

The Seminar Q+A Sessions by Phil McShane

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Thursday, April 15th 2011.

This is the final question-sharing session for this seminar. It begins with a very long question that many of the group received [from Hugh Williams] and to which I promised a lengthy answer in this final session. I leave the broad question as he wrote it. Other people have puzzled in a similar fashion, but this posing gives us a serious contemporary context in which to tackle an answer, or to view an old answer freshly and existentially. It is only the beginning of that tackling and that answer, just as this is only the first of 25 seminars. The next four seminars will blossom into some of the practicalities of the answer, and a neat integral perspective on that pragmatic answering is to appear in the Autumn, 2011, Copy of *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, on "The Ethics of Inquiry". That volume is to include three essays that enlarge on the present pointers. The three essays are [1] Pat Brown, "The Ethics of Functional History"; [2] Bob Henman, "The Ethics of Lonergan Studies"; [3] Terry Quinn, "The Ethics of Sciences, Arts, Technologies." The three essays will be seen - and it is hoped ingested - as enlarging the context of your reach in these 25 seminars, an enlarging and a topic that is at the heart of the first question and answer [16]. But they can also be identified in a preliminary fashion as [a] following the sequence of the move from history [1] to dialectic [2] to foundations [3]; so, following the sequence of seminars 3, 4 and 5.

There were various questions about the result of this seminar and the directions - and hopes - of the next, second, seminar, so I include them in the final question of this seminar, **Q.17**, to which I add **An Appendix** on the proper reading of the middle paragraph of *Method 287*, a key stumbling block of contemporary Lonerganism, important immediately to Seminar Two.

16. It should be remarked that as you undertake this courageous (and at times lonely, I'm sure) task, the "old tradition" of the institutional Church is undertaking an enquiry and discussion of the "new evangelization" with the next Synod of Bishops scheduled for Rome, October 2012. My continuing concern with the seminar and its hope, and with Lonergan's text and tradition of scholarship as the central focus, is that this "lifting" of "the problem" out of what might be called special categorial (or Christian) discussion, into the general categorial discussion (of the post-enlightenment/post-modern) is done at great cost and loss. Why? Because it assumes that the discussion can be removed from within a tradition in which it receives its life and meaning to a more general perspective and its associated standards that lie outside this tradition. Lonergan's philosophical-theology may very well be interpreted to sanction such a move. But as Cardinal Maria Martini wrote in his exchange with Umberto Eco not that long ago:

Is there a faith believers and non-believers can share? Yes – in practice there is rich soil that believers and non-believers draw sustenance from.....giving it different names. And in the realm of practice it is the things themselves and not their names that is important.....the events themselves and not their names. And yet names are important. They are not arbitrary but the fruit of intelligence and understanding and when shared lead to the recognition of common values. There is still a long road in this matter of "names" calling for courage and intelligence in examining the meaning of simple things.

The question calls for a reflective seminar of its own, and indeed, it calls for something like what Lonergan wrote in his two prefaces to *Insight* and in his Introduction AND his Epilogue to that book. What, then, can I do in a single Answer to a penultimate seminar Question?

The answer, of course, comes in a context, that of the first of 25 seminars, and the three essays mentioned in my introduction pushes that context towards including the first five seminars. How the second seminar fits in is another complex matter, discussed in **FuSe 10**. And there are the three essays that home in on the 3rd, 4th and 5th seminars.

And the answer comes in the contexts pointed to by Hugh. There is the Synod of Bishops of 2012 that he mentions; there is Cardinal Martini's dialogue with Umberto Eco; there are the weave of Hugh's questions round those events. Each of us has to supplement those contexts and weavings with their own local reality, and to do so differently as they grow older and wiser and move among different pilgrims. Perhaps I might suggest, as a constructive distraction here, that we listen in also to the dialogue of Lonergan with his superior in 1935 {Lambert-McShane Lonergan Bio, 144-54 presents the entire discomfiting letter}: there we find Lonergan poised over the heart of the matter, one that sadly did not, and does not, concern the tradition in which he lived: the Roman Church.

Now **THAT** should be a wake-up call to any sleepy reader!

WHAT IS THIS, ANY, SEMINAR ABOUT? It is about the effort to understand in an adequate and serious fashion, an effort that has been dodged for centuries by philosophy and theology. I write this, no doubt providentially, in April of 2011, 50 years after the memorable April conversation in which Lonergan - in Dublin, freshly escaped from the brutal horror of teaching in the Gregorian University - talked, with some heat, of "big frogs in little ponds", the world of the education of clergy. But I would have you, as I said already, bring the remark, the question, the puzzle, into your own corner of life and of educating and being educated.

Regularly I find myself, when I visit sites of theological and philosophical studies, surrounded by the settled and secure pressure of commonsense interest. I get the brutal and horrible impression from the talk that there is nothing within except a commonsense interest, hidden by scholarly competence from its own commonness, a commonness no doubt that can be living in the same common neuromolecules and skinsights and muscle-reaches that crave a larger life of common sense and reach for it in song sessions, in evening lights, in bed-sites, but the commonness that I think of in its axial inferiority is deeply alien to, and indeed destructive of, common loneliness.

It is that common loneliness that needs to be seriously understood by leaderly folk, and that serious understanding in its needed orientation cuts deeply into present leadership conventions and Conventions. It is that common loneliness, in its gracefulness that gives the Yes answer [think of Molly Bloom's final word in *Ulysses*!] to the first question of a quotation that Hugh gave us:

Is there a faith believers and non-believers can share? Yes – in practice there is rich soil that believers and non-believers draw sustenance from.....giving it different names. And in the realm of practice it is the things themselves and not their names that is important.....the events themselves and not their names. And yet names are important. They are not arbitrary but the fruit of intelligence and understanding and when shared lead to the recognition of common values. There is still a long road in this matter of "names" calling for courage and intelligence in examining the meaning of simple things

That graceful loneliness is the topic of all the seminars, but the division into three groups seemed appropriate to me. But I emphasize again that the general categories are concrete, are us in the hope of reaching "the good as concrete" (*Method*, the beginning of chapter 2) in the style and way that *Insight* did. The challenge we face in seminars 1-8 is to lift *Insight* into the larger functional context. Best leave further comment on this and its complexities to the next and final question.

17. Could you please sum up the fruit, the benefit, of our struggle with the pointers given in the first seminar? The functional division at this stage seems obvious: why is it not implemented within Lonergan studies? What is to be expected from the second seminar - again, a question of a summary less demanding than FuSe10.

I am trying here to keep things as clear and brief, and as you will notice, as blunt as possible. But all round helpful I hope, both to our small effort here, and to the ferment of the chemicals of history in their craving for that powerful set of recurrence-schemes anticipated by Lonergan's little discover of 1965.

The fruit of the first seminar? Two points: [1] that functional research is not at all easy to conceive in a preliminary manner, especially since it is a hope, not a reality; [2] that reaching for the *acquis*, the Standard Model, of Lonergan is not easy, indeed not something realistically within the communal reach of the first couple of generations of his disciples. To these two points I had best add immediately [3] and [4] relating to the other two requests, re the failure of Lonergan studies and re the drive of the second semester: [3] Lonergan studies are in a rut of old style totalitarian discourse that is grossly **effete** (*Method in Theology*, 99) ; [4] the second seminar is perhaps the clearest in giving a blunt illustration of the gap between Lonerganism and Lonergan, the gap brutally obvious from even a lightsome comparison of *Method* chapter 7 and *Insight* chapter 17, section 3. Let me tackle these question in the sequence [1] [2] [4] [3].

[1] I think I can be laughingly brief on this matter, and there are a half dozen **FuSe** essays to prove this to yourself, **in so far as** you have had an experience of struggle to back the proof. I recall the two meanings of proof: **deductive proof**, which does not apply here, and **verification of hypothesis in experience**, which does. As far as I know, there has been no attempt to figure out functional research prior to our effort. Nor did we push the attempt. So, we stayed with the general categories; further, we stayed, as realistically as possible, within philosophy; thirdly, we confined ourselves strategically to research into Lonergan's own works.

The strategy of confinement to Lonergan's writings came to me only slowly, only in the context of prolonged work on Crowe's effort to do functional history. It is a sound way of drawing attention to the gaps in Lonergan studies and could be illustrated depressingly from conference papers over the past forty years. In **Cantower 9** "Position, Poosition, Proto-possession" I drew attention to the dishonesty - or should I call it invincible ignorance? - of the conference that led to the volume Lonergan's *Hermeneutics*, edited by Ben Meyer and Sean McEvenue. We just never got to Lonergan's pointers: which now, I would note, is the discomfiting challenge of the second seminar. But the second seminar continues this in other ways: on then to [2].

[2] The "gap" between Lonergan studies and Lonergan was slowly appreciated in an initial fashion - I hope - during our struggle with functional research. But do you not find it comic that we skipped the data, didn't do the most obvious of research, in that wonderful conference of the late 1970s that is imaged in *Lonergan's Hermeneutics*? But then, we managed to skip most of the data in the Florida

Conference! AND by most of the data I mean not only Lonergan's words but their referents. This point emerged in our first seminar when we pushed to understand just what was meant by the "sphere of functional research", and our labours led us to at least suspect that we were up against an omnidisciplinary global challenge. Should I hold to the focus on rescuing Lonergan in the two other sets of seminars, not perhaps considering for the moment the un-ending seminar 25, which pushes for a full integral perspective, including an eschatological reach? I puzzled about this restriction to Lonergan's work in recent months. In some of the FuSes essays I brought up other possibilities. So, what if I were to begin seminar 9 with researching the contexts of the fourth gospel? I had to hand John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, (Second Edition, 2007), Oxford University Press. Apart from raising a complex set of problems of research, it does so in an abundant muddle of methodological and interpretational overlaps that show the clear need for the functional division of labour. Again, there was the temptation to go back a 100 years to the take-off point of the 1911 classic of Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism. The Development of Humankind's Spiritual Consciousness*, for a start to the third series at seminar 17, the series reaching towards a grip on general divine speaking. But eventually, now, at the end of the first seminar, it seems to me best to stick with the application of Lonergan's suggested functional divisions to Lonergan's own work in each of the three sets of seminars. **It reaches best my concomitant goal of waking up the Lonergan school.** At all events, there is obviously data there for reflection on the cycling dynamic in theology, less obviously, perhaps, data on the broad religiosity of humanity, and strangely, remarkably, there is enough to get us going on humanity's "destiny" (*Method in Theology*, 291), on "the order of the universe ... and that order's dynamic joy and zeal" (*Insight*, 722, end), on the drive of primitive chemicals to "fuse into a single explanation" (*Insight*, 610), so that "the development of language fuses with the development of knowledge" (*Insight*, 578), in a new everlasting chemistry of the Eternal Explanation Spoken and Clapsed.

[4] The core of the challenge of an adequate *acquis* is placed before us by Lonergan's canons of hermeneutics, and the second seminar lands us in that deep water. I see no point in touching briefly on that here, since various facets of it are outlined in FuSe 10 and in the other places referred to there. What is the benefit of an elementary struggle with - as we do, as I focus on - the second canon of hermeneutics? A honest battling with it should show us that we are betraying Lonergan "all along the line", to use a favorite phrase of his. It shows us that we need a radical shift in the teaching of Lonergan's work. What is that radical shift? Well, lets leave that to the three seminars on Communications, seminar 8, seminar 16, and seminar 24. The betrayal is a consistent - all along the line - refusal to face the challenge of serious explanation.

[5] that challenge is brutally clear in *Insight*, but also in *Method*. One of the challenges of the second seminar is to interpret the middle paragraph of page 287 of *Method*, which asks those who are serious to get on with re-writing the first part of *Method* in serious explanatory terms. [I decided when I finished this **Q. and A.**'s, to add, below, **An Appendix** on the writing and reading of this paragraph]. Instead of that, Lonergan studies drifts along in "pseudometaphysical mythmaking" (*Insight*, 528) way beyond "breathless and late" (*Insight*, 755) and seems to do its best to keep the next generations enslaved to rich comparative description as a philosophical and theological style.

What can be done about all this? What might you do? If you are a graduate student or looking for a Lonerganesque job, well for the moment best keep your views to yourself. If you are teaching Lonergan-stuff, you may need to pause, see is self-discovery the agenda in class both for yourself and the students. If you are free free - like little old me! - then you can make offensive noises. What above all we need "is knowledge of all that is lacking" (*Insight*, 559) instead of pontifications that pretend to enlarge on or emend Lonergan's meaning. None of the Lonergan leadership - largely members of the two

generations after mine - [Fred Crowe and I belong to another age, and Fred is now nearing escape velocity] - are interested in serious functional collaboration. Surely they cannot dodge the question of functional specialization during the 40th anniversary year of the publication of *Method*? Well, let's see.

" **Why is it not implemented within Lonergan studies?** ". Because it is easier to carry on in the same old same mold, brutally excluding any serious effort at implementation. Education and Economics, to name just two tragic zones, scream silently for massive reform, but Lonergan conferences putter on with the reading of papers comparing Lonergan to Jones, or dancing round pseudo-niceties with only a nominal grip on the normative steps of that dance. An Axial Super-ego is settled in the vis cogitativa, deadening the chemistry of creativity with an imprinting that echos the life-style of infant geese. "Incidentally, re anxiety, what the Freudians call the Super-Ego is Aquinas' cogitativa: just as the little birds know that twigs are good for building nests and the little lambs know that wolves are bad, so little human beings develop a cogitativa about good and bad; it reflects their childish understanding of what papa and mamma say is good or bad and in adult life it can cause a hell of a lot of trouble." [This is quoted from the 13th of 129 written communications of Lonergan to Crowe, some as short as Christmas cards, some several pages long. This letter is dated 27th December 1955. I have no doubt but that these letters will eventually appear in some published form but meantime I avail of Fr. Crowe's generous permission to quote from archival material that has not been published.]

An Appendix on Interpreting the Method mid-287 paragraph:

"Such differentiation vastly enriches the initial nest of terms and relations. From such a broadened basis one can go on to a developed account of the human good, values, beliefs, to the carriers, elements, functions, realms, and stages of meaning, to the question of God, of religious experience, its expressions, its dialectic development."

A. A first level of interpretation is pretty evident. It is a descriptive interpretation of this description of procedure, putting bones on the process of going on. Roughly, one can see and say that *Insight* grounds a non-descriptive account of ... "the human good" etc. Such an interpretation could fit into an initial run within the descriptive precepts of *Method 7*.

B. A second level of interpretation would get one on the road described in *Method 7*. Let us just think mainly of sections 1, 3, and 5: a not-pushy 1, a descriptive overview of the task; 3, going over the words, at some level: say, the low level apparently tolerated by *Method*; 5, ditto, regarding oneself, in that low level reach.

C. A third level of interpretation homes in on 4, "Understanding the Author", but here things get tricky. That section deals primarily with the commonsense of an author. Let's say that we have got from **A**, **B**, and the beginning of **C**, that "the meaning of the text is plain" (beginning of section 4, 160, line 5). We are here, in a sense, among the best of Lonergan readers, tuned into *Method* as descriptive and prescriptive. But now we pause over the common sense that is driving the typing fingers, perhaps angrily and frustratedly. "Damn it, this is a big hunk of the book I wanted to write in 1952, the second volume, **Faith and Insight**." Is **this** part of "the object to which the words refer"? (160, line 6).

What is the author referring to in these words, in that paragraph? His life's work? History? "All we know is somehow with us" (end of chapter 9 of *Insight*). We, who have listened to Lonergan speak, knew that confidently: we could ask questions ranging round all he knew and get an answer without his hesitation.

So, his commonsensical fingers typed here, in the mediation of his colossal minding, the end words of the paragraph "its dialectic development." *End of Paragraph! Bonk the carriage back to go on a little further* : "Finally...."

When I read these two pages in my indexing challenge of December, 1971, I smiled at the way he had solved the problem he posed to me, in Summer 1966, in a tired anxious high-tone voice, about beginning to write chapter one of *Method*. Was his solution a stumbling? I do not think so: the Luminous Man was not in the dark about this attempt to round off his life's work, to say more that the *Gregorianum* essay, before "he left functional specialization to his disciples" [The Final Rice interview of the early 1980s]. Had he forgotten his Second Canon of Hermeneutics? I do not think so. Yet, was he clear that all the way through he was venturing into what would be later recognized as a particular exercise in the eighth functional specialty? THAT is a tricky question.

But he did know that he was describing a great task of the future in a way that fitted both his own age and tiredness and the low level of the achievements of his disciples. [Sometimes, in conversation with me, he over-rated followers - no names mentioned. But occasionally he surprised me with the vigour of his view. I recall his clear rising tone when commenting on one of the present leaders of Lonerganism, "he has NO SYSTEM!" (again, no name mentioned!).]

It seems best to leave this third level, **C**, dangling, at least in the present short series of hints. And indeed, comments on interpreting that 287 paragraph that spring from other sections, like section 8, "stating the meaning of the text": who is doing the stating and who is the listener? This part of chapter 7 of *Method* should have focused on the baton-exchange to the historian, but Lonergan was not into such precision at the time.

But now think of him as he is, in this paragraph, "stating the meaning of the text" of *Method's* "Background" [most of it: there is a tricky business right through the book regarding what I call (10), the missing general categorial inclusion of functionality on page 287, before that middle paragraph,] stating that meaning in a single paragraph, ending with the words "dialectic development". Was he heading for those two words all along in that paragraph? Was he living in the referent of those words in his strange luminosity? Was he **IN** the chemical universe that I have described, in commenting on the first 17 words of chapter one of *Insight*, so that the seventeenth word **renaissance** names a massive heuristic layered creative patterning of chemicals? Indeed, was that not some way the INN of his first word, **In**, of that chapter one, an Epilogue to his Epilogue. (On Epilogue, see my commentary on the Epilogue of *Insight* in **Cantower 21**, "Epilogue").

Is that paragraph of *Method* 287 haunted by the second canon of hermeneutics? So that, if "One can go on", then history held heart-close by the on-goer of a later time can bring, in an inner psychic word, Lonergan's two writing of two paragraphs - 287 *Method* and 609-10 *Insight* - and two books, *Insight* and *Method*, all Lonergan knew and reached for to "fuse into a single explanation" (*Insight*, 610, line 9).

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