

887 Question session following on June 15, 1976, evening lecture ‘Ongoing Genesis of Methods’ (recording not available)

Question: On the question of praxis: we will bring it down perhaps to something more comprehensible; you talk about it working from above downwards. Now, if I may take the illustration of the value-free economist or the value-free psychologist who happily and in innocence works from below upwards, do you think that a praxis-orientated effort would contextualize his efforts from above downwards with a value context?

Lonergan: I’d say that would be a different inquiry, a different method; it would be in the second phase. *Method in Theology* is applicable to any inquiry in which one is enlightened by the past and attempts to throw some light on the future, and that holds true for economists as well, and behaviorists. But the thing about the economist and the behaviorist is that they conceive science as prediction, and insofar as they predict they want something that is already under control. If it is already under control, it isn’t free, and if it isn’t free there’s no use bringing in any morality or value, and so on. So they are blocking out part of the picture. It is a reductionism. The difficulty about bringing in the values is the point that you have to have praxis in the sense of some way of handling judgments of value, some form of discernment; and that’s the catch, because the whole pressure the other way is that that cannot be handled. You can say, for example, the Catholic Church has handled it in the past by a dictatorial procedure. But that will not do, insofar as history meeting new situations and the future is not going to be the same as the past. The idea, ?, is prehistorical, and your morality has to be able to deal with new situations. That is where this question of authenticity and eliminating unauthenticity is relevant, but it isn’t simple, and it isn’t by shouting or slogans or billboards or propaganda that it is going to be handled; it’s by conversion.

Question: Would you consider the possibility in this context of a quite new history of economics and politics?

Lonergan: Well, yes. But there are people who write quite serious histories, like Adolph Lowe. He locates Adam Smith and Marx and himself historically in different situations. Adam Smith did his thinking in a time when something like perfect competition existed. Marx arrived with the heavy industrial society, in which it was better for the capitalist to keep things going even at a loss than to close down. That would cost more. So your laws of supply and demand were not working. The situation radically changed. The struggle against the Aristotelians soured the modern world against a philosophic approach, and there were a lot of people who wrote philosophies that were as equally evil in their effects, as far as bringing any sort of rational unity into the sciences: e.g., the cult of logic, the unified science in terms of logic. Piaget’s beautiful work on developmental psychology, operational development in psychology, turned to symbolic logic, and did a lot of work on symbolic logic as far as the synthesis of it. But anything that is logical is static: it is eternally so; if the conclusion follows today it follows tomorrow and yesterday and forever, whether you thought of it or not.

Question: When you speak of authenticity in this paper, would you be referring to the transcendental method, your transcendental method?

Lonergan: No. I'm referring to *you*. You're intelligent; you ask questions. When the answers don't satisfy you, it's because of your intelligence; intelligence in you is a norm. You are authentic on that level insofar as you ask the questions, and you are not satisfied with unsatisfactory answers. And you are rational. You want to have sufficient evidence for the answers before you affirm them. When you get sufficient evidence, you are rationally bound to affirm them. You are authentic insofar as you follow that norm, your own rationality. And you are responsible insofar as you deliberate, insofar as you don't just say 'Gimme.' You ask, Is it a satisfaction, Is satisfaction the only thing to be considered? Is it worthwhile? That's a stopper! It is you that asks that question. You have a good conscience when you ask it, follow a sound answer. You have a bad conscience, an uneasy conscience, when you don't. That is you, your authenticity. I'm talking about what goes on in everyone's 'black box.'

Question: Also, with regard to the hermeneutics of suspicion, how is one to avoid allowing that to breed hatred, anger?

Lonergan: Well, it is done very detachedly, eh? You don't have to be angry with Marx to see that this is not satisfactory and that isn't holding, and do on. Anybody that reads any book, they are inclined to say, Well, I wouldn't say that, and wouldn't go that far, and so on, and that's a hermeneutic of suspicion. You are following it out insofar as you pin down just where the trouble lies. 'There is some oversight, some exaggeration, or at least some difference from me. It may be that I'm wrong.' You can have the suspicion turned on yourself too. And the hermeneutic of recovery: you find out what's good in the man, what's true. It is not that he is all wrong; he wouldn't have taken the trouble to write a book if it was all wrong, unless he was paid fifty-thousand dollars by Xerox or somebody like that.

Question: You spoke, I believe, of the possibility of a dialogue between authentic people in different and opposed traditions. Now, I'm wondering what kind of difference there is between them. It doesn't seem like it could be a conversational difference. As you mentioned, the primitive can be authentic. Is it the type of difference that can be spelled out by further research and new data, or is there some intermediate type of difference?

Lonergan: Well, it can be a cultural difference: as I said yesterday or this afternoon, the difference between Japanese culture and Western culture, or for that matter Russian culture. The Russians never had a Middle Ages in the sense that the West had a Middle Ages, with universities in which logic was very highly developed. As Whitehead says, it is out of the medieval universities that there came modern science. Now, what cultural differences imply is that you have to find expression of your religion in that culture. You don't impose your own culture on these people. You use the resources of their language, and so on, and their symbols, to find an expression. That is what is meant by pluralism, theological pluralism. There's a group in Africa, in the Congo; they're some Protestant group, and they wanted to be straight African, none of this European overlay, Greco-Latin overlay of Christian doctrine. They had the Holy Ghost, and they knew what they meant, and they loved the Lord Jesus. That was all they wanted, and the Belgian Government thought that was not good enough and persecuted them, and they resisted and suffered an awful lot. When the Congo became independent, they began having their own schools, and all the rest of it. They had gone underground. But it is an example of a primitive Christian community, which perhaps is as orthodox as the Jewish Christians described

by the theologians: in other words, the attempt in early Christianity to express Christianity in terms of the Old Testament and the symbols of the Old Testament. That can be a valid expression, but that doesn't mean that it is valid theology.

There were three men from India when I was studying theology, and I remember asking one of them, Well, this is all Western thought that this theology is in. Don't you want something different in India? He said, Well, in India we are quite willing to learn Quantum Theory and Relativity, and so on, even though they are from the West. In other words, there is a difference between what you can ask of a differentiated consciousness and what you are going to ask from everybody. Eliade says that if you want to understand primitive religions, study the peasants in European countries. Harvey Cox – I remember the year I was teaching in Harvard Divinity, we used to have lunch, bring a glass of milk or something, but there would be a talk, discussion, and so on. He was holding forth about Mexico City and the way in which week by week all the taxi drivers and all would go out for the Guadalupe devotions, but they never referred to it as Our Lady of Guadalupe; they referred to it in the name of the pagan shrine that was there before the Christians came. That was very scandalous, but you don't get an illiterate people to understand these differences. There can be genuine religion without a capacity for distinctions. When I was a student in Rome, there was a procession welcoming Diana, in the Christian town of Frascati, and there were certain very earthy aspects to the procession, and the welcoming was being broadcast over loudspeakers. It was the survival of an earlier level of their culture without any attempt to purify it. I remember a student at the German College who went out teaching catechism in Rome. 'Who created you?' 'The Madonna.' Of course, this was scandalous to the German student. But you don't get these distinctions without a certain level of culture. But that doesn't mean that the theologians can do the same. They're supposed to have differentiated consciousness, and not to say, Well, the man in the street won't understand this word, therefore we will eliminate it. Mathematicians talk only to mathematicians, and not to all of them, and so on in all fields, and that is the point to a systematic theology. You can't communicate unless you know exactly what it is you want to communicate. Knowing what you want to communicate can be the same for everyone with differentiated consciousness, and they can all communicate the same thing and know that they are communicating the same thing. But they communicate it in very different ways to different cultures.

Question: Let's suppose the situation where you have a Catholic theologian and a Lutheran theologian, and they are both authentic, and they both have differentiated consciousness. Would their differences be cultural differences, conversational differences, or other differences?

Lonergan: You find out in the concrete situation. They find out in talking to one another. Dialectic becomes dialogue in the limit. And it will be some time before they get much further than putting up with one another.