

2966BDTE070

Continuation of Q&A from November 8, 1979

**Lonergan** (continuing response from 2966ADTE070) But he (Voegelin) looks upon taking propositions seriously as a source of logomachy, fighting about words. And of course it can very easily lead to that. Plato first discovered there was a distinction between eristic and dialectic. 'Eristic' was the fellow who's out to win, the lawyer in the case, in an adversary situation. 'You were holding that side, and I'm holding this side. I do everything I can to destroy your arguments and bolster my own, and he does too. And we'll see who can come out on top.' And dialectic is not concerned with that. Dialectic is a conversation between intelligent and reasonable and patient people who, when they have difficulties, can put them precisely. Plato gets on with these dialogues, with people saying 'Yes, indeed; yes, indeed.' I remember I was giving a lecture once in the state of Washington, and there were two people responding. Each was to have ten minutes, and the first man responding spoke for twenty. And the second man said, 'Well, all I need say is to quote the words of the finer figures of Platonic dialogue, "Yes indeed, verily that is so."'

**Question repeated:** If so, will the critical realist who has not undergone religious or moral conversion be capable of discerning positions from counterpositions; or will such a person only be able to see the antithetical nature of the positions while not discerning which is position and which is counterposition?

**Lonergan:** Well, here there are two issues. Conversion is existential; it's a difference in *you*. It's not only seeing that what is worthwhile is better than selfishness or group egoism; it's living that difference. It's not following the remark of Ovid, *Video meliora proboque*, I see what's better and I approve of it, but I do what is worse. That's moral conversion, when you do what you see and approve. Now the seeing is something very elementary in human nature. People can always find fault with others, say 'That's not fair.' It's finding fault with themselves that ... I forget who it was that said that confession is good for the soul but hard on the reputation. There's always a minimal morality in any group. There's honor among thieves. They don't squeal on one another, or if they do you're a rotter. But moral conversion is more than that minimal idea of conversion. It's along the line. So moral conversion is not merely a discerning positions from counterpositions. Discerning them is not too great a difficulty. A fine discernment is. Saints are prone to regard themselves as the greatest of sinners. And that is

because they have a developed moral sense, not that they're worse than anybody else.

End of Q&A.