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First Q&A 1978 Boston College Lonergan Workshop

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Question 1: In *Insight* you speak of a ‘memory of startling strangeness.’ Could you relate this to Bergson’s notion of ‘re-lived memory’ and to the hermeneutics of suspicion and recovery?

Lonergan: Well, I can say something more readily about the memory of startling strangeness, and then briefly relate it to re-lived memory, and so on. It is the memory of the transition, of initiating the transition, from the world of ‘the already out there now real’ into the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. It is pulling out of one world and moving into another. It is the memory of a basic shift in criteria, from simply what is given to sense and consciousness to what is given, understood, affirmed, evaluated. Spontaneously one catches onto these further activities when one is learning to talk and when one goes to school. One does it all. But having done it one doesn’t realize what a difference that makes to what one had before one started to talk. It is that discovery of the difference that you underwent through learning to talk, through living in a world that is not just bounded by what you can see, hear, smell, and so on, but you can talk about what is past and future as well as what is present and what is far as well as what is near, and so on indefinitely, all the stuff that is in the encyclopedias as opposed to what lies within your immediate experience. So it is also the memory of the moment when the problems of accepting a critical realism vanish. Problems that emerge concretely in questions concerning real distinctions: Scholastics disputed for centuries – Thomists, Scotists, and Suarezians – whether there was a real distinction between essence and existence; and if your notion of the real is what is ‘already out there now,’ well, it has to be both existence and essence; you can’t get them distinct. So you had Scholastics for centuries maintaining that there is only a notional distinction between them. If, however, the real is what is known by experience, understanding, and judgment, you can see that understanding and judgment add two different things. The difference between understanding and not judging and understanding with judging is something that provides a ground for discerning a real distinction in certain cases, namely, finite existence. Similarly, subject and subjectivity, meaning, relevance, significance, presence versus propositional truth – that is the big hurdle at the present time. They want to get rid of the propositional truth of one person with two natures and get into something in term of presence, because presence is something real, it is ‘already out there now.’ It’s the same old chestnut, but in a different form.

It is the memory of coming to understand why there are empiricists and why there are idealists and why there are two realisms, namely, the naive realism of the ‘already out there now’ and the critical realism that distinguishes between experience, understanding, and judgment and the different activities involved. The empiricist empties out the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values of everything that isn’t ‘already out there now’ – the rest is all eyewash, subjective, and so on. Idealism is granting the empiricist’s view of reality, but that is not what we know when we know. When we know we use our minds, we understand and judge, and that is the ideal, that’s what our knowledge really is. Mistaken philosophies generally – you can trace them all down, and when you have them all lined up, then you have the memory of startling strangeness; you have moved out of one world and into another.

It becomes a memory that is re-lived, though perhaps not in Bergson's sense, when one succeeds in communicating a repetition of the memory to a student whose face lights up when he catches on, and on his own can work out all its implications in due course. Aristotle's criterion of the man who has a science, knows a subject, is when he can work on his own; he doesn't need a teacher anymore.

The hermeneutics of suspicion and recovery have to do with the suspicion that something is wrong, has gone wrong, and the recovery of the right road, the recovery of Christ's straight and narrow path, for example, as opposed to the broad way that leads to perdition. It is a twofold hermeneutics, because it can be misapplied. The suspicion may fall not on what has gone wrong but on what is right. 'It is an old wives' tale.' The recovery may be the return from the right that is suspected to the wrong that is its opposite. So the hermeneutics of suspicion and recovery can be applied very fruitfully, and it can be applied disastrously. It all depends on the subjectivity of the subject.

Question 2: Could you spell out your views on the importance of art for human living, and on what you mean by the priority of poetry? Could you relate this to the work of Proffo?

Lonergan: The importance of art for human living is that actions speak louder than words. Words communicate a lifestyle, but a lifestyle is concrete, it is not just a set of maxims; it is doing things, doing them gracefully, attractively, winningly. It completes words with modulations of voice, variations of facial expressions, changes of attitudes and postures, gesticulations, and so on. It was the row that went on at the beginning of Vatican II. Is there any difference between a pastoral council that Pope John XXIII wanted and all the previous councils in the history of the Church? There were those who held that all you have to do in a council is determine what is true, and all the preacher has to do is teach the people what is true, and that is what's being pastoral. Chenu took issue with this after the end of the first session, and he did so brilliantly. 'Pastoral' is preaching the word of God, it is the prophets, Jonah's getting the people in Nineveh to live in sackcloth and ashes and starve for three days and beg for forgiveness, and so on. It is a concrete action, an effective communication; it is preaching the word of God, not simply studying it or analyzing it, and so on. All this has value, but it becomes pastoral when you reach communication and real communication, effective communication.

'The priority of poetry' is an expression of Giambattista Vico. He was arguing against Cartesian rationalism and deductivism and abstruseness; he asserted the priority in the fully human of the integrated versus the specialization, and he held that what men know best is men and what men do. They are not inside nature; they study nature from outside it, but they can study men from within themselves. His case may be illustrated by Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of Mind*; the possibility of logic, mathematics, science, philosophy was prepared by the whole prior history of Greek literature, by the Homeric similes that expressed differences of human character. A lion never retreats, Hector is a lion: a very simple way to communicate. Homer ran through all different types of characters. By the lyricists there is expressed human emotion and sentiment, and by the tragedians exhibition of the momentousness of human decisions. There is a whole play that depends upon one decision. This is teaching people what a decision is. By the ability of the Eleatics, Parmenides and Melissus, etc., to convince men that there was more to human knowing than sense; they demonstrated what manifestly was false to sense, and they could prove it, and other people couldn't answer them. They could argue that there was only one

being, and it took Plato and Aristotle to show the fallacy in their contention. They could argue that Achilles could never catch the tortoise, and they revealed that there was something to logic that you haven't got in sense; that there is something to knowing besides the 'already out there now,' and that we have further capacities for knowledge than that.

To speak of the priority of poetry is to insist that premature specialization without a solid grounding in the humanities results in a one-sided man. Alfred North Whitehead ranks with the great mathematicians of the twentieth century, but until he was 17 years of age he studied just Latin and Greek.

Progoff is concerned to help the one-sided, to fill out their experience with imagery and sentiment. I cannot give you an account of his twilight imagery; all you have to do is close your eyes, and you start seeing things, and they will be changing all the time for a while, and then they start making sense to some extent. And in the guru type of session, you have the man lying on his back, and he closes his eyes, and he starts seeing things, and it is twilight, the colors aren't bright or anything, and the first images are very shifty, and then they start taking on form; and the man is describing all the time to the tape recorder what he is seeing, and Progoff is noting down his observations, and after about twenty minutes or half an hour they stop. And then they discuss what they have been through, and it has marvelous results. I suppose you have to have Progoff around to get the marvelous results! The guru business is one to one; he also has group sessions. And the members of the group will have very different associations, very different backgrounds; what is of concern to one will probably be of no concern to any of the others. Yet what happens in the group sessions? One man will be recounting an intense experience of his own, and he will come to a point where he is able to stop, and that is the high point; it is something in the style of transcendental meditation. And the same will happen to the rest of the group even though what the other fellow has been recounting is of no particular interest to them. What is significant is not so much the images and where they end but their absence and the silence that can follow. So it is something on a different level from Vico's priority of poetry, but not unrelated.

Question 3: Fields of inquiry like literary criticism require dialectic and foundations, but these are theological tasks. Could you comment on the difficulties implicit here: the challenge to the critic of enlargement of horizon; the challenge to the theologian of literary modernity.

Lonergan: Well, at least he needn't write in Latin. Dialectic and Foundations are needed in theology, but they have their extensions into literary criticism, and you can learn about them in the literary criticism before you learn theology. Literary criticism can serve as the entry into theological Dialectic and Foundations. I was at a meeting once in Notre Dame; they were initiating their doctoral program in theology, and they had a number of people there, and among them was Professor Harrelson of Vanderbilt, which I believe is in Nashville. He told us that when he went to Nashville to teach theology his presence was very much resented by the professors of English. They felt they were the ones best fitted to communicate religious thought and feelings and the professional teachers of religion were at best otiose and probably inept. What becomes a specialization later on is something that is present in commonsense knowledge but not sufficiently enucleated yet. You don't get a different species of humanity when one becomes a mathematician, but just develop what everyone has to a certain extent, however limited. So I should say that the specialties are implicit within more general education, that they

have their start there, but that start comes to full fruition when it develops into a specialty. So the challenge to the critic is to move on to the specialties; inversely, the challenge to the specialists is to learn to communicate effectively. The new math: I once asked Eric O'Conner – he is quite well up in educational circles across Canada – about the new math, and he said, 'Well, we all know it is better for the teachers; whether it is better for the pupils is another question.' Well, what the new math does is to start off at the most general level; you never have to generalize if you start with the new math; you are already there. But it is an awful lot like acquiring technical skills; it is a matter of working through all the elementary stages, developing what my tutor Charles O'Hara used to call having an X-ray mind. He would cover the board with an equation, and he would say, 'Now, if you have an X-ray mind, you'll see that this is a quadratic.'

Question 4: Could you comment on the difficulty of the theologian's task of reflecting on the significance of religion in a cultural matrix, when that matrix is laced through with the blossoms and briars of modern science and scholarship?

Lonergan: Well, the solution to the difficulty is Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and recovery. The difference between the blossoms and the briars is the opposition between rational and irrational numbers (example of incommensurables given on blackboard). There are lots of irrationals. We speak of inverse insight. People are intelligent but not fully intelligent, not always intelligent; there are not only the rational elements in human living but also the irrational elements, and it is the irrational elements that supply the briars and the rational elements that supply the blossoms. What you do is train your suspicions in such a way that you can spot the irrational elements and train your recovery powers so that you can replace the irrational by the rational that the irrational was trying to express. You will have in principle the solution to a very serious problem that isn't solved that easily, but at least you know what's up and that the solution exists in principle. Practicing it is a different thing.

Question 5: You speak of the unrevisable reviser in *Insight*. In what sense can we speak of unrevisability in relation to the fundamental distinctions and circuits of your economic analysis.

Lonergan: Well, the two are not quite parallel. It is the reviser that is irrevisable. Whether the circuits and distinctions are irrevisable is a different question. In that case, you are talking about an object, but in this case you are talking about a subject, the subject that you *are*. Now we will find out what is unrevisable in you. The unrevisable reviser is a man or woman who keeps on experiencing, trying to understand, to arrive at the truth, to distinguish right and wrong. One does so spontaneously; one doesn't have to be taught to do so. If one is taught, one knows what one is doing spontaneously, and one can reflect on it, but one does it before one is told. It is really spontaneous. Inasmuch as one does not understand, further questions keep popping up, and as long as they keep coming, one has not yet really understood the matter, and one is aware of the fact. Insofar as one has failed to reach sufficient evidence for a judgment, contrary instances keep recurring to block a certain judgment. You can tell someone, well, have you thought of this? The contrary instances keep coming, and they block the judgment. You get to sufficient evidence by a process of trial and error in which your subjectivity makes you think of something further. Insofar as one has made a bad moral judgment, one suffers from an uneasy conscience. It is the same thing recurring on another level. One may try to dispose of it, of one's uneasy

conscience, by rationalizations: it really wasn't too bad, or there is this to be said for it, and so on, but one does not fool oneself. The uneasy conscience remains, and the rationalizations prove to be subterfuges simply by the fact that further doubts and questions do keep recurring. So this is the unrevisability of the reviser.

Now, in my economic analysis it rests not on the inevitable procedures of the subject but upon objective argument. There is a model and an application of the model, and the model comes from elementary differential calculus: acceleration, velocity, and the constant of integration. If the acceleration is a , then the velocity is ad , acceleration by time. If the acceleration is 32 feet per second per second, the velocity will be 32 multiplied by the number of seconds. And the distance traversed s equals the initial distance from the origin, say c , and the distance traversed in virtue of the initial velocity ut , and the integration of the acceleration at^2 over 2. So you have those three fundamental things that are at the root of Newtonian mechanics and all the rest of the calculus.

From this model to the economic circuits, c , the constant of integration is represented by merely redistributive activities, i.e., Brown now owns what Smith owned, neither is produced; one simply owned it, and now he no longer owns it, but he has the other fellow's money; it is just redistributing. Velocity is represented by the current standard of living of the community; a standard of living is something that is being produced all the time. In the standard of living there are durable consumer goods and there are transient consumer goods, but there has to be a constant flow to keep that standard of living in existence. And finally, the acceleration is the growth of the economy, the growth of the plants and equipment that produce the means of producing the standard of living.

Now, the precise values of these quantities may be anything from zero to any finite number; that won't change anything. The relations, the functional relations between these quantities are the relations of constant of integration to velocity and of both to acceleration. The relations are what count. On this basis one can obtain a vast variety of possibilities; one can show that many of them break down; they won't work; that some succeed; and so we have a structure on the basis of which we can say that certain procedures are to be recommended and others are self-defeating. Why should you not step on the accelerator and the brake at the same time? Well, it is a self-defeating operation, and everyone can see it; but you can have them in economics, and the difficulty is a little more complicated and takes longer to see it, but that is all you are trying to do, to see why not to step on the brake and accelerator at the same time.

Question 6: Phil McShane states on p. 1, from the foundation of the four conversions, that 'present schemes of education, commerce and power are predominantly an epiphany of "the murderous grotesque of our time."' (LONERGAN: Or as someone, I think it was Fr Broderick, remarked that the University of Chicago's edition of the Britannica was a monument to materialism!) The religiously and morally converted political activist would agree. But to communicate to this activist – not the fanatic, but the religiously and morally converted activist – the need for intellectual and psychic conversion, and the complementarity of our concerns with those of such an activist, is a very difficult task. Do you have any suggestions as to how we can establish the legitimacy of our long-range work in the eyes of the religiously and morally converted activist (e.g., the Catholic Worker movement) and the complementarity of our concerns with theirs.

Lonergan: Well, it depends how far on the Catholic worker is and the Catholic worker's school, and so on. But you can't do what the French call ... You can't leap over years of study and give people the equivalent of having done it all when they haven't. But that doesn't mean that the situation is hopeless. The short answer is that nothing succeeds like success. Capitalism sold itself to the democratic countries by doing things that all could see and like. They didn't have to argue, the arguments of the economists had little influence on the rank and file. But they liked their pay, and they liked all the novelties that were being produced, the motor cars, the concrete roads, highways, etc. One can sell the remedies to the defective capitalism by coming to know what precisely the defects are, devising means for discovering remedies, and putting the remedies to the test. If we can show that our proposals work, the rest will be plain sailing. In an inspiring passage, Christopher Dawson once wrote, 'you can give men everything that they desire, and they will remain unhappy and discontented, but give them a cause, and they will suffer hardship and pain, hunger and thirst, brutality and death, and do it gladly.' One description of the Second World War in the far East tells of the disappointment of a person after the war when they found that things were as they had been before; but during the war the soldiers would do for one another anything and do it gladly, and the change in spirit when the war ended was what this fellow was talking about. There is a resource there, that it is not what is hard that is impossible but it is letting people see that there is something to be done that can be done, and doing it.

Question 7: Could you speak of aesthetic and psychic conversion as undertow to the transformation of mind and culture.

Lonergan: Well, I have no doubt that they can be described as an undertow to the transformation of mind and culture; 'undertow' is a metaphor, of course. But they provide a basic liberation on which one can build; not like a record on which the needle leaps back to the same groove every time the turntable goes around. That's when you have a fixation, and it needn't be that bad. Fr Doran could talk to you more fully on the subject.

Question 8: Would you comment on the search for universals in language in the study of Chomsky and indicate the strategy of critically integrating the work of Ricoeur and Lévi-Strauss into your own methodological perspective?

Lonergan: Well, the idea of ongoing collaboration is that I don't do everything! My knowledge of Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss is sketchy and second-hand. Chomsky seems to be quite correct in his claim that a child comes to construct endless new sentences that he never heard out of the few elements he picks up. But he does not seem to realize that this comes about through the spontaneities of the unconscious, of sensibility, of intelligence, of reflection, and of conscience. There is a whole mechanism that can be discovered. It is not exactly a mechanism. It is a conscious spontaneity. And children not only learn languages, they also invent languages of their own. The three children of my younger brother tried to have a language they could talk to one another with that no one else could understand. They didn't get too far, but at least they had the idea. They saw advantages in it.

Lévi-Strauss seems anxious to realize the materialist's dream, to account for the emergence of culture and art through the workings of the preconscious and the non-intelligent

and the non-rational. He wants to really get down to depths, to what is really real – as far as I can make out.

Question: How would you spell out the differences between and the relations of hermeneutics and communications?

Lonergan: Well, hermeneutics and communications are distinct only as functional specialties. Gadamer and the exegetes would be apt to say that one really understands a text when one can communicate that understanding and all it involves to others. The aim of hermeneutics is the application, and the application is what you get someone else to do. What does the text say to him here and now: the ideal of the preacher. I distinguish them because the function of a method is to define different tasks and prevent them from being confused. In teaching theology, I was constantly confronted with that problem. You explain what the Church teaches, and people will say, Well, how can that be so? And then when you went on to systematic theology and explained how it might be so, they would ask, Well, is it true? And you can get shoved around in all sorts of ways. So I distinguished eight distinct tasks that proceed by distinct criteria and work to different ends. And why? What's the point to it? Well, when you get to a certain stage in theology, you have to keep these things distinct or you are perpetually in a mess. Textual criticism is very important. You hear it said, I remember Leo Keeler saying, 'If only he had done some textual criticism. He's finding a profound metaphysical point because the text was corrupt!' So textual criticism is necessary. But that doesn't mean that the text does not mean anything. So you have to separate these things. Research is concerned with the preliminaries, what is the text, what is the original text, what was there, or what can we surmise was really there? Interpretation is a distinct task. What does it mean? History is a third task. It is based on texts, but what was going forward in the succession of texts? And dialectic: well, people do their research and their interpreting and their histories in quite different manners. Where to the differences come from, and can they be solved simply by doing them over again, or is there some catch somewhere? And we apply the hermeneutic of suspicion and recovery, and so on. Now, that is the reason for the distinction between them.

Hermeneutics can be taken in a very broad sense; with the man who studies scripture in order to preach good sermons, hermeneutics and communications coincide, and he doesn't need any of these distinctions. But if your sole aim is not preaching but also teaching people how they can figure out their own way of preaching and going about things, well, you need a little more refinement. And so you liberate them from their professors.

Questions from the floor

Question: St Ignatius of Loyola talks about consolation without a cause, without a previous cause. Is that parallel to what you mean by unrestricted love?

Lonergan: It is connected. It is what Thomas calls operative grace, when you begin to will to do what previously you were unwilling to do. When you begin to will to do the good that previously you wouldn't. That has not got a cause in you; it is a case of the heart of stone being replaced by the heart of flesh.

Question: What is the experience of this, the religious experience? If this is unrestricted love, we are very restricted in the sense that we desire to know infinitely, in the data of rational consciousness; when you change it into a love language, how is this experience of unrestricted love ...

Lonergan: Well, take the words of Deuteronomy and Mark, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole mind and all thy strength, etc.' One of them has four and the other three, but it is the whole, the totality. That is a dogmatic answer, eh?