

Q. and A. Session June 16th, 2011 by Phil McShane

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This Question session has only one question and answer, although the question is an amalgam of questions from various people at various levels and in various places. In particular I expect this Session's answer to have relevance to the people who are to be in my audience in Puebla, Mexico, for a meeting on the date of this **Q. And A. Session**, and I would note, with Irish eccentricity, the day "that does be in it", as we say in the Gaelic. The sixteenth of June is Bloomsday, the day about which James Joyce wrote in that fat book, *Ulysses*.

Q 29. I find you questions and your Fuse Essays 11 and 12 both enlightening and still obscure. As you expected. The appendices are encouraging, in that they are reaching for, but not getting to, some glimpse of a future Standard Model. Could you please express practical strategies of moving forward towards 2020: the year, not the 20/20 vision!

A 29. Well, I can try.

AND first it would be good to locate this answer as an effort within the functional specialty **foundations**, the topic of Seminar 5 starting in January 2012.

I am now, here and now, working as best I can within that fifth functional specialty, and within a Standard Model [**SM**] that I have acquired - *acquis* - from focusing on Lonergan's pointers since 1956.

I am now, there and now, attempting to share a component in that SM that you ask me about, the component that is a reach for an effective fantasy of this next decade.

I am now, there or here, tuned to the difficulties surrounding the attempt, poise in the perspective of the texts on "The Existential Gap" (I am recalling *CWL* 18), but trying to raise the issue for you, in your here and now, there. Might I note that there could be derived a statistics of success, and that it would vary considerably were we to shift culture from scattered efforts to improve, to the ordered effort suggested by Lonergan? [recall the discussion on *Insight* 144, on the shift from products of fractions to sums]. While I am recalling *Insight* I might as well do a recalling parallel to what I did in question 26: I recalled there the 26th place of *Insight* chapter 19. Now, in this question 29, I recall the 29th place of chapter 20, where Lonergan talks of "the nature and content and significance and power" of the solution. This question, then, points towards the challenge of conceiving foundationally the condition series of schemes of recurrence that are progressive. Moreover the challenge is to do so without regret - like Frank Sinatra - something that twists round the past, say, seventy years, to arrive at "something better than was the reality" (*Method*, 251). There is a shadow here of "reversing the counterpositions" (2nd half of *Method* page 250), and pushing for a genetic systematics. [Another essay would be needed here, and additions to the biography of Lonergan's "Leading

Ideas": see, then, the advantage of his move to Rome, so that he did not write the second volume of *Insight*; see the advantage of the brutal neglect, for forty years, of his brilliant idea of 1965; etc]

I say **a shadow**, and what I am talking about is the "Existential Gap" problem of this writing. I am not pushing foundationally so as to nudge a lift of the next specialty. I am writing to people who have little idea of that 6th specialty, or of the two that follow, and their effective outputs. This answer, then, is *haute vulgarization* in its positive mode. It belongs, properly, in the conversations of C₈₉. [But its belonging is conditioned by the sad fact that there is no content in the heuristics of the previous two specialties].

How, now, am I to go on about the next ten years? The focus has to be on the positive line of progress with its slices of statistical possibilities.[I cannot enter here into the subtlety of conceiving properly of this: I talk below of singular events, but the statistics are related to divergent aggregates of their consequences]. So, for example, I do not dwell on the range of possibilities, and their statistics, which might emerge in the same old mold (there are the three senses of mold, all fitting here: **mildew[n]** that grounds a **pattern[n]** and a **shaping[v]**): Lonergan Conferences going on as usual with scattered and scatty interests, and the same mood - or mold - patterning Journal contributions and classroom directions, these topics, and educational programs.

So, let me take up first my own efforts: although where we are going here - I hope, and this effectively - is towards community, towards your possible allegiance, towards sub-groups that are ready for immediate minor interventions, and towards the tougher types with long term hopes, "strong enough to refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait" ("Dimensions of Meaning", *Collection*, 245).

My efforts at present are obviously not all solitary: There is the program of 25 seminars familiar to the present group, running on into 2017. There is the parallel effort of some 80 essays, which began with **FuSe** Zero and has now got as far as **FuSe** 13. There is the further effort, set up by Mike Shute, of parallel volumes of *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, running to volume 30.

There is the effort - here we have John Raymaker and David Oyler on the job - of a volume or three on broader interest in functional collaboration. And other efforts in education and searching that call for larger listings.

But, again, what of the effectiveness of these efforts? [recall, above, my comment on statistics: effectiveness calls in probability distributions of consequences] Here is where the society called **SGEME** [**Sceim** in Irish!, pronounced *sch-aim* in Irish] enters in: **The Society for the Globalization of Effective Methods of Evolving**. (www.sgeme.org) It was founded two years ago with a dual purpose: to foster the growth of a concerned support group, and to generate an active core group. Think, if you like of those who admire and watch tennis, and those who play the tournaments. What I look to and for now, as President of **SGEME**, and what Bob Henman, the General Secretary, hopes to hear from you about - is **your** caring interest either in [a] simply

taking a stand with us - "something need to be done! - and in particular done about Lonerganism" or/and in [b] getting someway into training and or even straining for implementation, for global enrichment, for cosmopolis. The society at present has over 100 members, over 20 of which are core and active members. I refrain from listing these active members for the present, but I would foresee the possibility of public identification later, when opposition to the fostering of functional collaboration weakens. Why the caution? Because of the sad fact that some of those interested are vulnerable: trying to get through thesis work, climbing towards a job, towards tenure. But I foresee the reality of an identification, in 2012, of those core members who are free of such worries.

My caution, perhaps, surprises some readers. But the doctrine of serious functional collaboration is at present an embarrassment to the majority of students of Lonergan, and this sadly includes those students who belong to the first and second generation of those involved in Lonergan studies and in guiding others. "Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company" (*Method in Theology*, 299), and certainly as I write now I am going beyond the bounds of politeness. I have done so before in similar contexts and been criticized for it. But this type of impoliteness is the stuff of honest scientific searching: I have previously illustrated this in such areas as the advances either towards Fermat's Last Theorem in mathematics or Gauge Theory in physics. Further, I would note the glorious impoliteness built into the concluding 15 lines of *Method in Theology*, 250. It corrects any naiveté about the scholar "being at pains not to conceal his tracks but to lay all his cards on the table" (*Method in Theology*, 193). A too-large number of Lonergan scholars in fact hide behind a biased selection of Lonergan's words.

The later mature cycling through *Method*, page 250, will shift the statistics of that pain of self-luminosity from Poisson distribution to Bell Curve. But in this next year, or decade, we need noise and numbers to get a stirring towards the painful psychic shift into the concrete fantasy that challenges the global chemistry of the axial superego.

Could we possibly embarrass the Lonergan leaders to wobble their views and practices regarding what goes on in conferences, journals, classes, theses? But who is the **we** here, but you reading and I writing: and are you interested in stepping out of line, out of decline, onto to the longer cycle of incline? [If you are a student you must do so only secretly: as Lonergan pointed out to me as I squirmed my way towards a doctorate in the 1960s of Oxford: "give the guy what he wants: it's only a union card."] What, then, is your inclination? Shaking your neurodynamics seriously with this question puts you, of course, in the *via cruxis* of the second part of *Method* 250, but I might help the putting and the seriousness with an anecdote and a connected article.

I was not invited to speak at the Lonergan centennial gathering of 2004 in Toronto - the organizers managed to shift around the blame for my exclusion - but I attended anyway. It was an idiot week of about 50 half-hour papers. I was fortunate to be required to go on to Dublin immediately because of a family tragedy, so I had the opportunity to do a week's Walkabout in My Town, puzzling over where all that nonsense was going. I invite you to do the same, perhaps

privately, reaching for a shake up in the strain of fantasy battling your axial superego. As part of the shake up and fantasy you might be helped by the expressed output of my Walkabout, which sought to nudge others, like you now, to step out in, step out of, the village that may hold you captive. **Quodlibet 8**, "The Dialectic of My Town, Ma Vlast", may help you to walk away from the general bias that is strangling Lonergan studies.

I am being somewhat outrageous here, but there is method in my method, more than can be said of the non-luminous methods of present Lonerganism, which is on the whole "a class closed in upon themselves ... effete" (*Method in Theology*, 199). Implementation was for Lonergan of the essence of genuine metaphysics: it seems quite sidelined in present central Lonerganism. One expert at a conference of 2009, who heard me speak of implementation as effective communication remarked to me - I kid you not - "I thought implementation was getting the idea".

So I chose now to be outrageously annoying. I feel like trying a pitch that echoes the days of McCarthyism: "I am not now, nor have I ever been, a member of the Lonergan Party." And, yes, there is room for satire and humour: "Proofless purposeless laughter can dissolve honoured pretence" (*Insight*, 649) But I see little to be honored in the present pretence of following Lonergan.

How are we to turn the corner from the shorter cycles of decline of Lonergan's pointers to the longer cycles of incline? My horrid 80-year-old lamentations can go the same way as previous calls from me for a lift in our efforts to understand, all the way back to the early 1960s ["The Contemporary Thomism of Bernard Lonergan" *Philosophical Studies*, (Ireland), 1962], to which I added, in the First Lonergan Conference in Florida, 1970, the appeal to take functional collaboration seriously. So, I ask for a **we**. How are we to turn? Again, who are the **we**? Question 29 was posed by some seminar participants. Was the posing one of serious interest, even if it be only as a spectator of tensions - [not tennis!]. "**Could you please express practical strategies of moving forward towards 2020: the year, not the 20/20 vision!**" *You*, in that question, meant **me**: but could it not mean **you**? You are surely not waiting for this old man to set your alarm-clock? Are you not alarmed at the present parochial or ghetto state of the Lonergan preserve? And if you are alarmed, why not contact the General Secretary, Bob Henman, (rohenman50@hotmail.com) of the non-Lonergan party, and join the SGEME of non-Lonerganism, Fusionism, a new Lobbyism, whatever. And for Pete, or Bernie's, sake: do a little physics and find out what serious understanding is!!

But I have gone on long enough, I hope, to startle some who are genuinely interested and certainly to annoy the orthodox, happy "in the substitution of a pseudometaphysical mythmaking for scientific inquiry" (*Insight*, 528). The relative solitariness of **my** eccentric view of Lonerganism leaves me an evolutionary sport. A SGEMING population could turn **us** into a virulent new species. **Could YOU please express interest in practical strategies of moving forward?** A new noisy species could help pressure Lonergan elders towards functional talk - a deeply unfamiliar talking luminous in linguistic and existential and omnidisciplinary feedback, a

fresh talk of classrooms, assignments, conferences, journals, theses, that would slowly but effectively lift the globe's 7 billion hungry hearts.

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