

Q & A Session (Functional History) September 13th by Phil McShane

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Q. and A. Session, (Functional History), September 13th

Q. 50. How does functional history differ from factual history?

A. 50 Obviously, functional history is in the cycle of collaboration. The functional historian knows this luminously, and so is luminously looking back when such back-tracking is appropriate [baton-snatch mode] and focused very precisely on the shift in history that is suited to the next specialty. The suggested shift has come up from FS2. That shift, or aggregate of related shifts, is a shift in ordinary history, so to speak. So there is an addition to history of a set of related facts.

But ordinary history is thoroughly changed in that the story is told as ongoing, as a zone of decision-formation, The entire ethos of the enterprise of history is changed ... that is the full meaning of *Praxisweltanschauung*. This raises larger questions ... is there a sense in which "ordinary factual history" is illegitimate, even unethical? Is it genuine as a story-telling to say, "this is what happened", while leaving out, excluding even vigorously or viciously, "this is what might have happened" [for the good? for evil: that is another twist].

And it certainly complicates the story-telling. At each stage there is a mighty range of other possible courses of action. Yet there would seem to be some necessity of selective allusions to give the story in some fullness? Like the film-comedy sequence implicit allusions ... near misses etc.

So, there emerges the importance of the neglected **significant** idea. The significance is two-fold. First, it was significant then; secondly it is still significant now, **now** including a reach into the future.

We are back with the task of FS1 [always we think in terms of *per se* task: anyone can hit a significant oversight]. The shared hunt is for local improvements in the story, these being positive anomalies, or local flaws – negative anomalies – and the discovery is cycled with, within, this intent, this *Praxisweltanschauung*.

All this is helped by thinking through a parallel with autobiography. Think of the difference between a so-called factual autobiography and an autobiography in which one is searching for leads to a new orientation in life. I am skipping subtleties here, but evidently **regret** takes on a different meaning in the second type of recollection.

Q. 51 How are we to make progress in functional history?

A. 51. It seemed initially best for me to split this into two, but the topics I had in mind overlap, so let us putter along with the mix. There is the "we" of the seminar group and the "we" of the broader Lonergan community: the "we" of the global community, that is a larger issue which no doubt comes up here and there in our rambles forward.

First, let us think of our efforts together in the seminars. Realistically I assume that not many of us have the time to be really serious about this, so I would encourage non-discouragement: don't be fussed about actually doing any writing. Read and muse! Add to your reading perhaps "Arriving in Cosmopolis" which is in my Website Archives. We need to generate an *ethos*, a sense in ourselves – each of us – of a large task, a big scientific shift, emerging. THIS is the central difficulty with the "Lonergan-we" ... in a way is it not amusingly silly that *Method* was read as if we knew what he was talking about, even though the talk presupposed 12 years of his genius climbing?!

This problem, and the problem of generating an *ethos*, turned up recently on the Skipperweb. Although the questions asked me were regarding certain seminar questions, what I wrote has a broader reach:

"... yes, I should venture some musing on your questions. I stirred up some thinking, on and off site, by my bluntness, but in that bluntness I was echoing Crowe of 35 years ago: "This is rather blunt, I am afraid, but is there need for a measure of bluntness at this stage?" ("The Exigent Mind," *Spirit as Inquiry*, Herder, 1964, p.27).

Let me have a crazy shot at the problem of transition. Think of the study of the sunflower (as it happens this is where my Cantowers began.... [see Cantower 2, "Sunflowers, Speak to Us of Growing", 2002]). Let me first distinguish: there is the story of the sunflower - that is what the Cantower is about - and we leave that aside in an odd fashion for the moment. Here we focus on the story of the study of the sunflower. We could go back to China or to pre-Aristotle, but perhaps think centrally in terms of Linnaeus (1706-

1778). At any rate think of the story of the study of the sunflower as it goes from early description through the precisions of Linnaeus to contemporary muddled - leave that aside for the moment - efforts at explanation. There is a story of such efforts. Next think of MIT chapter 7, on Interpretation and on "knowing the object". Suppose we did have a grip on this understanding of the object, at least a decent heuristic grip.

Lonergan's point - obvious, eh? - is that this would help us understand the story (his point is much more sophisticated in Insight 15 and 17, but we are dodging that here!). Our problem now is to study the story of the study of the organism, as told by A,B,C, up to and beyond L (our friend Linnaeus). Helpful here is to go back to what Lonergan said about the study of the history of mathematics in *De Intellectu et Methodo* (Rome, 1959). The long brilliant passage is available in Cantower 7, "Systematics and General Systems Theory", at note 29 (where I quote from Michael Shield's 1990 translation). You have to try to study the history from the best up-to-date grip on the understanding of the sunflower. Here is where the "simplification" gets difficult. [I am skimming along from "simple interpretation" (Insight 578) to the second canon of hermeneutics.] What is that best? I dealt with the question in Part One, "The Method of Botany" of my website book, **Method in Theology; Revisions and implementations**. And it seems best that I should pause here, with just a hint: it seems best not to get into a pre-scientific ramble of comparing, say, A's view and C's, or A's view and L's, or even L's view and Z's, but in trying for a magnificent controlling grip on the story that one gets by getting all the views into some sort of genetic sequence (I slip past the problem of reversing counterpositions here: we are in enough trouble!!!). But perhaps I have said enough to give a decent hint to the difference between Lonergan, MIT250, and standard practice of, say, comparing Kant and Lonergan on the sunflower of the position?!"

My answer is broad but it gives a context of the difficulty of thinking out the difficulty of making progress. And I halt that answer here, because the next question is marvelous in making matters ... ho ho ... much worse!

Q. 52 You have suggested venturing into functional autobiography as somehow a way of getting into functional history, and, yes, this has its parallel in *Method*. But the larger project of *Insight 17*,

section 3, still turns up in the case of autobiography. Please give some pointers on this.

A. 52. As I noted at the end of the previous answer, this opens up our problem very uncomfortably. The full discomfort emerges when we move into the stance of the fourth specialty, the fourth seminar (Oct 5th – December 10th). But let me try some suggestive rambling.

In order to get my rambling going I went back to what I had to say in the Epilogue to *The Shaping of the Foundation*, which Epilogue was completed on my 45th birthday. Yes, I had climbed quite a distance by then, but I mention it because I realize that I am pushing rather much in all this. The big trouble is the absence of the support of a scientific community, one that has gone round the cycle many times [as we might have done had we started in 1972!]. It is, for most of us, quite baffling to try to think of oneself as it were invisibly, in those come-about categories that are altogether alien to Jack and Jill. Think: Jack or Jill – or you! - as a sequence of [well, skip the chemical aggregates for the moment or the century!] refined positionings on the various levels. The story is of how one got there or missed getting there on some level. AND then of sniffingbeyond history... how one might take off from missed opportunities to “get there”. But that may be going aside from the direction of the questions that are arising for you Best leave it to the struggle with page 250 to see what strategies we come up with. But you can see how tricky and difficult the exposure to self and to others is?!!

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