

The
LONERGAN
Review

THE JOURNAL OF THE BERNARD J. LONERGAN INSTITUTE

*Forging a New Economic Paradigm:
Perspectives from Bernard Lonergan*



VOL. II, N°1 – SPRING 2010



CENTER FOR
CATHOLIC STUDIES

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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PHILIP MCSHANE

The Implementation of Lonerган's Economics

THE ABOVE TITLE IS THAT OF MY PRINCIPAL paper for this gathering. Here I wish to have available to all of us a single page as a basis of effective discussion. The word effective is important and key. "The Perfectibility of Man! Ah Heavens, what a dreary topic!" is quoted as frontispiece from D. H. Lawrence by John Passmore in his classic book, *The Perfectibility of Man*.¹ Yes, it is a dreary topic, all too regularly discussed in effete terms, and that effete discussion is characteristic of an ugly science. What do I mean by the odd juxtapositioning of *ugly* and *science*? I mean the opposite of a science that is one, beautiful, efficient.

It is quite legitimate to seek in the efficient cause of a science, that is in the scientist, the reason why a science forms a unified whole.²

Lonerган points to the near impossibility of such beauty in the final section of *Insight* chapter seven, when he wrote of Cosmopolis. About eighteen years later he wrote of its realizable possibility in an eightfold functional global collaboration. The key element in that concrete possibility is the luminous specialization of a global group in marketing adequately adequate procedures of perfecting.

It is a major concern, for it is in this final stage that theological reflection bears fruit. Without the first seven stages, of course, there is no fruit to be borne. But without the last the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature.³

Forty years after he first wrote of that project in *Gregorianum* 1969, it remains a neglected blue-print, not perhaps "denounced as absurd," but maybe "admitted to be true but obvious and insignificant."⁴ It is time that we implemented his view of implementation and of perfectibility.

Let me be simpler. I do not ask for a massive struggle towards the 8 specialization that are to emerge in economics, as in all other areas of inquiry. I ask that we recognize here-now, operatively, the need for a two fold division of labor. Metaphysics is "the conception, affirmation and implementation" of a view of perfectibility. One may think of conception and affirmation as a familiar zone: but now we need to think of the second one, implementation, as a valid and necessary specialization. It was not taken as serious when *Insight* was indexed, for either edition, though the word and topic occurs a dozen times. It is not taken seriously in most of the papers of this gathering. Yet I think that it is why we have been gathered here by Fr. Liddy.

Yes, in our papers we help each other to conceive and affirm Lonergan's economics as a massive potential shift of economics towards being a genuine science of credit, profit and production. Is the shift to become actual? I concluded the introduction to *For A New Political Economy* with a note on the history of texts in economics, and my text above it there reads,

The massively innovative primers that would meet millennial needs, 500-page texts of empirically rich, locally orientated, normatively focused non-truncated writing, are distant probabilities.

How are we to begin to shift those probabilities from worse than Poisson-distributed to a normal law distribution?

This is only one aspect of the full shift, yet it is a key one. Such texts

would push for a cultural ethos in which success is measured, self-attentively, by local and global achievements in tuning into the normative concomitance of monetary flow with the creative production of better global life-styles. That ethos would challenge effectively “the monster that has stood forth in our time”⁵ and bring forth eventually, not the 3 billion cars predicted for the globe in 2040, but, perhaps in a millennium, a billion gardens meshed into a world of caring nano-technology, a wondrous “difference between high civilization and primitive gardening.”⁶

Notes

- 1 John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (Duckworth, London, 1970).
- 2 Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, vol. 10 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 160, line 16.
- 3 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 355.
- 4 Bernard Lonergan, *Macroeconomic Dynamics*, vol. 15, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Lawrence, Patrick H. Byrne, and Charles C. Hefling (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 106.
- 5 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 40.
- 6 Bernard Lonergan, *For a New Political Economy*, vol. 21 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Philip J. McShane, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 20.

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Greg Barron is the Vice-President and Engineering Manager for Barron Industries in Oxford, Michigan. He has studied Lonergan's economics for about eight years and has been working to understand how to bridge the gap between Lonergan's economic theory and mainstream economics. He hopes that one day we can control our economic destiny to then afford us all the leisure time for higher pursuits than struggling to make ends meet or excessive consumption.

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