

Q and A Session May 19th, 2011 by Phil McShane

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Q. And A. Session

May 19th 2011.

The questions coming to me in these weeks indicate that this is a tough seminar. The reasons are clear to some, but the following questions help both in giving light and in revealing the extent of the darkness. On we go then, cheerfully!

P.S. You'll notice that I end with **Q.26**, part of the next Q & A session. It has been coming up from different angles. Perhaps you have a version of it yourself, or an answer to it to post on the BLOG?

Q.23 It seems that a key trouble of tackling the task of interpretation, whether solely in the context of *Method 7* or by adding *Insight 17.3*, is revealed, displayed, by adverting seriously to the demands of the first aspect of understanding the text (*Method*, 155): understanding the object. I took up the task of **interpreting Aristotle on seeing**, and this first aspect, when I took it seriously - perhaps for the first time - just blew me away. Could you comment on this?

A.23 Oddly, raising this question, or aspect of interpretation, is a great way of finding the canons of hermeneutics relevant to the task understanding or of "doing" of *Method 7*. I ramble a bit here, but always bear in mind that **THIS** is the crisis question of getting functional collaboration off the ground, of getting Lonergan out of its rut [more on this in **FuSe 11** and **Fuse 12**, coming shortly!]. So: bear in mind that we all have a long way to go. Meshing Canon 2 and Method 7 is a challenge of this century.

Our three questions, coming in various formats to me, mesh nicely, and you'll find bits of the answer to each question in the other answers. "Understanding the object": think of the history of any science. So, e.g., Yes, Aristotle on seeing is a challenge towards figuring out hylemorphism and further aggreformism. But... understanding the object? Wow. We are at a fresh beginning in this 21st century. Think of my rambles in the 41 *Field Nocturnes* with my basic textbook, **Neuroscience**. But you are on to a good thing in being blown away. Let me add to the wind or the blow. Section 2 of the first chapter of *Method* begins: "Operations in the pattern are **seeing**" I bet reading **seeing** there did not blow you away at all on a first reading. A bit of a shock, isn't it to find that you are not reading the text properly. How many people pause there and go off the find out about the object?!!

Now cheer up, things could get worse. "Understanding the object". What is seeing? For the concrete methodologist the question reaches out to all methods that weave round the reality of seeing, and that reality is not an isolated piece of being, but sight-seeing in the Cosmic Ark of NoAskingexcluded. So, best to have - to be - an adequate heuristic. You **see** the elitist challenge

(MIT, 351)?. But this question carries us into the next question, of how luminous that seeing is, and what we - you and I - might do about it.

Q.24 Could you give some direction regarding the task of "understanding oneself" as it emerges from our seminar or seminars?

A.24 To quote Lonergan in that section, "this is an existential dimension of the problem of hermeneutics." (MIT, 161). Yet it is also global, and, to repeat the end of the previous answer, What are we going to do about it?

It is important to be very intimately existential yet very global in this or any of the seminars: **glocal** is a useful word here. What is the main drive of these seminars? To get the Lonergan community awake and involved regarding, in guarding, the project of positive global orientation within emergent probability. That positive project includes the genesis of a critical mass of global population that is genuine integral heuristics. In my two page outline for LA and more broadly in my essay for the Mexican Meeting on June 16-17, "Arriving in Cosmopolis", I put in the tentative date of 9011 A.D. as a date for the emergence of the suggested adequate Tower Community of 250,000,000,000 that would care for a global community of 10 billion. Will the billion one-acre gardens have emerged by then? And will they provide food, or will food supplying have gone in that other direction that I and other ecologists have talked about? Here recall Lonergan's view of future gardening and money on page 20 of *For A New Political Economy*, "a superchemistry to clear away finance and even money, to make economic solidarity a memory, and power over nature the only difference between civilization and primitive gardening". And, within that, there is to be a New Covenant, a massive luminous transformation of the meaning of **promise**, a promised and promising land and globe, so so far away, as a reality of money, from the present malice and vulgarity of, say, derivative goings-on and hedge-fund managing.

But why am I thus pushing for this vision? Because that is a grounding motivation for our little efforts. The task of "understanding oneself" becomes, thus, a present task of getting us on the road towards the quarter-of-a-billion Tower-Caregivers. Among other things, they will have read *Insight* in its contemporary versions and be tuned into the simplest of the sciences, physics. [pull in *Insight* 17 section 1.2 here, on Adequate Self-knowledge.] BUT our little efforts need not include that. Indeed, here we are at the heart of present "Lonerganism Trouble". The Care Givers that were Lonergan's audience in the second half of the 20th century and on until now, were and are just not up to the culture that had emerged in the past five hundred years. So they wriggle round his challenge, perhaps in a good will meshed in invincible ignorance. Lonergan's writings and hopes on the matter are quite clear: THIS JUST WONT DO! Most of my collaborators in this seminar are uncouth when it comes to serious science. That is not the harm. The harm is the crippling of Lonergan's project and hope by leading the next generation to be similarly uncouth.

I am tired of people battling me on the topic of NOT NEEDING PHYSICS TO DO PHILOSOPHY. Certainly you - and I mean you possibly, even with statistical high probability - may get on with

doing good, teaching philosophy or running a business or whatever, without understanding physics. But if you don't encourage the next generation of philosophy teachers to go that different way "not only to read *Insight* but to discover themselves in themselves"(MIT, 260), to become "elite" (MIT, 350-1) not "effete"(MIT, 99) then we, Lonergan followers, are going to continue in what - when you have paused over my claim enough to shake your invincible ignorance - is an immoral style of educating the future Care-Givers. Lonerganism will continue on its silly way, but now sinfully, blabbering commonsense papers at one another with almost no effect on the desperate situations of the globe.

Lonergan's answer to the impossible task of generating Cosmopolis was and is functional collaboration. You may not understand physics, but you can understand Lonergan's stand sufficiently [again, I point to the Biography, chapter 10] to slowly intussuscept his view on getting in tune with the needy globe. Functional collaboration is so structured that it will, as I have said in various places, spin forward people with adequately differentiated consciousnesses.

You do not have to do physics to support that, to move that distance beyond the abuse you received in you own education. But I would note, for some of you - it is for you to discern - that a pause from your goings-on might do the larger trick ... a year, even a summer, of serious humble calculus (see *Topics in Education* 145, on this and add *CWL* 6, 121 155, on the menace and malice of *haute vulgarization*.) I recall one of my audience in a Boston Workshop of the 1970s, who seemed to be impressed by my appeal, asking me what to do for the summer, which he said he had free. I suggested physics. He didn't: he now pontificates destructively in leading others into the general bias of sophisticated enriched description, layered plentifully with references to dead Germans and live Frenchmen.

I seem to have taken a strange line on the task of "understanding oneself", but it is a line that is central to our effort, especially our present effort of e.g. grappling with canon 2 of Hermeneutics.

Most of us have, in fact, no experience of such grappling, "... never bitten by theory ... no understanding of what Newton was about" (*CWL* 6,155), "lost in a no man's land between the world of theory and the world of common sense" (*CWL* 6,121). SO: this task I have given in this seminar, of trying to figure out the meshing of *Insight* 17.3 and *Method* 7, is a crazy invitation to, perhaps, have a first shot at doing some serious scientific thinking. Now, wouldn't the knowledge of THAT be a worthwhile piece of self-knowledge, perhaps slowly cutting the heart out of your eloquence regarding some dead German, of even regarding a particular dead Canadian?

Q. 25. I have been dipping into various authors on the question of Lonergan's hermeneutics ... best not name names here! - but not getting much help? How best to go about pushing for his meaning?

A.25 Nor will I mention authors, Lonergan-centred or otherwise. Certainly putter along with Lonergan, BUT you need to be working with the two previous questions and answers bubbling in your brain-chemicals: numbers **23** and **24**. And that is why I put the questions in this order. I recall one of my great moments (about 30 years ago!), reading *De Intellectu et Methodo* (now in Englishyou get the details and the actual piece of text I am referring to in *Cantower VII*, "Systematics and General Systems Theory", at note 29.)

I was trying to figure out the meaning of pure formulation (in *The Sketch, Insight 17*). The piece of Lonergan in *De Intellectu et Methodo* was about the historian of mathematics: he or she is adequate to the task when he or she has an up-to-date grip on that history. From brooding over this text, it became increasingly luminous to me that functional systematics was to be a genetic retrieval, structuring, of all systems. This led me, first, to get a grip on reversing counterpositions, in that there can be something creative in, so to speak, blind alleys [not just those that establish inverse insights that ground further structures]. Later, it pushed me towards the heuristic view of **GS** as geohistorical. That helped me to diagram and quasi-systematize Lonergan's various suggestions of ongoing, overlapping, merging, etc contexts.

I seem to be leaping forward from your question, but I am not. My suggestion is that you follow analogies of science, as Lonergan suggests at the beginning of the first chapter of *Method*. You can broaden your reach by venturing into the zones of technologies and of the arts, tracking technologies and aesthetic norms that "live on" as seeds of creativity. The difficulty of reading various authors on hermeneutics is that the literature tends to cycle round a range of mistakes. Nor is the cycle anything like the cycle of creative collaboration, which is so structured that it is to be a spin-cycle: spinning **in** the "live on" stuff and spinning **off** - either to outer space or to operable commonsense patterns - what is not the stuff of Tower Work. Again, here, I am thinking of the progress of physics, especially as it enters the Tower-cycling in this next century.

There is lots more to say, but we are handicapped by our discretion re mentioning authors: you might raise questions about the value of reading W, X, or Y and **if** I have been into their texts I can privately write to you. I would note, however, that as the Hermeneutic Cycling advances, less and less attention will be paid to people that have been taken too seriously too long. We will seek, systematically and globally, to live on with the "live on" stuff. Authentic solipsists do not talk to other people, and if they do other people do not bother to listen, unless the solipsist is a dear relation in a mental home. So with various traditions of hermeneutics.

Q and A Session, June 2nd 2011.

Q.26 It seems that the major problem in initiating functional collaboration is not functionality but the absence of what you call an *acquis*, a Standard Model, a shared scientific view. Could you please hint, in some decent detail, the pragmatics of the moves towards this in the next decade or century?

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