

918A (question period following the lecture 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,' June 21 1977 evening)

TC 918 A

**Question:** In *Method in Theology*, the proper context for understanding doctrine is the intelligibility of the historical process. Would you relate that to the proper context of the third plateau?

**Lonergan:** Well, the context there is really the activity context, and it moves beyond itself in the Amon Hymns of Egypt in the thirteenth century BC. They arrived at the unknown God beyond the gods. They hadn't yet identified, as deuterio-Isaiah had, the intracosmic gods as idols. They were participations. Is that the sort of thing you're asking?

**Question:** I'd like to see how it relates to the doctrinal theologian on the third plateau trying to talk about the experience on the first.

**Lonergan:** He tends to understand the types of thinking that went on on the first plateau, and to understand it. I would suggest he try and get a hold of Voegelin's idea that myth is not primitive science to be replaced by a later science. It is an expression, an imaginative expression, of the constitutive meaning of human life. Meaning is constitutive of our living, and not only of our knowledge.

**Question:** In your threefold division of conversion – intellectual, moral, and affective – does affective then become identical with religious conversion?

**Lonergan:** It includes it. There are three types of love, eh? Love of the family, love of the civil community, and love of God.

**Question:** So it is a more general term?

**Lonergan:** Well, they are all concrete. Being in love is not an abstraction. It is a reality. It takes over your life. It becomes the first principle that controls everything. As Augustine put it, *amor meus pondus meum*, love is the principle of gravity in me.

**Question:** Could you say something about the political context of your paper ['Natural Right and Historical Mindedness']? I'm not sure who asked you to present it, but is it related to the present efforts in the Church to move on to social ministry. What was the context?

**Lonergan:** It was a philosophic context, a philosophical society, but it was a Catholic philosophical society. Its relevance to the Church is the fact that if your ethics is solely in universal principles, you will have something left over that the universal doesn't quite reach. When can science predict? Science cannot predict simply on the basis of universal law. You have to have a concrete pattern of recurrence such as a planetary system before prediction becomes possible. You have to be able to combine different laws together within a concrete scheme, and then prediction becomes possible, but the rest of the time all you have is statistics, probabilities.

Between the universal abstract intelligibilities, there is a further level of intelligibility represented either by concrete schemes of recurrence or probability, and your ethics doesn't move into that area, which is the political area, simply on the basis of universal propositions. That is the basis of Aristotle's principle of equity. The universal law can be unfair in the concrete situation. How can you move? Well, I'm giving one way in which you can move into this concrete situation by considering the concrete principles by which we come to experience, understand, judge, and evaluate. And that is the point of the paper.

**Questioner:** Your answer is much more profound than my question. I guess what I'm asking is what is the audience you have in mind that ought to work through what you write.

**Lonergan:** Well, I think it is up to the audience to decide if they want to work through it.

**Questioner:** But do you have audiences in mind?

**Lonergan:** I have people who have been influenced by Leo Strauss, people who really felt that he really eliminated the sort of science represented by Max Weber, value-free science. Showing how you can have historical mindedness and also bring your values into your judgments by the dialectic, which reveals whether people have been attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, loving or not. You get one sort of social situation when they have, and a situation of conflict and mess and insoluble problems when they haven't. And there has been a lack of intelligence, rationality, and responsibility in the agents that produce the situation. And the situation is also going to lack intelligibility, rationality, and responsibility. It will be a *surd* too. It is something that excludes intelligibility, and what excludes intelligibility is the insoluble problem. And the insoluble problem comes out of human action that brushes honest questions aside instead of working out the answers to them. And it is those immanent norms of question and answer that are the way that people really govern their lives. You know when you have not really met the question, because the question keeps recurring in one form or another, and that is the uneasy conscience. And that problem that goes on within peoples' minds and hearts also manifests itself in the social results. It's saying in other words what I say in chapters 6 and 7 of *Insight*, in the section on moral impotence in chapter 18, on the problem of evil in chapter 20.

**Question:** You began by saying that what you had to say was very much like what Straussians had to say and yet differed somewhat. Could you state the difference? I'm asking the question more to understand the Straussians than to understand your position. I know your position answers what the Straussians are trying to do, but I never could understand how they were trying to do it in their way.

**Lonergan:** Well, what they are doing is reasserting the value of commonsense judgments. But they don't spell that out. Strauss considers Max Weber, and Max Weber will say that, of course, the social scientist studies values and value judgments as objects, but he doesn't make his own value judgments upon those value judgments. Otherwise it won't be objective. And Strauss will say, 'You mean to say that people can be totally unreasonable, and you won't notice it.' And that is a commonsense judgment. But it doesn't set up a system, a method of scientific investigation of the issues. What I'm trying to do is to set up, to reveal to any person who is reflecting on his own thinking and needs and social thinking and needs and so on, that there is a source both of

intelligibility and of unintelligibility in individual conduct, in individual thinking, individual judging. And those minute differences which, though they are not going to change the constitution because so and so does something wrong, but the total resultant will manifest the presence or absence of intelligibility, of rationality, of responsibility in the sort of problems that arise. There *are* problems that are insoluble. The only thing to do about them is to say, 'This is a mess. We have to start all over.' And to make that diagnosis is something, and to see that in principle that diagnosis can be correct. The social situation becomes the social dump: Garbage in, garbage out. In other words, I'm throwing in a theory of history that Strauss is not. And that theory of history is outlined in *Insight* and various other places.

**Question:** How can one relate your generalized empirical method to the study of the social sciences and psychology? How does your method overcome the difficulties of introspection and the reasons why it has been rejected by some psychologists?

**Lonergan:** Because it doesn't exist. Introspection doesn't exist. Introspection is just the same blunder as saying you know by taking a look. It is a mythical conception of knowledge. That's not the way you know. You start from data, the data acquire precision insofar as they have been understood and have been conceived in some determinate fashion, and until then they are not identified, they are not only conceived but also named. Depth psychology is a problem because we have feelings without names for them. We can't identify them. We can't recognize them. And because we can't identify them and recognize them, we can't deal with them. Client-centered therapy provides a benevolent atmosphere in which a person comes to pay attention to things that he has not paid attention to up till now. He comes to recognize what he hasn't recognized. He begins to feel comfortable with himself instead of bewildered by himself. And it is the same sort of thing with this cognitional theory in *Insight*. It is investigating the 'black box.' We all know that sensations go into the 'black box' and that talk comes out, but what goes on in between? Well, one can find out. It is hard work, but one can find out.

**Question:** Are the principles similar to the method of predictability and replication?

**Lonergan:** No. No. That's all talk. You have to get behind the talk to the operations prior to them. You have to discover them. Why does the modern mathematician rewrite Euclid's geometry? Because Euclid uses all sorts of unacknowledged insights, and you can't deal with space of infinite dimensions on the basis of unacknowledged insights because you would be lost before you had taken ten steps. Now let's do an unacknowledged insight: the first proposition in the first book of Euclid's *Elements* (as repeated many times in L's writings, with board work, not repeated here). You can have this sort of thing going on all the time. And Euclid's right. He's quite right. But he doesn't prove it. And he can't prove it. He hasn't got the foundations of geometry sufficiently. And if you say this is just a problem that doesn't happen in Euclid's theorems, well, let's do a theorem. He knows by insight that the two circles will intersect. You can see that they must. But you have to put that seeing into the talk. Otherwise you'll be caught in fallacies. (Does exterior angle example also.)

**Question:** So it has to do with the assumptions that one makes?

**Lonergan:** No, it is not assumptions. It is discoveries, the way the mind works, namely, by insight. And that you have to formulate all your insights, otherwise you won't be doing a good job. And to formulate all your insights you have to know what an insight is. And to find out what an insight is, you will have to solve problems and notice what happens when you solve them. Now, Aristotle knew about insight, and Aquinas knew about insight, and they spoke very accurately about it. But logical people don't bother with that. They refute people with a lot of talk.