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First Lecture: Part 1

The first part of the lecture of the first day, 2 August 1971.

Introductions by Conn O'Donovan

My topic is method in theology. Very briefly, the question is, What is one doing when one is doing theology? The answer to that comes in two parts: background and foreground. The background is five chapters on general notions. The first chapter is on method; a second is on the human good, a third on meaning, a fourth on religion, and a fifth on functional specialties. We can be very brief on the fifth chapter, on functional specialties, because that chapter has already been published in *Gregorianum*, and I think it is available here. The foreground is the series of functional specialties: namely, research – what was written, the textual critic's job; secondly, interpretation – what was meant; on the third functional specialty there are two parts: first, history – what is critical history? – and secondly, some account of what historians think of history, 'History and Historians.' Fourthly, dialectic; fifthly, foundations; sixthly, doctrines – and on doctrines there is a lecture I gave at Marquette University, 'Doctrinal Pluralism,' which was available in booklet form immediately after the lecture, and I believe it is available here, and that will be relevant to that sixth topic and consequently ease the burden of these lectures. Seventhly, there is systematics; and eighthly, communications.

Now what are we saying in that background and foreground? We are offering models. By a model is meant, not a description of a reality and not a hypothesis about reality. A model stands to hypotheses and descriptions as mathematics stands to natural science. It is a set of terms and relations that is useful to have around when it comes to forming hypotheses or making

descriptions. What we are going to offer is not simply a model, but it will be more than a model insofar as each one finds out in himself what he is doing when he is knowing. That's the big chore.

First, then, on method. There are three ways of conceiving method. One can conceive method not as a science but an art. It is something that is learned not from books or from lectures but in the seminar and in the laboratory. One learns method from the concrete example of a professional in the field, from his critique of one's performance. This view of method is true for all initial thought on method; you first have to do it before you can start talking about how it is done. It is always true for the more specialized areas, the finer points in method.

However, that first view of method is not the only view. One can study and analyze the conspicuously successful science. For Aristotle that science was mathematics; today it is natural science. One can study that and say, 'When one does this, what is done by the physicist, what is done by the mathematician, one is a scientist, and insofar as one does something different from that because of the exigencies of the particular material, well, in that degree one is only analogously scientific.' That was Aristotle's procedure with regard to mathematics: you have scientific knowledge not only when the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises but when the premises themselves are necessary truths. It is a notion of science that no longer exists. It disappeared from mathematics when they discovered that Euclid was just one type of geometry. It disappeared from physics with the advent of quantum theory, which predicted not necessary results but probable results. And it disappeared from economics when the iron laws of economics vanished with the Depression of the 1930s. They went into Keynesian economics. The general tendency today is to take natural science as science and anything else that isn't quite like that stands a little lower in the pecking order, with theology at the tail.

There is a third alternative, namely, to derive a preliminary notion of method from the successful science, to proceed from that to cognitional theory, and to use cognitional theory as a transcendental method, as the kernel of any scientific method, and to determine the relation of this transcendental method to methods generally. And that is our procedure.

[1 A Preliminary Notion]

First, then, our preliminary notion. What do we mean by a method? A method is a normative pattern of related and recurrent operations that yield cumulative and progressive results. There are, then, distinct operations; each is related to the others. The relations of the operations to one another form a pattern. That pattern is normative; it is the right way to do it. That pattern may be repeated indefinitely, over and over again. The operations are recurrent. And the results are not always the same. The results are cumulative and progressive. Although your pattern is repeated over and over again, it just doesn't go around; it also rolls along. The results are not the same thing over and over again but you're developing, getting new results, and adding them on to what you had before.

What are the operations? There is the spirit of inquiry. Scientists praise the spirit of inquiry, and inquiries recur over and over again. There are observations and descriptions: you see what is there to be seen, and you say exactly what you see. And they recur over and over again. The descriptions give rise to problems: how do you put this and that together? And the problems give rise to discoveries, and discoveries recur; and every discovery is something new, something to be added on to what already has been achieved. The discoveries are expressed in hypotheses; the hypothesis is reduced back to its presuppositions and pushed forward to all its implications. This pushing forward to implications gives rise to

the possibility of experiment; you try this and that to see whether this or that implication of the hypothesis is in fact there. Insofar as the consequences of the hypothesis are verified in the data, your hypothesis is confirmed; and insofar as they are not, you have to modify your hypothesis, move on to a slightly different hypothesis and, in the limit, to a totally different hypothesis. And that sort of thing keeps going on.

So we have a set of operations; the operations are related to one another, one leads into the other; inquiry leads into observation and description, description leads into problems, problems lead to discoveries, discoveries are expressed in hypotheses, hypotheses have presuppositions and implications, the implications reveal the possibility of experimental verification, the verification either confirms or demands a shift in the hypothesis; and so you get your progressive and cumulative results.

Now this account of method is not precise enough for the natural scientist, and it is a little too precise to be immediately thrown into theology. It at least provides us with a lead, a preliminary notion of what is meant by a method. We note that by a method we do not mean 'a set of rules to be followed blindly by anyone, and he is guaranteed good results if he obeys these rules.' We don't mean by a method any set of rules; we mean a pattern of operations; the pattern is normative. From that pattern you may or may not deduce rules, but the point about method is that it is a pattern of operations; it is not a set of rules. Much less is it a set of rules that can be followed blindly by anyone. No one makes discoveries blindly. Discoveries can be made more probable but they can't be made inevitable. The idea of method as a set of rules is fine if you want to get the same results recurring – 'The New Method Laundry.' Okay, all you always want to get is clean clothes; you don't want anything new. But if you are going to have cumulative and

developing, progressive results, you need a series of discoveries, and the method includes the directives that favor such discovery.

Again, by method we do not mean something that is simply logical. Logical operations are operations on concepts or terms, operations on judgments or propositions, operations on inferences. But besides such operations, which are included in method – namely, describing, forming hypotheses, lining up presuppositions and implications – there are other, non-logical operations: observation, discovery, synthesis of the new discovery with what is still true of previous discoveries: those are non-logical operations. It is the combination of logical and non-logical operations that gives modern science its dynamic. Anything that is simply logical is permanent and static. People complain about metaphysics being static. It is not metaphysics being static; it is the logical mind that is static. The logical operations consolidate what has been achieved, but it is observation, discovery, the adding of new discoveries to old discoveries that gives you your dynamic of modern science, the ongoing movement.

That is just a general sketch of what we mean by a method.

[2 The Basic Pattern of Operations]

We have now to turn our attention to a basic pattern of operations, to move from a general notion of method to transcendental method. The operations we are going to consider are to some extent quite familiar to you: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, kinesthesis; imagining, inquiring, understanding, conceiving, formulating; reflecting, marshaling and weighing the evidence, judging; deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, doing, writing.

We can assume some familiarity with most of these terms. The question we want to ask is about the pattern into which they fit, the dynamic pattern. It is

through the discovery of that pattern that we come to know the operations in their relations to one another; and so one has explanatory knowledge of the operations, because explanatory knowledge is knowledge of a set of terms in their interrelations.

Here is the whole problem, namely, one has to discover in oneself and for oneself what are one's own cognitional, intentional, and conscious operations. All the operations I have listed occur consciously; they don't occur in a coma; they do not occur when you are in dreamless sleep. It is that set of operations that occur consciously and that are intentional, that refer to objects, that one has to discover in their interrelations.

We note, first of all, then, that all these operations are transitive. They are transitive in a grammatical sense; they have objects; I see a glass, a table, a hall. They are transitive in a grammatical sense. But they are also transitive in a psychological sense. 'I see the table' is transitive in the psychological sense in the sense that the table is present to me visibly; it is visible to me; it is an object in a psychological sense. And it is this psychological sense that is the meaning of intention, intend, intentionality. Intention is my awareness of an object and the object's presence to me by that awareness.

However, these operations are also conscious; they are the operations of an operator. The operator is not only operator or subject in the grammatical sense – *I* see: the 'I' is subject of the verb 'see' – but also in the psychological sense that by the operation I am present to myself and my operation is present to me. There is not only seeing the wall but there is me seeing. That 'me seeing' is the conscious element. This psychological meaning of the subject is what is meant by consciousness, being conscious.

Whenever any of the operations I began by listing occur, there occur two things: the intentionality and consciousness; intentionality insofar as an object is

present to me, consciousness insofar as I am present to myself and my operation is present to me. One and the same operation in each case is both conscious and intentional: conscious insofar as it makes me present to myself, and intentional insofar as it makes an object present to me.

Note the ambiguity there of the word ‘present.’ There are two different aspects of presence. I am present to myself as intending; the object is present to me as intended. Consequently, my whole attention can be given to the object as intended, and yet I can be fully conscious as intending; one doesn’t exclude the other.

The word ‘introspection’ very easily is misleading. To have something to introspect one must already be conscious. You are not conscious because you introspect; it is insofar as you are conscious that you have something to introspect. What is really meant is not any introspecting, any looking in, but there is a heightening of consciousness that arises, that results from one’s attending not merely to the objects but also to oneself intending; and that heightening of consciousness provides you with the data for a process of discovery and hypothesis and naming and drawing conclusions and verifying, and that is coming to know oneself through a study of one’s own operations. Just as we move from the data of sense through inquiry and insight and formulation and reflection and weighing the evidence and judging about sensible data, so too we can move from the data of consciousness, through inquiry and insight and formulation and reflection and weighing the evidence and judging; and it is that second process that goes by the name of introspection; and it is a process: not just one operation of taking a look but a whole series of operations, of inquiry, insight, formulation, weighing the evidence, judging.

Now I am using just one word, consciousness, but, as a matter of fact, there are different levels of consciousness, and the quality of our consciousness changes

as one moves from one level to the next. In the dream state consciousness is fragmentary and obscure. When we wake, the data of sense are far more vivid and far more fixed, and that is empirical consciousness; it is spontaneous, it is intelligible, but the new quality of consciousness that emerges on the next level makes consciousness intelligent; it inquires intelligently; it operates intelligently in the light of what has been understood. There is a third level of consciousness, on which we are rational, reasonable beings, where we are governed by reasons, and that is a new dimension of consciousness, a new quality of consciousness. And finally, on the fourth level, of deliberating, evaluating, deciding, we are free and responsible, and that is a new quality of consciousness.

So the different levels of consciousness differ from one another qualitatively. Sensing in man is not, of itself, different from sensing in the higher animals. But on the intellectual level of understanding and formulating, consciousness is not merely sensitive but intelligent; it does the intelligent thing. On the third level, one becomes rational, reasonable. I once spoke to a group of psychiatrists on *Insight*, and one of them objected that their patients had all sorts of insights but they were wrong. That's perfectly true. Insights are a dime a dozen, and it's only when you have an awful lot of them you get something that is really intelligent, really hitting nails on the head. And to distinguish between a lot of insights that are wrong and insights that are right is the task of the subject as reasonable, as rational.

The first three levels are concerned with what is and what can be and what probably would result. On the fourth level [the concern is with] what is good, what is worthwhile – the question for deliberation. So there are qualitative differences of consciousness.

Another distinction is between the transcendental and the categorial. Categories are determinations; they have a limited denotation; they vary with

cultural variations. The totemic operator of Claude Lévi-Strauss is a set of categories. There are Aristotle's explicitly named categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, space, time, action, passion. There are categories that are not named categories, for example, Aristotle's four causes: end, agent, matter, and form; or the logical categories: genus, difference, species, property, accident. There are the categories of contemporary physics, the categories of the periodic table in chemistry, the categories of an evolutionary biology, Heidegger's existentials – all of them are categories. They are determinations, they have a limited denotation, they vary with cultural variations, and they are illustrated in various ways.

The transcendentals are comprehensive in connotation; instead of being limited in denotation, they are comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant through cultural change. The transcendentals are implicit in questions: what and why and how? on what principle does it work? and what for? These are all questions for intelligence; they are different ways of seeking the intelligible. The capacity of wonder that puts those questions has the transcendental goal of the intelligible, which is unrestricted in denotation, comprehensive in connotation, invariant insofar as it is simply describing to understand; it is always the same, though people understand differently at different stages of human development. Again, the true and the real, the question, Is that so? There you are intending truth and reality, and that is another transcendental, two more transcendentals. Finally, there is the good, what is worthwhile, what is truly good, a fourth transcendental.

Distinguish the transcendental notion and the transcendental concept. When I talk about the intelligible, the true, the real, the good, I am using transcendental concepts, objectifications of what is intended by the question. But the root of the question is the transcendental notion. It is the transcendental notion that constructs consciousness, that moves us from merely experiencing on towards understanding,

from understanding on towards truth and reality, from truth and reality on towards what is worthwhile, what is good. We have a structure that assembles its own parts. I spoke of method as a normative pattern of related and recurrent operations with cumulative and progressive results. And what fundamentally is that structure? It is the transcendental notions; they are the dynamic element that assemble acts of attending to the data of sense or the data of consciousness; inquiry moves it on to understanding and formulation; reflection moves it on to truth and reality; deliberation moves it on to what it worthwhile.

So the transcendental notions are our attention, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility. The transcendental concepts are objectifications of our transcendental notions.

Further, we have to distinguish elementary and compounded operations and objects. The elementary operation and object: seeing and the seen, hearing and the heard. In that elementary sense, seeing is knowing, hearing is knowing, feeling is knowing, touching is knowing, any cognitional operation is knowing in the elementary sense. But there is another meaning of the word ‘know’ – human knowing. And human knowing is not just any one of these operations; it is an assembly of operations on different levels. Merely to see without understanding is to gape, and that is not human knowing. To see and understand mistakenly is not human knowing. Not knowing whether it is true or not is not human knowing; you also have to know that it is true. You experience and understand and grasp that your understanding is correct, and then you have human knowing. It is an assembly of operations; it is compounded. The compounding is intended. What is experienced is what is understood. What is that ‘what?’ It is what you are intending in the whole process of experiencing and understanding and judging; you are intending the goal from the start. You want the good, what is worthwhile, and to know the good you have to know what is real and what is really possible. And to

know what is real and really possible you have to understand; and to understand you have to attend; there is a single process that gradually assembles its own parts intelligently, reasonably, responsibly.

And so our basic pattern of cognitional operations is dynamic. It is dynamic materially, insofar as its parts are operations; it is not like the parts of a statue but like the parts of a dance, in which the parts are movements. But it is also dynamic formally; it assembles its own parts; it is something alive; and not merely alive, but intelligent, reasonable, responsible.

So much for the basic pattern of our operations.

[3 Transcendental Method]

Now we have to see that basic pattern as a transcendental method, that is, a method that is not confined to this or that subject, that holds for every case of human knowing. Other methods, then, aim at meeting the exigences and exploiting the opportunities of particular fields, but transcendental method aims at meeting the exigences and exploiting the opportunities of the human mind itself. It is a concern that is both foundational and universally relevant.

It is foundational: if you know the pattern of operations in any instance of human knowing, then you have the basis of human knowing. It is universally relevant because it is always worthwhile to know precisely what you are doing. Now in a sense everyone knows and observes transcendental method, inasmuch as he is attentive and intelligent and reasonable and responsible; it is a condition of being a human person, of being an authentic human being. But in another sense it is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method, because that is not achieved by reading books or by listening to lectures or by analyzing language. It is a matter of heightening one's own consciousness, to be able to objectify it, to say

precisely what one is doing when one is knowing. One has to pick out the events that occur when one knows. Some of them are quite simple. It is quite simple to have an experience of seeing and not seeing; all you have to do is open and close your eyes. To have a clear experience of hearing, you just have to be around and listen, or you can cover your ears and you won't hear. But it becomes much more of a trick when you want to experience what it is to have an insight, because you have to have a problem and solve it, and notice what happens when you get the solution. To assemble problems and solutions is something that requires much more effort than simply opening and closing your eyes.

We will close on an example of an insight. The first problem in the first book of Euclid's *Elements* is to construct an equilateral triangle on a given base in a given plane. The construction is to take center *A* and radius *AB* and draw a circle. And center *B* and radius *BA* and draw a circle. Call the point of intersection *C*. Join *CA* and *CB*. Then you will have an equilateral triangle. Because radii of the same circle are equal, *AB* and *AC* are equal. *BA* and *BC* are also equal. Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. Therefore you have an equilateral triangle. And the question is, What is the fallacy? The fallacy is that there is no possible Euclidean proof that two circles will intersect, that there exists some point *C*. While the modern geometer can get around that difficulty by introducing terms that do not occur in Euclid, still everyone for over 2000 years knew that that was the right way to construct an equilateral triangle even though there was no proof for it. How did they know? By insight. There is a preconceptual act of understanding that is the basis of your concepts and your definitions; and it is that preconceptual activity that enables people to do things intelligently even though they haven't got proofs. It is that preconceptual activity that is the basis of Euclid, and it is a fuller exposition of that preconceptual activity that gives you your modern mathematics.

So much for a precise example of what is meant by insight, namely, the difference between Euclidean and a modern geometry.