

Philosophy that is Mindful

Philip McShane, S. J.

I write this as I fly north from the first international Lonergan Congress held in Florida in April. It was, I would say, a first in many other ways as well. So, for instance, at two official parties there was poetry – his own – read to us by Senator Eugene McCarthy, and of the songs sung, two were the old Irish songs, *Una Bhán* and *Eilín a Rún*. There was even some dancing, and in general an air of happiness which was remarked on especially by the press and some of the Protestant experts. Nor was all this expansiveness extrinsic to philosophic and theological dialogue. It is a very barren, mindless, philosophy and philosophic dialogue which cannot be authentically continuous with human exuberance, indeed which cannot be enlarged by that exuberance.

The need for continuity, indeed, lies very deep in the basis of genuine philosophic method. Popularly one might say that in so far as a philosopher's viewpoint has to shift as he or she shifts from lecture hall to lounge, then that lack of continuity should lead the philosopher to question both the content of his philosophy and his performance as a human being. More generally and scientifically, the basis of all advance in philosophy is the possibility of conflict between the content of the philosopher's view and his or her performance when philosophizing. Take for illustration the philosopher David Hume. Hume had a curious view of human Knowing as a sort of synthesis of sensations. He elaborated that view very acutely and intelligently and defended it as correct.

His performance of Knowing was a personal effort to get at correct understanding. Performatively, then, for him Knowing was understanding. Performatively, then, for him Knowing was understanding correctly – not at all like a synthesis of sensations. The illustration may be a little remote from popular philosophy but the point, I hope, is not totally obscure.

There is a wider question of continuity: continuity in the emergence of deeper layers of philosophy reflection within a community. Our own nation and culture at present is in such a state of emergence. Concretely one may note the phenomenon of the lay professional philosopher, and the fact that 1970 is a year of decision regarding the introduction of philosophy into the schools. The philosophy that emerges and that is cultivated, to be authentic, must arise from our self-questioning, a self-questioning that must not be only transcultural (so, for instance, human knowing, be it Chinese or Irish is a matter of correct understanding) but also national.

To the transcultural self-questioning the method of Bernard Lonergan undoubtedly is relevant – for the method is precisely one of fundamental self-questioning. This indeed was a point that emerged on various occasions during the conference referred to: the point that what was being proposed was not another system but a strategy, a programme for getting to grips with oneself as a human being. And may I note in passing that unless a philosophic programme – be it school or university – includes some measure of methodological self-attention and self-questioning, then adolescent and youthful exuberance and aspirations are liable to be frustrated.

But there is also the question of cultural reflection, and that can be frustrated by the unquestioning acceptance of alien determinations of meaning, whether it be that of Heidegger's search for meaning that characterises the *Lonely Crowd*. Cultural reflection should well up centrally from the within of a people, and that *withiness* may be as remote from the palpable and the economic as the twists of an old Irish song. Remote, yet relevant to our children's children.

That welling-up is not only aided by levels of exuberance such as I mentioned at the beginning; it should also mediate them, make way for them. But to do so the reflection, while deeply theoretic and remote, should never abstract from the concrete complexity of the people. Thus, in so far as a philosophic community concerns itself entirely with the transcultural only, to the neglect, for instance, of the concrete problem and benefit of phonemic regionalisation, the shades of irresponsibility hang over the community.