

Questions for Discussion / 2 October 1980

1. According to Method, p 70, by "its embodiment in language, in a set of conventional signs, meaning finds its greatest liberation." Does this imply an inherent hierarchy in the carriers of meaning, with language at the height of embodiments of meaning?

Isn't any hierarchy really determined by context or situation?

2. In Method's chapter on the human good, and in class discussion, it has been stated that the inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility of decline may be reversed by religion through self-sacrificing love. This appears to be a transposition into contemporary terms of the time-honored maxim *gratis perficit naturam, non tollit* -- grace "perfects" nature without taking it away. But that is basically a Roman Catholic position. A good Calvinist would counter *finitum non capax infiniti* -- the temporal order isn't capable of being "graced."

Now, the chapter on the human good is part of Method's "Background," before the functional specialties. Does it, in fact, rest on a specific (Roman Catholic) understanding of nature and grace? And if so, has a theological position been taken up before even reaching the functional specialty, dialectic, in which specific theological questions, such as the question about grace reversing decline, are decided one way or the other?

3. Could you give a specific example of "potential meaning," to add to those on page 74 of Method? Specifically, is there such a thing as potential meaning carried in language? Or is meaning that is expressed in language always at least "formal meaning," because it is expressed in language?

4. Are the effective and constitutive functions of meaning always concerned in some way with the future, with what does not yet exist or has not yet been done, but which is intended or anticipated?

5. Would you please briefly (summarily?) distinguish and relate the following terms: subject, soul, spirit, psyche?

6. Could you please indicate something of the intellectual history behind the shift from the notion of the good of order in Insight to the good as a distinct notion in Method?

In a review in Gregorianum 44 (1963): 359, you wrote: "Dilthey had seen a need for doing for history and human science what Kant's Critique had done for natural science ... " To what extent is Method aimed at speaking to this need?

8. (Two questions combined) How has the work of Newman influenced the philosophy of Method? Are there specific works of Newman's that might prove helpful in coming to understand your own? I suspect that the Grammar of Assent would be among these; are there any warnings to be observed, similar to the warnings you have given about "idealistic" tendencies in Collingwood?

1. "Meaning finds its greatest liberation" in language because conventional signs admit indefinite permutations and consequently indefinitely diverse carriers of meaning.

The medium of comparison is basically material and so is not strictly hierarchical: compare permutations of letters with permutations of bodily movements (dancing), postures (statuary), colors (painting), forms (architecture), sounds (music). Music is the only rival that might be alleged, but it lacks precision of denotation.

2. "... appears to be a transposition..."

Its source is not medieval Latin but chapters seven (progress and decline) and twenty of insight.

Against the argument of God's existence is the evil of this world. Chapter twenty is concerned with a heuristic structure to determine what would counter the evils of decline.

".. time-honored maxim, gratia perficit naturam..."

Distinguish three stages in this matter of the distinctions between the state in the garden of Eden, fallen man, man redeemed by Christ, and heaven.

a three stages of liberty; cf Lonergan, Grace and Freedom, p. 10

b states in which human nature existed; ibid., pp. 13, 10.

c accounts of grace based on metaphysical analysis and accounts based on intentionality analysis, Method, pp. 288f.

".. temporal order.. cannot be graced..

The temporal order as society, the state, politics, economics, cannot be graced, directly, yes, indirectly, distinguish

as human beings, existential subjects, cannot be graced as operating individually, no,

as operating socially, distinguish,

prior to development of economic science, no

subsequent to such development, distinguish,

if the churches are incapable of such development, concede

if the churches put their minds and resources to it, no.

"specific RC theological position taken prior to dialectic"

there are many specific RC positions on nature and grace

positions taken in Method are not theological but methodological unless notice to the contrary is given, eg, the discovery in oneself of a horizon that corresponds to the NT command, Repent, The Kingdom of God is at hand. Method, p. 271 cf. 270, 332 f.

".. dialectic in which... specific theological questions are settled..."

dialectic does not solve theological questions but brings to light the strength and weaknesses of workers in research, in interpretation, in history, and in their own horizons.

Relation of Method to RC and other communions

See pp. xi, xii, 150, 270, 284f.

3. One further instance of potential meaning: the identity of intelligence in act and the understood in act.

Data of themselves are like Aristotle's prime matter; they are neither substance nor quantity nor quality nor relation nor action nor passion nor place nor time nor posture nor habit.

To express supposes data, insight, and conception.

4. What has been constituted can act and be acted upon; but constitutive meaning is what makes a person authentic or unauthentic, a state what it is to be a state, etc.

Effective meaning is what makes meaning a means to an end distinct from itself.

5. "Subject" may be taken grammatically (of a verb, a sentence), psychologically (of its operations), metaphysically (what is subject because completed by something else; Aristotle's hypokeimenon)

Soul (Aristotle) is the first act that actuates an organic body; soul (Plato) is in the body as a sailor in a boat.

Spirit (in Latin and derived languages) became the term corresponding to the Hebrew "nephesh."

Psyche, transliteration of Greek word for soul, in current psychology, the carrier of feelings and symbols.

6. In insight, besides the particular good & the common good there is the supreme good, God.

"value" came into common use as the name of a supreme good through the Baden Neo-Kantian School; see Copleston, History of Philosophy, vol. 7, ch. 19 #5; Doubleday edit., 7, 2, 137-40.

7. Dilthey's aim was to do for history what Kant had done for physics; ie Kant had made Newtonian physics the basis for new knowledge of what knowledge really is; he succeeded inasmuch as Newtonian physics was a fairly good specimen of scientific thinking; Dilthey recognized that modern history was another

new source of knowledge on what knowledge is, but he found that his new source was not pure; it was contaminated with ideas derived from the French Enlightenment and German Absolute Idealism.

Method aims at drawing on modern science, history, and philosophy to give a practical account of what theology as a modern science would be. "Modern" in the sense that it profits from the advances in knowledge of knowledge made by scientists, historians, and philosophers since the 17th century.

Its aim is to install theology in the third stage of meaning, cf. Method, pp. 93-96.

8. My debt to Newman.

I consider Newman a master of English prose composition, an extremely sensitive and solid thinker, a profoundly religious person.

From Newman's "ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt," I learnt that difficulties are the great means of clarifying thought and advancing understanding, but doubts are what can change one from unauthentic to authentic and vice versa.

I learnt the same lesson and its corollary from his statement: First learn to shoot round corners with pistols, and to moor mighty vessels with silken threads, and then you may hope to convert the hearts of men with syllogisms.

Newman's sense of his limitations he himself expressed in the passage quoted by Fr Crowe on the front page of "The Lonergan Enterprise." He was a philosopher/theologian as were Plato, Augustine, Pascal; he was not a comprehensive technician as were Aristotle and Aquinas.

Newman (along with my many professors) taught me to trust my own intelligence and judgment and enabled me to find in Plato and Augustine and then in Aquinas and Aristotle what I needed from them.

PS A simpler reference than given in class to:

Giovanni Sala, The A Priori in Human Knowledge: Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and Lonergan's Insight,
The Thomist, 40 1976 179-221