

5. From First Principles to Transcendental Method

By a principle is meant a first in an ordered set.

But a set of propositions may be ordered deductively so that some propositions are found to be conclusions but not premisses, others both conclusions and premisses, others finally that are premisses but not conclusions

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First principles, in the sense of logically first premisses, cease to be of basic import once transitions are effected from logic to method, from the Posterior Analytics to modern science, from human nature to human history, and from the human soul to the human subject. However, the term, principle, is far broader than the term premiss; traditionally it denotes any first in an ordered set, primum in aliquo ordine; and the transition from logic to method, as it does not eliminate multiplicity or order, so it has to acknowledge some first in its order. That first is, not a proposition, not a set of propositions, but human subjects, in their historical milieu, working at modern sciences, in accord with their appropriate methods.

A method has been defined very generally as a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations. But now a distinction must be drawn between special methods and transcendental methods. For there are norms common to all methods; they have their basis, not in the special exigencies of this or that field of inquiry, but in the proper functioning of the human mind itself. It follows that such norms are universal, everywhere relevant and, in that sense, transcendental. Further it follows that the method constituted by such norms will be a universally applicable and relevant and, in that sense, transcendental method. It remains, however, that so general a method will be an insufficient guide in directing and controlling work in specific fields. There are needed then further and more particular norms appropriate to the subject-matter of different fields and, when these further norms are added to

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Since a principle is a first in an ordered set, to speak of first principles obviously ^{seems} ~~is~~ tautologous. However, what is meant really is ~~the~~ not the generic notion of principle but the specific notion of premiss; and since the premisses of one syllogism may be the conclusions of other syllogisms

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Within the context of Aristotelian theory of science first principles, in the sense of logically first premisses, are of basic import. But once there occurs the shift to individual subjects in their historical milieux working at a modern science in accord with a method, there must also occur a shift to new foundations. Now a principle is a first in an ordered set. So a shift from logic to method implies a shift from the first in the ordered set of premisses to the first in the order of methods. Such a first is transcendental method.

Every method is a normative pattern of related and recurrent operations. In special methods the ~~operations~~ operations in question are determined, not only by their own proper nature, but also by objects. So it is that the methods of physics, of chemistry, of biology, of the human sciences are adapted to their several objects and differ from one another. But beyond such differences there is a common core that is independent of the various classes of objects and is determined solely by the spontaneous, immanent norms of human cognitional process. That common core is transcendental method in its latent, implicit state. To make it explicit is the task x each subject must perform for himself by applying his operations as intentional to his operations as conscious. ~~When substantiated in consciousness~~

The result of such work will be first-hand knowledge of (1) what one is doing when one is knowing, (2) why doing that is knowing, and (3) what does one know when one does it. In other words, one will acquire first-hand knowledge of

the universally valid norms already mentioned, there are generated the special methods of physics, chemistry, biology, ~~economics, sociology, psychology~~ of the human sciences, and of theology.

The substance of transcendental method, as we employ the term, is self-appropriation, that is, the self-knowledge and self-possession that result from knowing (1) what one is doing when one is knowing, (2) why doing that is knowing, and (3) what one knows when one does that. Clearly the three are intimately interrelated. They are, respectively, cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics. But if the previous section gave some indications about cognitional theory, we cannot here attempt to treat epistemology and metaphysics. Rather than repeat we would refer the reader back to our book, Insight,¹

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- 1) B. Lonergan, Insight, A Study of Human Understanding, London and New York 1957. Students' edition 1958, frequently reprinted.
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cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics. In the previous section some indications were given on the ~~basic triad~~ first of this triad, cognitional theory, but a sample epistemology or metaphysics cannot be attempted here. So we refer the reader to our book, Insight, and proceed at once to an account of the properties and functions of transcendental method.

First, there is its normative function. All special methods consist in making specific the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. The work of making transcendental method explicit to oneself reveals the real ground and content of those precepts. One may at any time be inattentive, or stupid, or unreasonable, or irresponsible. But one always is disinclined to admit one's lapses even to oneself, much more to boast about them to others, most of all to present one's deviations as the foundation of one's experience, thought, judgement, decisions.

Secondly, there is the critical function. The scandal still continues that, while scientists tend to agree, philosophers tend to disagree. They disagree about the nature of the activity named knowing, about the relation of that activity to reality, and about reality. But differences on the second and third can be reduced to differences on the first, and differences on the first can be resolved by bringing to light the contradiction between a mistaken cognitional theory and the actual performance of the mistaken theorist. For Hume the human mind is a matter of impressions linked by custom. But Hume's reader must ~~assume~~ conclude that the only explanation of Hume's great originality lies in his possession of a mind quite different from the human one described by Hume.

Thirdly, there is the dialectical function. For the critical use of transcendental method can be applied to every mistaken cognitional theory whether explicit or implicit. In this manner one can arrive at a historical series of positions, that criticism confirms, and counter-positions, that criticism confounds.

Fourthly, there is the systematic function. Explicit transcendental method provides a set of basic terms and relations, namely, the terms that refer to the operations of the method and the relations that link the operations to one another. Such terms and relations constitute cognitional theory, they ~~ground epistemology~~ indicate the ground for epistemology, they are isomorphic with the terms and relations denoting the structure of reality ^rproportionate to human cognitional process.

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Eighthly, transcendental method is relevant to theology. This relevance is not, of course, to be conceived by relapsing into the Aristotelian context and so assuming that the relation of transcendental method to theology is a matter of deducing theological conclusions from philosophic premisses

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This, of course, does not mean that theological conclusions can be deduced from philosophic premisses. For the present discussion lies outside the Aristotelian context, the Aristotelian notions of philosophy and theology, and the Aristotelian relations between different subjects.

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Eighthly, transcendental method is relevant to theology. For theology, no less than the natural and the human sciences, is a matter of being not inattentive but attentive, not stupid but intelligent, not silly but reasonable, not irresponsible but highly responsible¹. Again, while the relations of transcendental method to the human sciences are not the same as its relations to the natural sciences, so too its relations to theology are not the same as its relations to the human or the natural sciences. For as each special method has its other methods have their has developed its proper features through the accumulated those experience of investigators in that special fields, the same is true of theology, which, indeed, has a longer history than than the other sciences

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Eightly, transcendental method is relevant to theology.

It is true, of course, that just as the special methods of the natural and of the human sciences derive their proper norms from the accumulated experience of investigators in those fields, so also theology has its own proper norms at which it has arrived by reflection on its own past successes and failures.

But it is also true that, just as the special methods of the natural and the human sciences, so too the special method of theology is a specific manner of being attentive, being intelligent, being reasonable, being responsible. Hence, just as transcendental method is relevant to the other sciences, so too, though in a different manner, is it relevant to theology.

This relevance is threefold. First, the theologian has a human mind and he uses it. In that use there occur the same ^{basic} basic operations in the same relations as in non-theological use. What is peculiar to theology occurs within that basic structure, though, of course, it adds classes of operations and ulterior combinations of operations, to which the basic structure is open, and which it does not determine.

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Secondly, the ~~proper~~ object of the human mind is unrestricted. In traditional language it is being~~x~~ and, outside being or beyond it, there is just nothing. It is only by contending, then, that the objects of theology are non-existent that one ^{can} urge that they lie outside the range of transcendental method.

Thirdly, it is true that the objects proper to theology lie beyond the proportionate range of human cognitional process. For all such proper objects have an intrinsic relation to God. God is not a datum either of our outer or of our inner experience

9th split

meaning - contingent

seems wisdom theory is open problem practice

deductivist

- vs empiricist - positive psychology

natural - data

human - data + c.s. meaning

Psychology - data + c.s. meaning (historically conditions) + truth + importance

functional / practical

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