Engineering as Dialectic

I am recalling now a lunch conversation with Lonergan in the late 1970s, where the topic was Matt Lamb's work towards a celebratory *Festschrift*.[1] Matt had asked me to write something on mathematics and I remarked to Lonergan that I had done that.[2] "Well, give it to him again," was Lonergan's reply, meaning just a republication. The recalling of this came from my venturing into the lecture "Being and Loneliness"[3] mentioned in *Æcornomics* 15, where I presented, on page 106 of *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, symbolisms that I consider vital to progress.[4] Might I presume to ask you to read it, or at least to read the turn of page 105, the turn offered by Goldmund to Narziss? The page turns on "nothing", the seventh word of ten in the key dialectic sentence. "Well, Narziss, I suppose you think nothing / of such letters." We are back at my None's Story[5] of the Lonergan expert who commented disparagingly on page 106 symbolisms, and who spent the rest of his life in that "nothing" poise.

Might you read it delicately and privately and meet your *Jacques* or *Jill* as "just inadequate"?[6] I wrote it almost 50 years ago "in heuristic obscurity"[7] and now, at this stage in my climbing, the obscurity is a lightsome darkness of being's loneliness for generous engineering. Read delicately, ready to bare and bear in mind the cauling of "a radical change."[8]

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[1] The Volume, *Creativity and Method*, edited by Matt Lamb, was published in 1981 by Marquette University.

[2] "The Foundations of Mathematics," *Modern Schoolman*, 1963, later became chapter 2 of *Lonergan's Challenge to the University and the Economy* (University Press of America, 1980). The website copy has Lonergan's markings. The article is also available there separately. It was given as a lecture in 1962 at the Institute of Theoretical Physics, Dublin.

[3] See note 1 on page 111 of *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*: a lecture that became eventually the Epilogue to this book.

[4] You might pause over the final line of *Wealth of Self*, 106, think back to Lonergan's 1934 hope of a cyclic lift in progress (*Essay on Fundamental Sociology*), and think forward to my various images of *The Tower of Able* that later emerged—e.g., see Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, Axial Publishing, 2010, 161, 163.

[5] *Vignette 20*.

[6] The full relevant text, from *Method in Theology*, 161–62, is on top of page 103 in *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*.

[7] *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 101.

[8] The radical change seeds the search for integral harmonious development skimpily sketched in chapter 15 of *Insight*. "What, then, is needed is a qualitative change in me, a shift in the center of my existence from the concerns manifested in the *bavardage quotidien* towards the participated yet never in this life completely established eternity that is tasted in aesthetic apprehension, in the inner utterance of truth, in the partial success of moral struggle" (*CWL* 20, *Shorter Papers*, 209). That ontic pointing points to a global possibility of each "habitat" (*Insight*, 498, line 11) shift of towering adult growth echoing, for the pilgrim flow—in a sacrament of the present finitude—a "whole way of life" (*ibid*., line 15) that is mysteriously plentiful.

This little final essay—just now made joyfully brief for me through remembrance of things past—has the same number as its contextualizing chapter 17 of *Insight*[9] and also the same number as *Cantower* 17, "Hodics as Science I" and as "Remembering the Future," the seventeenth chapter of *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*. Is there any point in my carrying on this tentacling series beyond 17, a higher flight that could come, in 2030, to parallel the Cantower essays?[10] Obviously I think not. It would be starting another joke.[11]

Arrogant Christian commonsense may well win out in this century of layered pollutions. It may continue to win out in the consequent uninhabitabilities of the tenth millennium. But there sits, in the Markov sphere of 2020, a slim recurrence-scheme probability that my colleagues in this "spooky"[12] daftness may disturb, with their published focus on *Assembly*,[13] some few people who will then face the details of seeding the slow, serious, self-sacrificing "resolute and effective intervention in this historical process."[14]

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[9] Note the apparently crazy leap of my title from Lonergan's "Metaphysics as Dialectic." "Engineering as Dialectic" simply rescues the "implementation" included in his description of metaphysics at the bottom of page 416 of *Insight*.

[10] *Field Nocturnes CanTower* 43, "The Final Cantower Series," indicates the manner in which I ended with 117 essays, paralleling the venture of Ezra Pound in his 117 *Cantos*. Pages 12ff gives a perspective on reading them. I mused this morning over my concluding paragraph there, its smaller meaning then an acorn of my present little tree. Might you zoom in on some climbing nudge by my repeating that ending here? I omit its footnotes. "So I come to my final paragraph of these essays, for that it is, recalling the final paragraph of Lonergan in chapter five of *Insight*. The paragraph points to getting a grip on the concrete intelligibility of space and time. The answer is not easily reached, for I have tried it with skimpy success for sixty years. One meshes efforts like those of Schrödinger and Eddington and Toynbee with concrete contemplative aesthetics, into a hope of the Tower of Able as best one can in axial times. The hope sees and seizes history in the third and fourth stages of meaning, and its Sonflowering in the heuristics of a genetic eschatological dynamics."

[11] Obviously, this is an invitation to revisit Robin Gibb and myself through tuning in to *Æcornomics* 6, "I Started a Joke."

[12] *A Third Collection*, edited by F.E. Crowe, "Mission and the Spirit," 25.

[13] A co-authored article "The Structure of Effective Dialectic" is a beginning of an effort to draw attention to Lonergan's brilliant compact expression of that effective dynamic in section 5 of chapter 10 of *Method in Theology*.

[14] *CWL* 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 306.