

Matthew L. Lamb, HISTORY, METHOD AND THEOLOGY: A Dialectical Comparison of Wilhelm Dilthey's Critique of Historical Reason and Bernard Lonergan's Meta-methodology.

University of Münster, Doctoral Dissertation, 1974.

In his dissertation Matthew Lamb fits together Dilthey's concern with history, Lonergan's with method, and the 'political theology' of J.-B. Metz. It is this conjunction, I feel, that most calls for elucidation. For it rests not, as one might expect, on some genetic dependence but on an overarching and somewhat complex dialectic; and it is this dialectic that both constitutes the unity of the study and informs the interpretation of the authors under examination.

Now dialectic denotes both conflict and movement. In this case the relevant conflict is between the promise of the Enlightenment and its fulfillment. There was promised the liberation of man under the rule of emancipated reason. But the implementation of that rule was entrusted to modern science; and modern science put its faith far less in the immanent reasonableness of the human spirit, far more in the embodiment of reason in experimental results and mathematical hard-headedness. So extrinsic a criterion and so abstruse a control, it can be argued, have done more for the mechanization than for the liberation of human life.

No less than conflict dialectic implies movement, and the relevant movement has been supplied by the ongoing development of modern science. For in the main it was Newton's achievement that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment celebrated

as the inauguration of a new era. But later achievements have kept shifting the meaning and enlarging the horizon of scientific endeavor. Even scientists have been slow to adapt their conceptions of science to real advance of their field. One can hardly be surprised if an even greater lag is discerned in adapting the ideals and norms of the new era to the ever changing embodiments of scientific reason.

One such change and enlargement was seen by Wilhelm Dilthey in the work of the German Historical School. For its technique was not the correlation of measurements, and the coherence of its narratives was not secured by borrowing mathematical syntheses. If Kant's Critique of Pure Reason could supply the theoretical foundations that Hume had denied to Euclidean geometry and Newtonian mechanics, there still was needed a supplementary critique of historical reasons. Where Kant had grounded an Erklären of things, Dilthey sought a Verstehen of concrete human living. For concrete human living was the very stuff of history, and with that stuff one became familiar only through a heightening of one's own conscious feeling, knowing, doing.

What Dilthey undertook and carried forward, he did not complete. At the turn of the century positivist views were still dominant in accounts of historical method. Even Dilthey's great follower, Ernst Troeltsch, was unable to break with historical relativism. Still Dilthey's quest for foundations lived on, ⁱⁿ Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, while Dilthey's technique of a Besinnung that interprets

not Erfahrung so much as Erlebnis continues in the various forms of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Meanwhile, however, the very notion of modern science was being transformed. The success of Einstein's special theory of relativity transposed the invariants of physics from the Euclidean image of space to the realm of empirical laws and theoretical principles. The investigation of the subatomic order led to ultimates that could be envisaged exclusively neither as wave nor as particle. Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy ran counter to the universal determinism that had been vindicated by Laplace when he established the periodicity of the planetary system. The extension of the relevance of statistical theory from thermodynamics to quantum theory invited a further extension that introduced schedules of probabilities to replace Darwin's chance variations and his survival of the fittest. Finally, these revolutions in the natural sciences found an echo in rebellions against positivism domination in historical studies: in Germany there was Karl Housci's Krisis des Historismus; in France Henri-Irénée Marrou's De la connaissance historique; in England R. G. Collingwood's Idea of History; and even before these three in the United States the penetrating essays of Carl Becker.

The twentieth-century development of the notion of 'modern' science not only has cast a retrospective light on Dilthey's work but also contributed to the ferment that in Roman Catholic circles prepared the way for the second

Vatican council. So Lamb finds in Lonergan an instance in which an awareness of contemporary mathematics and science led to a revision of traditional interpretations of Aquinas and of Aristotle and, as well, brought to light a generalized empirical method that covers the learning process of common sense, the procedures of empirical science, the ways of historical scholarship, and the philosophic grounding of the objectivity of human knowledge. This grounding is placed in authentic subjectivity. It challenges the once seductive implementation of reason through experimental science. It invites thoughtful men and women to the self-understanding and self-appropriation that can follow from a heightened awareness of their own powers of attention, their own intelligence, their own reasonableness, their own conscientiousness. It finds a methodology that not only accounts for the diversity of specializations but also stresses the historicity of their past development and promotes their future interaction and collaboration.

It was the intrinsically practical aspect of method that enabled Lamb to link Lonergan with Metz. For the latter's so-called 'political' theology is not so novel as to step beyond academic limits. Its specific difference seems to be twofold. Where other theology tended to center its attention on its justifying past, political theology would add concern with man's future. Where other theology in its medieval phase ambitioned the role of queen of the sciences and, more recently, has been content to stress the significance of religion for man's inner life, political theology

assumes an interdisciplinary role and seeks an interdisciplinary setting. Indeed, its proper Sitz im Leben would be found in the projected interdisciplinary university of Bielefeld, and with that project Metz himself is actively concerned.

Now with such a vision the dialectic of the Enlightenment moves to new plane. For an interdisciplinary university carries on the aspirations for unity and comprehensiveness of the 18th-century Encyclopédie. At the same time the notion of science, inspired by Galileo, Descartes, Newton, is sublated by the advances of Einstein, Heisenberg, Darwin. The natural sciences are complemented by human studies. A future-oriented theology adds a corrective to a utilitarianism that denied limits to utility, and so set our activities, our policies, our institutions on the fatal course of exponential growth.

I have been endeavoring to communicate what I consider the overarching idea that informs Lamb's dissertation. I now must add that my effort involved a great simplification. It was, I trust, legitimate for me to simplify the dialectic of the Enlightenment by taking as a base line the subsequent unfolding^{of} natural science. But Lamb had to write as a historian. He had to seek his materials first in Dilthey's own writings, then in Dilthey's antecedents, later in Dilthey's interpreters. In doing so he has displayed a great erudition and, while I am not competent to judge that display, neither am I in a position to quarrel with the University of Münster which not only awarded him his doctorate but also crowned his efforts with the prize for the best dissertation of the year.

Presumably Motz, his Referent, found acceptable his account of Metz' political theology, while I can testify that he is fully conversant with Lonergan's writings.

Finally, it is indeed true that he still has to progress in the writing of English prose but many, I feel, will put up with his somewhat Tautonic style for the sake of drawing on his learning and of entering into his thought.

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