

The Seminar Q+A Sessions by Phil McShane

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I introduced this possibility in various communications, but best clear up a few points to begin with.

A flow of questions to me, and tentative answers from me, seemed worth having in common. Questions may be on particular points in the seminar, or range wider. It seemed best to keep the questioners anonymous, and easiest for me to presume this. If a questioner wishes to be identified, identification presents no difficulty. Just add “identify me”. Moreover, answers are necessarily short: someone can come back **identified** [if they wish] with further questions or better answers.

In this seminar time we have four Q + A sessions: March 3,17,31 and April 14, the second last day of the seminar. With each following seminar we shall have something parallel.

Thursday, March 3rd 2011

I do not tackle the questions in each session in the order in which I received them. My first question here arrived only yesterday, but it is a good beginning.

1. Why did you begin with Functional Research? Might we not as well have begun elsewhere e.g. in functional dialectic?

Yes, we could have begun anywhere, and dialectic is one of the best places to start. Indeed, that is where I started with the Australian group about six years ago: my efforts to interest people in page 250 are in the Webseries: 8 *SOFDAWARE* essays and 21 *Quodlibet* essays. Indeed, I could recommend **Quodlibet 8** as a key starting point, and I'll get to that in question 3 below.

And question 2 is connected here. Starting elsewhere in the eight specialties presupposes picking up stuff from the previous specialty: but how to do that as a starting effort? In seminar 3 we will come to consider Fred Crowe's book on the functional History of Revelation. It was not a success as functional work for many reasons, but one was that what was around already to pick up was a general *ethos*, with added muddles, not pointers from interpretation.

The big difficulty we have is **envisaging the beginnings of a new science**. We are like Kepler, messing with Brahe's results, not like Einstein with Maxwell behind him. Lonergan appealed broadly to successful science in the first two pages of *Method*: I find it better to get us into the popular area of physics-searching that we are vaguely tuned to by cyclotron experiments and popular images. A key thing here is that the observer has been gripped by theory and eyes look at the images in an **informed** way. As the seminar proceeds we find that this enlightens us about the defects in our approach, and the road we need to take to move in this century to a mature science.

Question 2 is equally a profound beginnings' question:

2. Functional is not a word discussed directly: does it not need comment? .

Indeed, I should have given it a lot more attention. Its meaning in fact goes very deep. Perhaps the nearest lead is got by going back to Lonergan in *The Sketch*, that impossible piece of *Insight* chapter 17. He writes of someone working in the universal viewpoint talking to “an audience that similarly grasps the universal viewpoint” (*Insight*, 602). I might almost claim that he was oh so near to glimpsing functional talk, functional collaboration. I regularly write of his agony of longing for collaboration in the 29 mentions of it in *Insight* 740-750. Functional talk is to be **directed** with massive clarity in the mature global science of later millennia, when we are to live in a world of **How-Language**. But here, think of simple analogies of industry: you can have a crowd working away each producing pins, or you can split the job into 8 **directed** zones. Or more simply, how would 8 people best put out a village fire?

Tom Halloran conjured up the question a few years ago: “To Whom are you Talking?” Lonergan speakers talk to undifferentiated Lonergan audiences. Even if they are all alive and well in the universal viewpoint, it is, in the main, “effete” (*Method*, 99), with “no proportionate task” (*ibid.*), “in vain” (*ibid.*, 355). Functional talk goes somewhere towards progress in the cosmos: it weaves into “that order’s dynamic joy and zeal” (*Insight*, last words on page 722).

3. I’m not sure what you are asking us to do with regard to taking a position on *acquis*, on mindset, on Standard Model.

It seems to me that this is the major challenge of the seminar; to push the analogy of science sufficiently far personally to heart-hear-here that, in all likelihood, your own view is not in the ballpark of Lonergan’s Model. But I want to hear about and have discussions on this. Serious understanding is seriously-acquired understanding, quite distinct from rich felt descriptions: something that allows one to talk coherently and answer questions in a loose but accurate variety of ways. [this is the way Lonergan put it to me in Easter 1961). No amount of rich description or comparative reflections makes up for this. I am asking you, then, to position yourself with regard to the *acquis* of Lonergan, expressed at some length in *Insight*, and very briefly on pages 286-7 of *Method*. This is a very existential “Socratic” thing. In question 1 I mentioned Quodlibet 8, which deals with the problem of taking a Walkabout “my town”, your locale, psychic or local. I wrote it after the 2004 centennial gathering in Toronto, which I found quite weird. About fifty thirty-minute papers in five days within a world that was “lost in some no man’s land between the world of theory and the world of common sense”, “their apprehension mediated by universal norms, criteria, classifications, serial types, and so on, but not knowing the concrete” (*CWL* 6, 121) Each of us has to face the possibility, in some solitary Walkabout, that our world view in fact includes little serious understanding of the concrete.

4. Why do you start with Lonergan as “object” and not philosophy or theology?

The focus on Lonergan is strategic. The full object is being, but I needed a start that would both get us modestly into the science and be a way also to perhaps lift Lonerganism forward - as pointed out in FuSe7. Both these objectives will show their value when we get to the fourth seminar, on dialectic. But notice that we found a larger view of research [see Fuses 5 and 6] when we took into consideration the **reference** of Lonergan’s words and the full meaning of

generalized empirical method. Then the restriction to Lonergan emerges as only apparent. It is a little like the way Lonergan talks about the restriction to his view of philosophy, or to his definition of metaphysics. The words “integral heuristic of proportionate being” point to everything.

5. You seem to be using the words *sphere* of common sense in a peculiar sense.

Yes, I am thinking of the sphere that is the earth, with its 30% land mass familiar from globes and atlases. And I am thinking of it in time slices, whatever width happens to be relevant to the discussion. You need to image this suitably: either a moving world-map or a globe with a time line from the centre. I elaborated on this in the FuSe essays 5/6. The global image can be a big help in holding together local movements of ongoing, overlapping, merging, etc contexts. It is vital to a fuller view of functional research, which is eventually to be quite precisely **glocal**, as well as omnidisciplinary and multicultural.

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