymount Strand, as you try to delineate the sea, the see, the seized absolute, in your organic darkness. "Rhythm begins, you see, I hear. Acatalectic tetrameter of iambs marching. No agallop: *deline the mare*. Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adiaphane. *Basta!* I will see if I can see. See now. There all the time without you and ever shall be, world without end."<sup>25</sup> You and U and I search for absolutes in the dark.

There is the absolute to be reached by borrowing the content of the question, Did Lonergan abandon metaphysics? But there is the lesser content, did Helen invent for Helen that element of the implementation of metaphysics that is the external word? No formal invention here, but simply normativity at work, the same normativity that works frustratedly in all the schools of contemporary philosophy. The same normatively that, with shocking subtly, operated in Lonergan to ground the sequencing of stages from the organism in the water infolding on crown-weighing to the speaking in chapter 13, however, inadequately, of the three-levelled organic - yet somehow transorganic - measure, that has as goal an inner product which we might well call *oomp*a, or good, or even God. Is oomp or good or God **real**, in some obvious but utterly remote sense of that word?

#### 4. Interpreting Lonergan

What sort of strange interpretation of Lonergan and of his chapter 13 is this?<sup>26</sup> It

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*Truth.*

<sup>25</sup>James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, 1986, 31.

<sup>26</sup>*Lack in the Beingstalk* (Axial Publishing, Cape Breton, 2005), chapter 1, section 5, gives a useful context for pondering over the shades of meaning of the phrase "Interpreting

seems to echo a sentiment of Joyce, in the conclusion to one of his letters: "If I can throw any further obscurity on the matter, let me know". And indeed much of my writing has been bent towards this, in a battle against an obvious reading of *Insight* that is a massive misreading.

But let me be less obscure about our drifting and my grifting. Chapter 13 is a sorting out, a readying up for the oompa-plunge to which you are very bluntly invited on that turn of page 387-8. Take the position thematically that you hold unavoidably anyway, with Hebrews and Hindus and Helen. The position is taken - or rejected in a mad self-denial - as a talker, with inner and outer words. Even if you are just now a fresh talker, with one waterword. The fresh inner word and outer word of Helen are in the "ineluctable modality"<sup>27</sup> of what I would call metaphysics. Inner and outer talk are unavoidably in context. "The conceptualization of understanding is, when fully developed, a system .... the concept emerges from understanding, not as an isolated atom detached from all contexts, but precisely as part of a context, loaded with the relations that belong to it in virtue of a source that is equally the source of other concepts".<sup>28</sup>

The virtue of the source, its normativity, is there from the beginning, latent but lively. Helen's first word is a word of metaphysics.

Did Lonergan abandon metaphysics? Did he stop thinking? Did he stop talking?

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Lonergan".

<sup>27</sup>James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 31.

<sup>28</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, University of Toronto Press, 1997, 238.