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3 Transcendental Method

We gave a definition of method as the normative pattern of related and recurrent operations with cumulative and progressive results. We went in search of a pattern in our own cognitional and volitional operations; our operations that are both intentional and conscious. And now we have to take this pattern and verify in it our notion of method. This pattern that is inherent in all human operations sets up a transcendental method. It is not confined categorially to any generic or specific type of result, to any limited field of investigation. Specific methods aim at meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities of particular fields. In that sense, it is true that the object determines the method. But transcendental method aims at meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities of the human mind itself. It is a concern that is both foundational and universally relevant. It is foundational: it reveals a pattern of operations to be found in any investigation. It is universally relevant because it is always worthwhile to know precisely what one is doing; if you do, you are apt to do it well; it won't be hit or miss.

In a sense, everyone knows and observes transcendental method. Inasmuch as one is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, one is faithfully following the precepts of transcendental method. They are also the conditions of the possibility of being a person, an authentic human being. And one can be an authentic human being without studying philosophy or theology or method. But in another sense it is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method. It is not achieved by reading books or listening to lectures or analyzing language. It is a matter of heightening one's consciousness, broadening the span of consciousness, and then objectifying what one becomes conscious of in this broadening.

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In other words, to be able to attend to what is seen and be aware of seeing at the same time. If you dropped the object of the seeing, well, you would be left with nothing. You have to keep the seen but be aware of the seeing; keep the heard but be aware of the hearing; have the insight, understand, catch on, see the point, but notice that you are seeing the point too. And that is more difficult than the seeing; for the experience of seeing, all you have to do is open and close your eyes; but to experience the insights, you have to have the insights; and to have the insights you have to have the problem and solve the problem, and not merely be interested in the solution but in the solving. This work is something like, perhaps it is a good deal similar in form and structure to, Carl Rogers' client-orientated counseling. The problem there is for people to discover their feelings, the feelings that they have and feel, but can't name, can't identify, that are queering the works. They want to identify those feelings, they want to name them, and not be afraid of them, and so on. The same sort of thing applies to one's insights, so that when you understand you can define in an intelligent fashion, and if you don't understand you are just repeating a formula like a parrot; you don't see why it is defined in that way. And understand what you mean by marshaling and weighing the evidence: what's that? There are two metaphors, but what goes on? On that see chapter 10 of *Insight*.

But the fundamental thing is to find oneself doing it. It can take time, and be slow, but it is very much worthwhile, because then you will be standing on your own feet and doing your own thinking; you will be somewhat independent; you won't be listening to an authority and consulting the authority again and seeing whether you got it right. You will be your own authority; you will be able to operate on your own. Aristotle says a person has the habit when he is able to operate on his own. And getting into this stuff, self-appropriation of one's cognitional and volitional operations, of what's going on, is a basis that gives you your freedom and makes you a master in your own house. So while it can be slow and tricky and all the rest of it, it is something very good and very satisfying. I first lectured on this subject in a course on adult education, on 'Thought and Reality' in

1945, in Montreal, at the Thomas More Institute. And we started off with about thirty-five in September, and there were about thirty still coming at Easter time. And those that kept coming were those who after the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, or the seventh evening said: 'I've got it.' They had found out in themselves what it is to understand and what the other operations are.

Now, we are going to describe what this process is. It is a matter, as I said, of heightening one's consciousness so as to be able to objectify it. In the measure that one does so, one knows precisely what one is doing when one is doing X. Now, what is this objectification? It is applying the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious. The operations are both. But to apply the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious is to come to understand and know the operations, to understand and know them insofar as they are intentional, and you have something to understand insofar as they are conscious. You have to apply the operations as intentional, not to the data of sense as in the natural sciences, but to the data of consciousness. And that is not so easy. However, let's say exactly what it means. It is a matter of our knowing; our operations are denoted by one name for each level; there are several different operations on each level, but we will use just one name so it won't seem to be as complicated as it is.

Our operations are experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding; those are the representative operations on each of the four levels. To apply the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious is a matter, first, of experiencing experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. Then it is a matter of understanding the experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding. Thirdly, asking whether and affirming that the experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding are understood correctly. Fourthly, it is a matter of deciding to observe the normative elements contained in the nature of our experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding: deciding to be authentic.

So, first, then, it is experiencing one's experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding. What is this experiencing? It is just consciousness. You always have it whenever you experience or understand or judge or decide; but ordinarily it is on the periphery of consciousness; you are not attending to it; you are attending to the object that you are experiencing, understanding, judging or deciding. Your attention is on it. The fact that *you* are intending in these four different ways can be very shadowy, very little attended to. To experience it, then, is to open oneself to oneself, to catch on, not merely to understand, but to notice that that's it, that's what understanding is.

The first proposition, in the first book of Euclid's *Elements*, is to construct an equilateral triangle on a given base in a given plane. (Goes through it.) The fallacy is that there is no proof that the two circles will intersect; and, not only that, there is no way of proving it on the basis of Euclid's definitions, axioms, and postulates. Consequently, Euclidean geometry at the present time is something that you don't, or a Euclidean geometer wouldn't, recognize, because you have to have different axioms to be able to take care of cases like this that are constantly occurring in Euclid. Do the two circles intersect? Of course they do. How do you know they must? Because you would have to have a radius that was more than twice that radius to be able to get around the other circle; and you can see that. You know by insight; Euclid knew by insight that the two circles would intersect. He was able to imagine all the different ways you could have two circles and see that this was a case in which the two had to intersect. And there is no Euclidean formulation for that fact. It is just insight, it is unformulated insight. And modern mathematicians can't afford to have unformulated insights; they have to know precisely what they are doing, and that is why they go into their enormously elaborate formalizations. Now, there are all sorts of instances of this, if you can find them. And there you have an opportunity to discover what happens when you have an insight.

So experience understanding, experience judgment; what goes on when you judge? There are a series of examples of judging in chapter 10 of *Insight*. And experience your deciding.

Next step: understand your experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding. These operations are to be experienced not singly but as elements in a process. We said that our conscious and intentional operations are dynamic, that the pattern is dynamic both materially and formally. Inquiry leads to understanding; it causes the formation of images in which you understand. Once you understand you are able to define intelligently, not like a parrot. These operations are all tied to one another, one leads on to the other. When you have your understanding formulated you can ask, Is it right? And you start looking for contrary instances; you marshal and weigh the evidence, as you say. This is a process: the operations are linked to one another, and one leads into another.

You can experience merely experiencing: you are lying on a beach and gazing at the clouds without a what or why or what for in your mind. And then you are merely experiencing. But that is very rare. People who are intelligent, usually you can see that they are intelligent, they haven't got a blank look on their face.

So, you have to understand the relations between the different operations and the way in which one heads into the next. And that is understanding your experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. In other words, there is a difference between this pattern of relations between the operations and the pattern of relations, for example, that a physicist finds in his objects. There what are given are the data, and his intelligence has to set up the possibly relevant interrelations that might account for the data. But here the relations are given just as much as the operations themselves. Inquiry wants to understand. And when you have understood you lose your insight unless you formulate it. When you have the experience of the bright idea and don't know what it is, you have had an insight without a formulation. Because to know what it is is to formulate

it. So there is that experienced interconnection of the operations that constitutes this pattern.

Thirdly, we have to affirm the understood relations of experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding. So we have the first question: Do the conscious and intentional operations occur? Are there these operations? And secondly, are the relations between them invariant or just another hypothesis that is going to be corrected by a better one?

With regard to the first question, do they occur? Well, unless one is short on some sense organs, one is not going to say that never in his life did he have the experience of seeing or hearing or tasting or smelling or touching, of imagining or perceiving or feeling or moving. Or if he did appear to have such experiences then it was merely appearance, since all his life long he has gone about like a somnambulist awake and asleep, always a somnambulist without any awareness of what was going on.

Secondly, it is not common for people to preface their lectures with the statement that he personally, in his whole life, never had the most fleeting experience of intellectual curiosity, of inquiry, of striving and even coming to understand, of expressing what he grasped by understanding. And if he appeared to have that, it was just appearance, because he really never understood anything at all in his life. He wouldn't have many listeners.

And it is very rare for people to preface their books and articles with the reminder that never in their lives did they experience anything that might be named critical reflection; they never paused about the truth or falsity of any statement, never had a doubt, never were certain. That if he ever seemed to exercise his rationality by attending to evidence and weighing it, still, that is mere appearance. He has had no experience of it whatever.

And, again, it is most uncommon for people to preface their books with the warning that never in their lives have they acted responsibly and least of all in writing the

present book. So it is a matter of considerable difficulty to find that these operations don't exist, at least in oneself. Anyone that wants to be counted out can always disqualify himself by claiming to be a non-responsible, non-reasonable, non-intelligent somnambulist. But very few people want to be counted out.

The second question: Do they occur in the alleged pattern? Is that pattern not merely hypothetical, what seems true enough at present but later will have to be modified? Science moves along, theories seem wonderful in their day, but they pass by and are replaced by other theories. What about this pattern?

Well, we have to distinguish between an objectification of the pattern, a description of the pattern, the sort of talk I've been doing or what one writes in a book about it, and, on the other hand, the human reality of experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding.

The more the sciences are developed, the greater there can be the detail in which this pattern can be expressed, the fuller the descriptions can be, and so on. Revision in that sense is quite possible. On the other hand, revision of the underlying human reality means that you are putting out a new edition of man or moving from man to something else.

Again, the pattern: while the pattern in its details can be developed and modified and corrected and qualified, and so on, still, there is a sense in which this pattern cannot be revised, namely, insofar as it is the condition of the possibility of a revision. If it is the condition of the possibility of a revision, then any revision will presuppose it and provide another verification of it.

Now, what do you mean by a revision? We appeal to science as the source of endless revisions. And why can there be a revision, endlessly? Because there can always be new data that will lead to a fuller understanding that accounts for all the others, all the data that the previous understanding accounted for and for still further data that the old understanding did not account for. Consequently, the new understanding is better, more

probable, brings us closer to the truth. But that is a matter of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging that the fuller understanding is the better one; it is presupposing the pattern and repeating the pattern. So in the pattern we have something that is fundamentally determinate. If we have any concrete meaning to the word 'revision,' we have a meaning in terms of experiencing, understanding, and judging; and consequently, something fundamentally invariant.

4 The Functions of Transcendental Method

Transcendental method is normative. Its basis is not some appeal to authority; and its basis is not success: it works; its basis is in the transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible; it is in the conditions of the possibility of being an authentic human being. Transcendental method has the function of setting before one the norms of one's being an authentic person.

In the second place, it has a critical use. The scandal of philosophy, for Kant, was that while scientists agree, philosophers disagree, and still more so theologians. Transcendental method asks three fundamental questions: What am I doing when I am knowing? (cognitive theory); Why is doing that knowing? (epistemology); What do I know when I do it? (metaphysics). The answers to those questions may or may not agree with what one objectifies when one objectifies one's intentional and conscious operations. For Hume the human mind was a matter of data linked by custom, appearances linked by custom. But Hume was an extremely original person; he wasn't linking data according to custom; and so there is a contradiction between the mind he had and the mind he spoke of. Consequently, transcendental method provides you with the criterion for criticizing inadequate philosophies.

Inadequate philosophy is a philosophy that misses out on some side of the whole picture. An empiricist emphasizes the first level: experiencing. And he thinks of

understanding and judging as merely subjective, not really a part of knowing. It may have a utility, and then we become pragmatists or something. The idealist insists on a structuring of all experience that is affected by understanding. He is sure that the empiricist's account of knowledge is simply ridiculous; and since he thinks reality is what the empiricist thinks it is, what the empiricist thinks reality is, he rejects that and becomes an idealist. And when you have all three levels constituting reality then you have a critical realism, if you can account for it.

There is a third function: dialectical. The critical use of the transcendental method can be applied to every cognitional theory, explicit or implicit; implicit in a hermeneutics, in a notion of history, in a notion of critical history, and so on. It can be applied anywhere, and you can line up all the ways in which you can go wrong. And in that way you get a dialectic.

It has a systematic function. And the point to a systematic function is that when thought is systematic you have to struggle, of course, to understand it, to grasp it, but at the end of that struggle there is no dispute about what the theory means or what the system means. There is no exegetical literature on Euclid's *Elements*; some people have to work hard to understand them, but there is no exegetical literature on it; you either understand it or you don't. And if you understand it the meaning is perfectly plain; even when he is wrong, you know he is wrong. And you can figure out why he is wrong. But the simple Gospels have tons of literature on them, always new commentaries and explanations, endless exegetical literature. What has been worked out on a systematic basis is univocal in its meaning; what is not sets all sorts of problems of interpretation. Therefore, the systematic function of transcendental method is important. And what is the systematic function? We have set up a set of operations linked to one another, and the links of the operations also are conscious as well as the operations themselves. The operations provide us with terms, the relations the relations between the terms; and a set of interlocking terms and relations is a system.

It grounds continuity without rigidity. Continuity because this transcendental method, fundamentally, is not subject to revision. There are senses in which it is, but there is a sense in which it is not; the radical revision is excluded, but other revisions remain possible. It is without rigidity because cognitional theory can keep on developing; your analysis of things can become ever more refined. And, consequently, your fundamental terms and relations can become ever more refined, more elaborate.

It has a heuristic function. *Heurisko*, to seek; and then a Greek word that ends with -ikos, -ikon, is causative. *Heuristicon* is what causes finding. And what causes finding is naming what you don't know and want to know. In algebra you say, let it be x , or let the two numbers be x and y , or let the three numbers be x , y , and z . In physics they say, let the law be represented by the indeterminate function, $f(x, y, z, t) = 0$. What is the function? We'll find that out presently. But first of all you name your unknown, and you take the steps to find it. Now the basis of that in algebra, in physics, in the sciences in general, lies in the transcendental notions. You're questioning. You are asking, Why does it happen in this fashion? And the why is the cause; you objectify the why in the cause or 'the nature of ...' and then you go about determining 'the nature of ...' by putting down all the things that are relevant to it. Now, the method itself is a heuristic structure; you know what you want to get going in motion and what it is aiming at.

It is foundational. Specific methods result from accumulated experience of investigators in their fields. And besides the special norms that have been learnt from experience, there are the common norms. Besides the problems peculiar to special fields, there are the interdisciplinary problems. It has been said that pollution is the result of specialization; each one is doing his own job and not knowing what the total result will be. Besides, inasmuch as special methods are grounded in transcendental method, sciences can be mobilized within a higher unity of vocabulary, thought, orientation, criticism. They are enabled to work together to attack interdisciplinary problems coherently, to complement one another effectively, to attack more fundamental problems

that are now neglected. This transcendental method, as something that becomes determinate in different ways in different fields, also is the way of uniting the people working in the different fields.

It is relevant to theology. Theology has its methods derived from the experience of the past, but its methods, however peculiar to theology, nonetheless are the work of human minds. Like others, theologians have minds and use them. And the point is for them to know what that is and what it implies. The advantage to that is that you know what you are doing. While there are differences between theology and the other disciplines, still, the differences are not a matter of a transition from attention to inattention, from intelligence to stupidity, from reasonableness to unreasonableness, from responsibility to irresponsibility. The transcendental method remains relevant to theology. One inquires and understands and reflects, and so on, in a different way in theology than in the other subjects, but the differences are not radical.

The objects of theology are not beyond the range of transcendental method. The transcendental notions are unrestricted; they are a matter not of what we can know but of what we can ask about. We can know our knowledge is limited only because we can ask questions that we know we cannot answer. So there is nothing outside transcendental method.

Transcendental method is not a new resource in theology; theologians always had minds and always used them; the resource has always been there and always employed. But transcendental method helps us make a better use of a resource that has always been employed. It finds a replacement for the Aristotelian idea of unified science. The Aristotelian idea was a most general science, metaphysics; and the scientific notions were further determinations of the metaphysical notions. Aristotle defines motion in terms of potency and act, and so on. He develops his physics in terms of his metaphysics, his psychology in terms of his metaphysics and his physics, and so on. It is one set of

notions. Modern science: each modern science has control over its own fundamental notions; they are its own product. It is independent of any philosophic position.

How, then, are we to conceive a unity of sciences, since the sciences each set up their own fundamental notions? Well, what they have in common is their methods; each has a method, in each the method is what counts. It is not the principles and laws known at the present time; they can be revised. And how will they be revised? By the method. The methods too can be changed but the change in the methods is much slower than the change in the results.

Since the method is what is fundamental, a transcendental method that finds what is common to all methods is the way in which you can unify the sciences by becoming the bed in which the water flows and not a dam that obscures it, as the metaphysical unification of the sciences is.

Finally, transcendental method enables us to set up in a new way the relations between philosophy and theology. We have the old method: philosophy is the handmaid of theology. What we are doing is not talking about philosophy in general; that can mean anything at all. If you are defending philosophy in general, well, you are defending something that is certainly for the most part wrong and indefensible. But the answers to three precise questions: What am I doing when I am knowing? (cognitive theory); Why is doing that knowing? (epistemology); What do I know when I do it? (and that what is correlative to the operations, simply correlative, and that is metaphysics, in a very precise sense). It is these questions not qua philosophic, but qua methodical, relevant to method, and these questions are raised because theologians have minds, they use them, and they are better off when they know what they are doing.

Questions

Question 1: Did you talk of two types of transcendental method?

Lonergan: No. I spoke of two meanings to the word ‘transcendental.’ The Scholastic meaning: ens, unum, verum, bonum, in which the transcendental notion is not

distinguished from the transcendental concept. And the Kantian meaning: ‘the condition of the possibility of ...’ The transcendental notion is the condition of the possibility of ...; the transcendental concept is not; it is just transcendental in the Scholastic sense.

Question 2: Does your method include everything in the Kantian approach?

Lonergan: Well, there are similarities to Kant, but there also are differences. We will go into this more later on, but the whole movement of modern philosophy is wanting to leave the theoretical field, occupied by Aristotle, to the sciences, and put the basis of philosophy in interiority, in self-appropriation. But we will say more on that later on.

Question 3: Is there an ontological method on the level of merely experiencing? Is the subject being on the level simply of experience?

Lonergan: Well, he isn’t fully being. You have the existential subject on the fourth level: when you are deliberating, evaluating, deciding, acting. You are not only affecting objects but making yourself the kind of person you are to be. Insofar as you are affecting objects you are practical; insofar as you are making yourself, you are existential. The existential is that component in human reality or that level of human reality in which that reality is making itself.

Question 4: You distinguished between notions and concepts. Can you explain that?

Lonergan: The notions are the possibility of the question; they are the drive of inquiry. When you have an answer there is the further drive: is it right, is it true, have I got it accurately? And what you have accurately is a possibility. Well, is it a worthwhile thing to realize, is it good? The possibility of those questions – the basis of all this movement on the levels of knowing and deciding. The notions are the origin, the first mover. One can just stare, there is a real difference. But the difference between that blank stare and inquiry is a real difference, and the cause of that is what I mean by the transcendental notions. And it is transcendental because questions don’t stop, they keep on, questions are

indefinite as are libraries; you can build new ones, but there will be still more new books; questions are unending; it is comprehensive. The notions are the source of that comprehensiveness: the categorial concept is always limited in denotation; it is a determination.

Question 5: Is there a difference in meaning when you use the terms ‘cognitional structure’ and ‘cognitional pattern’?

Lonergan: No. I don’t think so. I use ‘pattern’ sometimes and ‘structure’ sometimes. But in *Insight* I speak of pattern whereas here I speak of structure.

Question 6: Can you say how the subject transcends himself on this fourth level?

Lonergan: Self-transcendence comes up in further lectures. But at the present time there is self-transcendence. First of all, sensitive experience takes you beyond yourself. With understanding you start constructing a world; it may be a mythical world or a scientific world. The animal lives in a habitat but man lives in a universe, and it is understanding that makes that. And insofar as you have judgment you have still further self-transcendence, insofar as you know that this apprehension of the universe is correct and that one is wrong. That is something independent of my thinking so. And you have a still further self-transcendence when you choose what is worth while: you become a principle of benevolence and beneficence, capable of genuine loving, etc. There is a whole series of meanings of self-transcendence, and each one presupposes the earlier ones and fills them out in a fuller dimension.

Question 7: Would you consider your account of knowing in *Insight* to be categorial or transcendental?

Lonergan: Both. We start off with mathematics and then natural science, then common sense: these are all categorial. But what we are bringing to light are questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, questions for deciding, questions for deliberation.

The armature is transcendental; the materials are illustrative scaffolding you can disregard once you have found yourself.