

The Seminar Q+A Sessions March 31, 2010 by Phil McShane

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The Seminar Q+A Sessions Thursday, March 31st 2010.

10. The perspective offered in this seminar is larger than, though not in conflict with, what Lonergan offers in his chapter on research. Is this to be true in the other seminars?

I do not wish to go into the history of the emergence of *Method*, although I suppose parts of it have come out in our seminar discussions. Lonergan was 62 in 1966 when he faced the challenge of writing *Method*. I have told stories of that Summer of 1966 when he was sufficiently recovered to envisage tackling the job. Looking back now I think, had I been more pushy, I would have said, "Bernie, the single article is enough". He puzzled over how to start, and I regularly quote his question to me in his room in Regis College, Bayview Avenue: "What am I to do? I can't put all of *Insight* into chapter one?" We have aired what he did do, and more about that is to emerge in seminar 2, when one of our members is going to tackle that marvelous paragraph Lonergan on page 287, in which Lonergan more or less says "you can go on now - with these general categories - to rewrite in an explanatory mode the first part of *Method*."

Could he have done it himself? Yes, if he had been give the time to write the second volume of *Insight* that he was thinking of in 1952: *Faith and Insight*.

Here it is important to divert to answer a lurking doubt in some minds, those who talk about the early Lonergan and the late Lonergan. Certainly he was leaping ahead on many fronts in those later years, but he was already way ahead of those who talk about the later Lonergan when he thought out *Insight*. What, then, do they mean by the later Lonergan? Are they like the chap in Florida who asked Lonergan whether he discovered feeling when he read Scheler? The answer is worth perusing here: see *A Second Collection*, 221-223. I edited out both the question and the first statement of Lonergan's answer: "I've got feelings too!". Especially take in the remarks at the top of page 222 on the minimalism of his effort in *Insight*. Still, I recall Fred Crowe smilingly telling me, about indexing the later *Insight*, that he found an awful lot more about feelings in *Insight* at that stage than when he did the first indexing.

But that was a distraction. I suspect that Lonergan was so energized and heated in writing that list in *Method* 286-7 - so clear in his sad minding that he had the basic categories in 1953 - that he simply slipped past mentioning the discover of February 1965 a discovery I regularly put in as number (10) in his list.

So, is there to be "more than in *Method*" in the other seminars? Definitely, yes. But some of it is merely following up that paragraph of *Method*, 287: getting *Insight* into the first part of *Method*. Notice, however, what we are also doing in the first series of 8 seminars: we are getting *Method* - or basically its chapter 5 - into *Insight*.

This is to be a very tricky weaving forward in future history, all the way to the maturity of the 10th millennium that I have written about here and there. Briefly, the cycling process of functional collaboration will continually bring "round and up" the achievement of, the heuristics of, *Insight*.

There is lots more to say about what is to be added, but I would make helpful point here, related to what Ciaran Dolphin pushed us towards: getting to grips with the heuristics of development. Lonergan was quite clear in 1953 [see chapter 20 and the Epilogue of *Insight*] about that heuristics as massively relevant to theology, to his second volume, *Faith and Insight*. That heuristics will raise its discomfiting ["embarrassing" ... see page 299 of *Method*] head in the work to follow. Its discomfort is represented in our heuristic as the **GS** in **UV + GS + FS**. And I would note in conclusion to this answer the simple help to be gained by perusing the chapter on Systematics in *Method*: it is grossly minimalist ... the tired old one-lunged warrior was moving gladly to an ending at the age of 65.

11. Could you say more about the sloping up from the plain, or the sphere, of meaning, that you have talked about in places.

Yes, certainly there is more to say, but it seems a crazy task to me to do more about it here. I gave a fair number of clues in the seminar, but the problem is to follow up those clues in the manner of a searching scientist. **AND this** is the important **more** to say here about our reach for a heuristic grip.

You recall our talk of Lonergan's criticism of *Haute Vulgarization*? How one can have no idea of what Newton was doing for weeks? Most Lonergan students are in fact like that: educated in a literary mode, whether or not in literature, philosophy and theology. They may even read *Scientific American*! But they have never been in the ethos of scientific searching. [this is also true, in my experience, of many scientists suffering from bad education]. So the **more** I say, is the need for more prolonged efforts at mucking round to glimpse how disciplines concretely converge "up" from research to a common search for a foundational perspective, OR how they dodge that convergence by pretended specialization. Furthermore, there is the matter of imaging better and better the plane, the sphere, of research. You have to intelligently range around the cities and seas (70% of the globe), laboratories, farms and factories of the spectrum of cultures across continents. That is not an easy task. Towards that task my imagings, my metawords, point.

In this matter they are no different from the great metaword that is the Periodic Table of chemistry.

12. What more might we do or think about functional research in Economics?

Now **there** is a question that we can entertain, perhaps effectively! Indeed, it is a great illustration of noticing an anomaly WITHOUT having a powerful Standard Model or *acquis*. If nothing else came out of our seminar, this would be a great achievement. If you like, it is something that can be passed on - not baton-fashion - to yourself as Communicator. The conversation **C₁₁** becomes you talking to yourself. Or, better a few of you, a few **with** you, talking about the simple diagram that dominates a first course in economics. Take the diagram and mull over it realistically. You must have met it somewhere: lines drawn from firms to households, the lines representing two opposing flows ... at this digramming stage there are no banks, no international trade, no secondhand trade [e.g. house-selling] BUT at this stage you find the anomaly, the BIG ERROR. HOW COULD THEY POSSIBLY HAVE MISSED THAT THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF FIRMS?

So, in answer to your question, "what more might we do or think" I invite you to first think [recall the previous question re messing around] and then do, where the do is: "go tell it on the mountains" and, indeed, the message is wonderfully connected with the orientation of that Christmas song! It is to lead to a New Covenant re global money.

Is this not a great instance of functional research? You don't have to do the new theoretical work. **You** simply raise a question of data missed: consumer-goods firms need another type of firm to supply their machines etc etc. **YOU** can think your way right on up to the immorality of present financial structure from there, where **YOU** is not you but a new seeding of economic thinking that will take a generation to get in place.

Meantime, there are needed bridge-structures to get us through the preset mess and into a saner next generation, but that is another question!

13. Is there an advantage in following up the second seminar?

This is a question that has come up in different ways for different people. And it allows me to comment on the partial success of the first seminar, and how and why we move forward.

In answer 9, which ended the previous Question Session, I was pretty blunt about the present state of Lonergan studies. One good reason for staying tuned to the next seminar and indeed at least through the four seminars of this year that climb to a view of a creative dialectic which would focus us on the full task of climbing, and inviting others to climb, towards the explanatory view of Lonergan. One good reason, as I say, is that it generates in us, and perhaps in others through contact with us, an ethos of discrimination. There is Lonerganism and there is Lonergan, and there is a quite definite gap between the two. In so far as there is a group actively - or even passively - interested in the task of functional collaboration that Lonergan saw as getting us out of the mess of present theological ramblings, then the task is less easy to ignore. SO: that is a minimal advantage. The larger advantage is that the seminars invite us to a slow serious read of that great chapter 5 of *Method*, and towards a critical view of the other chapters of the book, written descriptively and at times unfunctionally by Lonergan. [I think here especially of the two chapters on history].

The rambling tradition of Lonerganism is no more effective than the old style theology. Six years of seminars opposed to that tradition surely will not be ignored by those who organize conferences, teach courses, etc? But, as I should emphasize, it is surely a personal advantage to get a glimpse of where history is leading us in our search for humanity's destiny? I best cut this short by saying, well, read **FuSe 10** about the next seminar. Indeed, I had best put on the BLOG soonest the introductory essays to the rest of this year's seminars: **Fuse 13** and **Fuse 16**.

And what is the achievement of this first seminar? A **beginning** of sensing that Lonergan did have a point in his discovery; but we are not near getting that point, and Lonerganism seems to wish that the pointing would go away: its acquis simple slides past the challenge. So, have we not raised our consciousness a bit, even though many of us fell off from the great effort required to produce three essays? Nor is this a surprise: we are mostly crippled by busyness. Except myself of course.

14. Say something more about the place of questions in the process round the cycle, starting with functional research.

I promised two weeks ago to get into this question, and it has become a larger issue during the two weeks in between: I note that, while I am engaged in this first seminar, I have to keep tuning in to the entire sequence. So, for example, there is the challenge of envisaging the starting point of the other two groups of eight. The starting place has to be **fermenting questions**, and at present I am thinking of such

starting points as the last century of Johannine studies as it relates to The Question of, the Quest for Jesus, or the question, the quest of prayer, whether mystical or non-mystical, focus by Evelyn Underhill a hundred years ago - 1911- by her book on **Mysticism**, many times reprinted. The Quest, The Question? That means **people fermenting chemically**, as Lonergan points out implicitly when he talks of foundations. The place of questions then becomes, does it not, quite obvious? We are to be together in this seeding of a Tower of Able.

But I could say a lot more about actual articulated questions and question-marks in baton exchanges. And do remember, in this context, my answer to the first of this week's questions. We need to muck around with illustrations, even from our own simplest of conversations, with each other, with our children of any age. Questions, longings, can be massive implicit, in a tone of voice, a sigh, a simper. So, in functional research, the question can be hidden, and baton-exchange is helped by trying by oneself to bring it out, and bring it out in as much accurate detail as a possible. Think, **think so slowly**, for instance, of the helpful details that would lift the problem of the two types of firm to serious advertence on the part of a teacher of economics and, indeed of the practical economist and the practical honest financier.

15. I have been asked about René Girard - and why I do not enter into - the discussion of Johnson, Doran and others regarding his Mimetic Theory.

I do not want to enter into this discussion for reasons that relate to my answer to **questions 9 and 13** above. But I wish to answer it here in relation to the first specialty, Functional Research. And I had best preface that discussion with a basic perspective expressed by Lonergan that connects with points in my answers to **questions 9 and 13**. "Empiricism, idealism, and realism name three totally different horizons and no common identical objects. An idealist never means what an empiricist means, and a realist never means what either of them mean." (Lonergan goes on there - *Method in Theology*, 239 - to give three illustrations of muddling along. Then he moves into a new paragraph. "Enough of illustrations. They can be multiplied indefinitely." Then he talks of blundering along in pseudo-positions and I would add emphasis on "pseudo-metaphysical mythmaking" (*Insight*, 528) when it comes to Lonerganesque discussions. Not that it is absent in all the other people, but Lonergan people presumably have read that section of *Insight* and presumably take him seriously I jest: in the main, they do not take him seriously.

I was going to quote at length re Girard but it really isn't necessary, since the point I make here is altogether general - like Lonergan's - and profoundly important for the future progress of our global care. But a snippet may help, from Britton Johnston. According to Johnston, "The 'Mimetic Theory' of René Girard opens new avenues for exploring the relationship between science and religion. Girard, a retired Stanford professor, is a "literary anthropologist" who has discovered that human beings get their desires from each other, leading to conflict over the object of desire, and ultimately to violence. Religion exists as a mechanism to keep our own violence from destroying us."

Where does one begin? One begins with the invitation of the end of that paragraph at the end of page 239 of *Method*. There Lonergan talks of being "liberated from that blunder" and "acquiring mastery in one's own house". Now the mastery that we are dealing with in these seminars lays the emphasis on the functional collaboration that divides up tasks in a manner that "eliminates totalitarian ambitions." (*A Second Collection*, 213: in that Florida Interview, 1970, with Lonergan): it is to be the mastery of the Tower of Able.

And so we have another illustration of functional research. The researcher tackles the data that is the writing of Gerard in a way analogous to the tackling of cyclotron data by a good physicist. The difficulty - a major point and discovery of this seminar - is that the current researcher in human studies is not a "good" humanist. But we are getting used to that humioity, I hope.

Go back now to the data that I provided in a previous paragraph "Girard, a retired Stanford professor, is a "literary anthropologist" who has discovered that human beings get their desires from each other, leading to conflict over the object of desire, and ultimately to violence. Religion exists as a mechanism to keep our own violence from destroying us." What is one to think of this data? Go back also to Lonergan's claim that various viewpoints are just not talking about the same objects. For the serious critical realist Girard is defined by the first metaword. For the naive realist or the standard Lonerganist, this complexity is conveniently avoided. And what are we, are you, to make of the rest of those few lines? **Human beings? Objects? Desires? Conflict? Violence? Religion? Mechanism? Destroying?**

Well, we can avoid complexities there too, and ramble on in theological or humanist gossip with our commonsense meanings and we can indeed rise to "an air of profundity" (*Insight*, 566), an air in which "the meaningless, the vacant," (*Method in Theology*, 73) can sound as if one is joining "Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, Newman in making their commonsense contribution to our self-knowledge" (*Method in Theology*, 261). But one is, normally, not doing so. And **certainly** one is not contributing to any theoretical advance. One may at best be simply generating more muddled data.

How, then does one go about bringing Girard into the cycle of progress? One tackles his data as a functional researcher: is there something anomalous there, in a positive sense?

This, I would note, is very difficult work. What is meant by *mimesis*? Perhaps "in this case the interpreters [I leave you with the nice question, "In what sense is the functional researcher an interpreter?"] initial knowledge of the object is just inadequate." (*Method in Theology*, 161) in which case how is one to get at the muddled meaning of Girard? Well, folks, there we are up against the problems of the second seminar, and the discomfoting fact that if you want to explain Girard's meaning you need "to acquire master in one's own house" (*Method in Theology*, 239, last line), the mastery that is psychic resonance and bodily presence within the second canon of hermeneutics. Best leave more talk on that to the second seminar.

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