

Q. And A. Session, Third Seminar August 16th 2011 by Phil McShane

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Not too many questions this time. Rather there is a general frustration, even despair, regarding getting a grip on functional history. Patience! We have only been four weeks at it: think of where we will be after four centuries!

Q. 41

I have tried to follow your reflections on forms of contemplation and their history (*Prehumous 4-8*) to come to a perspective on the functional history of contemplation, but the word *mysticism* recurs regularly and seems to have confused meanings. Could you throw some light on that?

A 41. I shall restrict myself here to some rambles re the meaning of **mysticism**. As you can see from those 5 essays, it is a complex historical subject and eventually good functional history and its concomitant foundations will, literally, tell quite a different story. The question connects with previous questions and answers here and looks towards more complex issues of critical method as mentioned near the end of chapter 19 of *Insight*. But an apparently simple point re critical method is worth pausing over here, since it comes up implicitly or sneakily during these first eight seminars on general categories:

What place does the divine and related human attitudes have in the practice of general categories?

Lonergan was given a rough time in the Florida Conference of 1970 on this issue, as well as on the issue of myth [on this see *Lack in the Beingstalk*, chapter 5]. Indeed, I would say that it was this that nudged him to omit reference to *Insight* chapter 19 in his sketching of general categories.

The main distinction re contemplation is that given by Lonergan (*Method*, 341), between kataphatic and apophatic theology or prayer. Here is where the word *mystical* comes in as confused and confusing. It tends to be used loosely about apophatic prayer, and that usage goes against a tradition that would consider mystical prayer to be on a supernatural level which could not be articulated with adequate coherent. Think of St. Ignatius and his "trinitarian experience," talked of by him as the sound of three bells. The supernatural here is considered to be an appropriate denotation because of this being not-insight-into-phantasm enlightenment [notice my neat obscurity: not saying, then, which question-dynamic is boosted.] But there is

also what we may call a normal supernaturality, where the natural dynamics is not over-powered [another neat cover-up word!] but operating within the usual image-insight connection.

You note, I hope, the degree of cover-up here ... we are talking about goings-on within the full human reality symbolized by $f(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; r_n)$, which symbolization draws discomfoting attention to the commonsense descriptiveness of our talk. Let us slide past all that:

pointers to future developments: recall page 266 of *Method*, where Lonergan begins by noting "our remarks on transcendence as a differentiated realm have been fragmentary." Add in the final paragraph of p. 290, re the "first set of categories from religious experience", the need "to frame terms and relations that will express that experience."

So we step back from that heuristic darkness to make a few helpful points: helpful in that they apply to what I might call ordinary experience, ordinary in a sense that includes the authentic climb through *Insight*. Here I would ask you to climb again through section 11 of *Insight* chapter 19, to arrive at the tricky notion of critical method as related to the ultimate (p. 708) and, in the previous paragraph, to brush past Kant's transcendental illusion (end., p. 707). Arrival at the position (*Insight*, 413) includes arrival at, with, in divine friendship. In Lonergan's neat talk it is a matter of shifting one's stance from "what is being?" to "what, then, is being". The view of friendship arrived at is loose, so not the absolute supernatural that is the concrete reality of finitude. But I would note a key existential point about that shift, one that relates to a proper view of analogy. Analogy, properly understood, is a matter [we are back with the best of Thomas, beyond Cajetan] a delicate balance that is a meshed triple affirmation of affirmation, negation and eminence. To handle the relationship with God existentially, one packages psychically the second two affirmations in a mood or a stand of remote mystery [I am taking a simple run at the fifth thesis of Lonergan's *Doctrinal Trinity: Vol. 11: focus the mystery, and hang with the fruitful understanding.*] Then one is on a pilgrim path with divine personality ["In the 26th place: *Insight*, 19, section 9, end]. One's concrete Christian state is quite another complex reality, but best leave that to the second set of seminars, where we will have to deal with the 4-hypotheses about the reality in each of us of the divine personalities and the concomitant chemical dynamics: a huge contemporary problem in theology.

My "cheap advice" then is to avoid the word *mysticism* and to be companionably practical in contemplating your position as pilgrim, and your poise in pilgrim contemplation. Your companion is the God of affirmation who invites us to think: the negation and eminence take care of themselves in a

bent towards a poises of mystery. We are back with *Jeremiah* 31: 31-33 and perhaps quite far away from "Guide me Oh Thou Great Jehovah"..

Q. 42

You raise questions about "the chemistry of history" when you speak about the 17th word in chapter one of *Insight: Renaissance*. Could you say more about how this effects the Standard Model and Functional History?

A. 42 The question of the chemistry of history is raised startlingly when put the way I did it, in terms of the single word and reality, **Renaissance**. But the question is **present** - or should I say **presented**? - in the third metaword **W₃**, with the reference to H in the top line. Our struggle is bringing us up against our ignorance of the objects to which words point. E.G.: Who am I?: the autobiographical question that I noted as help to doing functional history. Advanced neurochemistry might help towards a functional autobiography of me, a telling of my story that would reveal suggestive chemical nudges towards a better life, and these nudges especially as emergent in what-to-do questions. Thinking in terms of the metawords keeps us humble and open. So, e.g. we get beyond the entities created by Freud and Jung to the patterned chemicals: neither the chemicals nor their patterns as yet seriously gripped by scientists.

The standard model contains that heuristics: a pretty clear message of *Method* pp. 286-7. The problem of our seminar is to heightened our discomfort regarding the containing of that heuristics in our own bones, in the bones and culture of Lonerganism.

The problem as we mess around with it in seminar after seminar, could be identified as twofold: [1] to conceive of, at least in a fantasy-description, a maturity of the collaboration in later times [9011 A.D? or 2111 A.D.?] when the community of the Tower share a decent standard model, and then anomalies "coming up from" research through interpretation are not gong to be such as shake functional history radically. [2] how do we make a start, in our present mess? The answer is by messing, as most us have been doing, and those of you who have had feedback from me taking in their strides the mess of their efforts that I glibly [the Monday morning quarter-back is your way of saying it in America ... in Ireland it is the hurler on the ditch!!].

[1], in a sense is easier to do than [2], but still it is hard work to push the stale molecular recurrence-schemes of imagination to flex to new patterns of

imaging ... hard work to "be attentive" to future patterns that yield cumulative and progressive results. But re [2]: I have been replying to those who are trying. There is the value of going back over your effort, sentence by sentence, to see are you really focusing on telling the story in that lean-forward way. I will say no more about that: it is best to keep it particular to each individual. But it would save me quite a bit of work if you sifted out other types of sentence sentences about method, about other people's methods, about fresh research which really goes back to the first seminar, etc etc.

So back to the question: how does the broad chemical heuristic effect the standard model? The present defective standard model is where you stand, and the problem is to effect that stand in you - in your neuromolecules especially! - so that it is perked up towards a better [1] and [2].

Q. 43 Functional history seems to pull in problems of context more than functional interpretation, making it more difficult. Could you comment on this, and on the problems most of us are having in illustrating for ourselves the doing of functional history?

A. 43 This really continues the previous question. Functional history only appears to pull in a larger context. The standard model context of the lab researcher is in fact the same as that of the historian or dialectician of physics or chemistry. I am continually trying to figure out what ways [2] of the previous question might be helped. So far, no one has produced a decent illustration of functional history we keep trying. The main line that is being followed is the line that takes the "normal" story of Lonergan and seeks to figure the missing leads identified through our previous exercises in research and interpretation. Perhaps we can turn to our own lives, as I have been suggesting, and sketch out each of us our story, academic or not. Is it the story of a perfect realization of potential? Might you identify a missing bent? Just one! I recall Lonergan giving an aside in the first seminar on economics, Spring 1978: what is being perfect? It is trying to correct the biggest flaw. [This parallels his discussion of correcting mistaken beliefs in *Insight* chapter 20]. Can you find such a wrong turn, a neglected idea, inspiration, opportunity? Then, tell the story over again, but now build in that neglect as a reality that continues right from where it occurred to the present, and then see how it might tie in now, twist towards the future. But I would note that the "see how" goes beyond the *per se* operation of functional biography ... it is a spontaneous trespassing on the next five functional specialties.

And again I halt abruptly: best to mess around each of us alone or with me me the master in the sense of the blind leading the blind or more optimistically as the one-eyed king in the kingdom of the blind.

Q.44 You write of you possibly taking up the exercise of re-writing Crowe's book, *Theology of the Christian Word. A Study in History*, towards a better effort at functional history. It seems a mammoth task. Have you a simpler illustration from your own work?

A. 44

Yes, the Crowe effort would be quite a push. Mike Shute, in his first attempt at functional history, calls in advice from W.W.Sawyer for learning calculus:

"I believe the correct approach is to do one thing at a time. When you take a student into a quiet road to drive a car for the first time, he (or she) has plenty to do in learning which is the brake and which is the accelerator, how to steer, and how to park. You do not discuss with him (or her) how to deal with heavy traffic that is not there, nor what he (or she) would do if it were winter and the road were covered with ice. But you might well warn him (or her) that such conditions exist, so that he (or she) does not overestimate what he (or she) knows."(W.W. Sawyer, *What is Calculus About?* (Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America, 1962).

So let me take a neat illustration.

I have recently sent out widely a memo on economics, with 4 diagrams showing how to get from the "household-firm" diagram that is standard, via noticing that there is more than one type of firm, to Lonergan's replacement of that "one-circuit" mistake by his usual two-circuit diagram.

So: think of my functional autobiography as I muse over the story of presenting the 1944 essay on economics. I did total coverage twice in 1977, and Lonergan did total coverage in 1978 and the following years. We got ourselves into all sorts of silly discussions of the heavy traffic of

contemporary economic practice. But suppose I had focused on what was there all the time {see chapter one of *For A New Political Economy*, chapter one): Lonergan's insight re the misdirection of the one-firm analysis. That contrafactual musing is re a neglected idea or insight. The contrafactual is to be developed in dialectic and foundations, but just think of this lift now in terms of functional history. Then the ongoing story is a story of a missed direction it is a story of neglect, a truer history THAT is the tricky heart of functional autobiography or history. The dialectical community grapple with the noting of the functional historian re-writing the old story of, say, how the 1944 essay was presented. It is, perhaps, discovered as a story of mis-representation that led to *haute vulgarization*, comparative ramblings, etc etc. This could become a shared foundational perspective through the work of the second half of *Method 250*. Foundational people would take up their double challenge of fantasy and cycle-acceleration of a rescued presentation. So, recalling Sawyer again, we would not be into the heavy traffic of, say, current American general muddles: we are talking to economists etc etc discomfoting about a reformed first course in economics.

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