

96400DTE070

Thursday, June 21 1979

Question: The question as submitted reads, ‘In chapter 11 of *Insight*, the reader is presented with the opportunity to make the strategic factual affirmation that he/she is a knower. The data for such a judgment are given in consciousness. My question concerns whether we may legitimately pivot from chapter 11’s factual affirmation of the self as a knower to its use as a criterion for getting into the *real*, i.e., to some it may appear as if your position does not escape idealism. Could you help us by commenting on this point?’

Lonergan summed up the question as follows: In *Insight* the transition from chapter 11, in which one knows one is a knower, to chapter 14, where one begins to do metaphysics: knowing you’re a knower depends on data of consciousness, and metaphysics is a matter of knowing something about everything. How can you go from one to the other?

Lonergan: Now, in general – there are exceptions – conscious acts are also intentional acts. The one exception is tendencies. You can feel hungry without smelling food. There is no stimulus to which you’re responding. And you can be conscious of the tendency without having any sensitive data on food. But in general, acts that are conscious also are intentional. So if you get your conscious acts lined up, your conscious acts that are also intentional lined up, you also line up the objects of those acts. And that gives you the principle of isomorphism: the structure of the conscious act has to be the structure of the components in the object, and that is the major premise going from self-knowledge to a metaphysics. One and the same set of acts ground both the knowledge that I am a knower and the metaphysics that is concluded from those cognitional acts.

Now, why does a naive realist feel that that is a case of idealism? Well, the naive realist understands realism as knowing what is already out there now. For example, the professor of epistemology that considered the critical problem answered by the explanation of how one sees a wall in front of one: if you could only see how you could see a wall right there, the problem would be solved. And if that is the solution to the critical problem, then knowing what’s going on inside of you is not knowing anything about what’s already out there now, and consequently the argument from chapter 11 to chapter 14 could only conclude to an idealism, knowing what’s going on inside; that is his definition of idealism. Realism is knowing what’s going on outside; idealism is knowing what is going on inside. So knowing what’s going on inside can’t tell you anything about what’s going on outside.

My position does not escape the naive realist’s idea of realism; if he is right, then I’m wrong. He needs to be converted if he is going to accept my position, and it can be a whopping change. It explains why there are so many philosophers that disagree with realism. They think it’s really backward.

Question: Would you address yourself to the difficulty put forth by Bishop Butler in his review of *Method in Theology* (*Clergy Review* 8/1972, pp. 586-87) regarding moral and religious conversion? His objection is if you really have a moral conversion, you also have a religious conversion, and if you really have a religious conversion, you also have a moral conversion.

Lonergan: The thing is that there are several stages of moral conversion, and several stages of religious conversion. And to begin any stage is not to have reached the end of that stage, and it is not to have reached the final perfection possible in that category, whether moral or religious. But conversion never means more than the beginning of any stage. The key step is to get out of the previous stages that are not yet moral or not yet religious. You have Kohlberg's three stages: there are six, which he subdivides into two stages [sets]. And the first stage is, What's in it for me? And the second stage is, What's the law, and how is it enforced? And the third stage is, What's right? And it is only in the third stage that you begin to think about morality.

Now, to begin to think about morality – 'Oh! That's what morality means! – well, that is the first stage of conversion. But it doesn't mean that you are morally perfect yet. It can be a long time yet before you begin even to think of being morally perfect.

There is a mention [in Butler] of operative grace. Well, operative grace for St Thomas occurs when you become willing to do the good that previously you were not willing to do. And there are all sorts of good things that you can become willing to do, which previously you were not willing to do. I heard a professor of asceticism and mysticism say that he had been converted five times, and he said that he made five steps forward. It didn't mean that he was five times more converted than other people.

Finally, there is Newman's distinction between notional and real apprehension, notional and real assent. A real apprehension of moral and religious perfection and an attainment of it, a real assent to it, would make Bishop Butler's argument valid, but you can have a conversion without having a real apprehension and a real assent to what moral perfection means and what religious perfection means and implies. You can spend your life finding that out. In one of Evelyn Waugh's stories, *Brideshead Revisited*, the character Sebastian says, 'Oh Lord, make me holy, but not just yet.' That's very human.

Question: [Lonergan skipped reading the third question on the sheet, and summarized the fourth. He began to answer the fourth and then started to address the third. We give the third and the fourth in their complete form, as on the sheet.] **3:** In *Insight*, metaphysics, the implementation of the heuristic structure of proportionate being, has its first step in a dialectic which distinguishes positions and counterpositions. In *Method in Theology*, the last four functional specialties follow upon Dialectic, which distinguishes between positions and counterpositions (e.g., the presence and absence of conversion). This superficial similarity suggests a more profound set of relationships between metaphysics as formulated in *Insight* and the functional specialties. Could you comment on some of these relationships? And **4:** In *Insight*, you speak of the intelligible in two ways: an intelligible which is a secondary component denoting what is or can be understood, and an intelligible which is a primary component identical with the act of understanding. For human understanding you use as an example of the primary component the generative principle which grounds the infinite series of integers. Would you give some non-mathematical examples? Is it failure to advert to the primary component of the intelligible that results so easily in a naive realism?

Lonergan: It is about two types of intelligible. The first intelligible is the act of understanding which is identical with God and the divine essence, and so on. And the other is the things that God understands because he understands himself, all the possibles and all the actuals that he makes, not just possible but also actual. That is the secondary object in divine understanding. Now the question goes on [here he moves to the third question]: In *Method in Theology* and in

Insight there is a dialectic. What is the relationship between the two dialectics? The dialectical oppositions in metaphysics deal with the transition from what is known tacitly to what is known explicitly. What is known tacitly is a topic developed by Polanyi, but an example of it is an engineering student at McGill who spent the summer in northern Alberta with a survey party. There were Indian guides guiding hunters around, and he was very interested in how they could track a buck for a couple of days and finally arrive at it and have the hunters shoot it. But he was astounded when they didn't retrace their steps on the way back to camp. They didn't do all the wandering around that the buck did. They went straight to the camp. He tried to find out from the Indian guides how they did it. And they would simply say, 'You know.' After getting several 'you knows,' he began to vary the question to: What do you look for? And finally one of them said, 'the stream.' So he pushed it one step further and said, 'Well, supposing you are going along and you come to a fork, which stream do you follow?' 'You know,' and so on. He never got further than 'you know,' but he always got straight back to the camp. That is tacit knowledge. He wasn't able to explain it. We all know how to tie our shoelaces, but to put it into words how you tie your shoelaces is another trick. It is tacit knowledge. Metaphysics is pulling out some things that are very tacit in our knowledge. (We will return to that in a later question.)

The dialectical oppositions in theological methods have their source in all the self-deceptions of the human race, traditional or personally initiated, that give some sort of security to one's existence in untruth, to quote Voegelin. (We will hear more about that tonight, the pulls and the counterpulls.) You have existence in the truth if you accept the pull of the golden cord, which is very gentle. And you have to add your freedom to it to get anywhere. But the counterpull that pulls in the opposite direction, all you have to do is to slide with it. And that is existence in untruth.

Question: Lonergan now turns explicitly to questions 4 (see above).

Lonergan: I've already said something on that. What is wanted I illustrate by the fact that you know all the integers by knowing $n+1$, $1+1=2$, $2+1=3$, $3+1=4$, *and so on*. And the 'and so on' includes the infinity of the positive integers. What about a non-mathematical example? Well, if by a non-mathematical example you mean an example drawn from commonsense knowledge, I should say that such an example cannot be given. Common sense is an unformulated accumulation of insights which fit together but do not follow from some prior and comprehensive understanding. Your common sense always has to be complemented by taking another good look round to see if you really understand the present situation. And when you move from one position to another, you don't say much for a good while. You have to size up the situation. If you've just stepped into a quite different situation and start telling people how to do things, they'll know what to think!

Now if you want a scientific example that isn't mathematical, you can take the periodic table. If you understood that perfectly, you would also understand, I'm told, over 300,000 compounds, because they are all matters of different combinations of the elements in the periodic table. So there's a key understanding there, discovered by Mendeleev in the nineteenth century.

Then the question goes on, 'Is the failure to advert to the primary component of the intelligible what leads so easily to a naive realism?' I do not think so. I should say that the source of naive realism is a lag between learning to talk, which we do before we are two years old, and knowing the difference between what you know and the way you know prior to learning to talk and afterwards. Learning to talk is moving into an entirely different world from the nursery.

When you start to talk you start to talk about things that are near and far and present and past and future and so on, indefinitely. You start imagining things in a bigger way than you could ever imagine them before, and talking about them and thinking about them, and not often very correctly. But when you do it incorrectly, there is a big Ha! Ha! and you learn to avoid that. But why there should be a big Ha! Ha! is getting out of naive realism and really understanding all you learn to do, all you learn tacitly, that is, the implications and the suppositions of being able to talk and form sentences. Chomsky says that a child can form any number of sentences that it has never heard before. Where do they come from? Well, it is not repeating what he heard before. It is knowing how language works, catching on. The difference and the momentousness of this learning to talk is illustrated by the astonishment and the delight of Helen Keller when she discovered that the marks made on the palm of her hand by her teacher meant water. She got hold of the idea of meaning. It was the first time she got hold of it. She didn't speak or see or hear, but she did learn an awful lot after she had got hold of meaning. It was in that experience, the cold water from the pump going over her hand, that she made her terrific discovery. The child makes that discovery without the astonishment and the amazement. It gradually seeps in: 'What did I tell you?!

Question: You understand the terms and relations of cognitional theory as 'isomorphic with the terms and relations denoting the ontological structure of any reality proportionate to human cognitional process' (*Method* 21). However, if cognitional theory includes also such terms and relations as deliberation and the notion of value, what would you understand as the further terms and relations of the ontological structure of that particular domain of human reality proportionate to human cognitional process not only as empirical, intelligent, and rational but also as existential?

Lonergan: Well, the further terms and relations presuppose time and add the possibility of change, and especially change for the better. If you know about change for the better, you know about the good and the bad and so on and so forth. They are all ontological terms. But the knowledge about yourself fundamentally is further knowledge about yourself and further knowledge about human life. It is the weakness of behaviorism that you understand something human, you have an explanation of something human, when the same explanation can be applied to a robot or at least to a rat. What is beyond that in man doesn't count. It isn't a possible object of science.

Question: Leo Strauss in his essay 'What Is Liberal Education?' says, 'Just as the soil needs cultivators of the soil, the mind needs teachers. But teachers are not as easy to come by as farmers.' Would you speak to us of your teachers?

Lonergan: That is rather big topic! My early education, up to about the age of 21, was in a classicist tradition: everything always has been and ever will be substantially the same. There was no historical mindedness involved in it. At that age I was shifted from Canada to England, where even the Jesuits regarded the *ratio studiorum* as quite outdated, and the shift started me on a process of thinking for myself, moving away from the way I had picked up thinking up till then without being aware that I had a way of thinking.

I remember I discovered the anthropological meaning of culture from reading Christopher Dawson's *The Age of the Gods*. It was quite different from the classicist idea of

culture, which was in terms of the immortal works of art, the perennial philosophy, and so on and so forth. The Eskimos had culture on that view, and anyone who could talk had some sort of culture.

Among my memorable teachers was one in freshman college, an Irishman from Limerick who initiated me in the wonders of ‘Sheets and Kelley.’ In my first year of philosophy in England, two were outstanding: the professor of logic and epistemology, whose efforts were devoted generously to making we didn’t think there any pat answers, and the professor of metaphysics, who had other and more important duties and gave us only three classes in the whole year. He relieved me of the labor of learning what I would have had to unlearn later on. Also during philosophy there was a tutor in mathematics for those preparing university degrees. Before entering the Society he had obtained an M.A. from Liverpool University, and at that time the M.A. was the top degree in England; it was prior to the dollar shortage. When he entered the Society, his tutor followed him down to Roehampton from Liverpool and said, ‘Look here, I’ve spent so many years teaching you mathematics. I’ve nothing against the Catholic Church or the Jesuits, but unless you get down to some creative work right away, you will not do anything really intelligible. All my work will have been in vain.’ And he made an election and decided to remain in the novitiate. Later, for teaching, before ordination or theology, he went to Stonyhurst and taught sixth-form mathematics. His students were headed for three different places: Cambridge, Oxford, and Trinity in Dublin. The entrance exams at the three places differed notably, and he began by working out an eclectic program that would take them through any of the three exams, omissions as well as developments. He also developed a whole technique of teaching math. He would write an elaborate equation on the blackboard and remark, ‘Now, if you have an X-ray mind’ – and we all wanted to have an X-ray mind – ‘you will see that this is a quadratic.’ He could expatiate on the great discovery of zero, which made the decimal notation possible, and the superiority of Leibniz’s ds/dt over Newton’s y with a dot over it, and other somewhat more recondite discoveries. He was strong on the history of mathematics, and he was a great man for drawing the diagram and flagging it, marking on it all the quantities you could pin down. If you did that, you would spot the equation that would solve the problem.

I did my theology in Rome, where we had a different professor for most of the treatises, and so had the opportunity of seeing all the different ways theology could be approached and taught. One could come to grasp that we were being given the parts but if we wanted more than a heap we would have to write a book on the subject of method, and so on.

Question: What are the virtues of retrieving the past in education, as in the example of the Great Books tradition (Leo Strauss, Allan Bloom, etc.)? What do you think are the limitations and inadequacies of this tradition in meeting the exigencies of the present?

Lonergan: I suppose the great advantage is getting rid of the nonsense of the present. We have a specimen of the Great Books tradition in the person of Pheme Perkins, in our theology department. When she finished the course in St. John’s, Annapolis, she had to decide whether to become a quantum physicist or a New Testament scholar. And she decided for New Testament scholarship because Harvard Divinity offered her a scholarship. But apart from that it was a toss-up.

A limitation of the Great Books is that they are read not in the original but in translation. What that privation means can be estimated from a reading of George Steiner’s *After Babel*, aspects on language and translation (Oxford paperback, 1975). It is about 500 pages of an

incredibly erudite piece of work (and I don't mean stuffy). He was never able to figure out whether his mother tongue was English, French, or German, and he tried various experiments. He was in an auto accident, and he inquired, 'What language did I speak first?' and he discovered various changes like that – well, it depended who the people were that he was talking to. He is professor of comparative literature somewhere in Switzerland and has an *entrée* in several places. But he is not really too welcome anywhere, because he knows too much.

More modestly, you cannot read Aristotle intelligently unless you are reading the Greek. A translator has to use the same English word for different Greek words, and different English words for the same Greek word, depending on the context. Such substitutions mean that one misses more than half the clues to what Aristotle meant. Is he talking about the same thing here and there? Well, is he using the same word or a different word, and what is the difference? You get the method of agreement and difference coming in all the time. Why one word rather than another? Again, the importance of retrieving the past is that the less of the past you retrieve the less is the difference between you and the anthropoids that by discovering and developing language developed the sides of their crania and multiplied the convolution of their brains. The brain has to evolve too.

What is the use of knowing Greek? Well, if you've read Demosthenes' *Philippics* and *Olynthiad*, you can't think of Russia without recalling Philip of Macedon, and you will remember the Athenian disaster in the siege of Syracuse at the end of Athenian democracy when people praised successful talkers and popular vote. The man who convinced the Athenians in the expedition against Syracuse was a good talker, and he had the popular vote, and there followed the disaster of Syracuse in which the Athenians who could recite Euripides were let go free and the rest were put to work in the silver mines. The exigencies of the present: well, people don't really know what the exigencies of the present are, but the better an education you have the more you learn from it, the more it teaches you to think or forces you to think, willy-nilly for a good while, and the better prepared you will be to know what the exigencies are and what can be done about it. We can go on to question 8, which is along the same lines.

Question: There seems to be an implicit elitism in the classical sense of liberal education. In a modern society tending toward egalitarianism, and given the inevitable shortage of excellent teachers, can there be a mass liberal education?

Loneragan: Well, of course, the big difficulty is the shortage of teachers. We had pedagogy when I was a student of philosophy in Heythrop, a half-hour twice a week. It made Heythrop a teachers college, and they got a government grant. But I learned what English education was and French education and German education. And I learned that the Germans and French considered that English education was fine for the formation of character, but the boys learned nothing. But I was quite willing to settle for what the Canadian boys could get in English public schools, for which you would prepare in private. In places like Eton, Winchester, and so on, there would be about 2000 boys in a school, no more than 12 boys in any remove, three removes a year, a reshuffle, with the boys in any remove all equal in knowledge of the subject. They might differ in age, and no one was teaching without an M.A. from either Oxford or Cambridge. And I asked myself, 'If we wanted a school like that in Canada, what would we do?' The staff for 2000 boys, teaching them in that style, would be extremely large. And where are we going to get all those Oxford and Cambridge M.A.s, which we were not producing in Canada? Well, we could import them, but the trouble with that was that after about a year they would all have much better jobs

than we could possibly pay them. You need cultural capital before you can have a good educational system. In Ontario there was a man who married a distant relative of mine, and he was in charge of Catholic elementary education in the Province. He once quoted to me the percentages of those beginning elementary school and finishing it. It wasn't a high percentage. And the percentage of those starting high school and finishing it wasn't a high percentage. And the percentage of those entering college and finishing it wasn't a high percentage. And he said it was just the tail wagging the dog, if you want to train them from the start to be the sort of people, the material that you need to put through for a first degree, the bachelors' degree. So they didn't train them for that. Ontario used to be a top place for high schools and elementary schools, but what can happen I experienced when I was teaching at Loyola in Montreal. There was a boy whose high school record was never less than 95%, but he didn't know any math, and Latin was too difficult, and he had never studied French, and he had never heard of Greek. And one wondered what he learned. It wasn't science. But it was certainly egalitarian. All you have to do is lop off people who know something or preclude their existence. In other words, a lot depends on what you mean by a tail and what you mean by a dog.

Question: Is there a correspondence in the first moment in the longer cycle of decline to the first moment in a person's radical falling away from God? If so, what are the moments, and what is their correspondence? Historically, then, how was the first moment in the longer cycle manifest?

Lonergan: Well, there have been two notable works on the sweep of history. [First] Toynbee's *A Study of History*; and in the first six volumes the key idea was the notion of civilization, and in the next five volumes the key idea was the religion that came out of the breakdown of one civilization and caused the birth of another civilization. It was the chrysalis in which was formed other civilizations. And Voegelin's *Order and History*. In the first three volumes, which he wrote a number of years ago, he was working on a linear idea of history, and within the last few years his fourth volume came out, and he again changed his viewpoint. He dropped the linear idea of history. Creative changes occur at random and anywhere. You can study the decline. That is very logical. You have to keep on making the same mistakes with ever worse results. But the other process you can't tie down. But if you want the general answer, there is Aristotle's answer to the question, Should a man love himself? If he means by self-love what ordinarily is meant by it, then he shouldn't. But if you mean wanting for oneself the best things in the world, which are wisdom and virtue, then if a man does not will them, he can't be a friend either to himself or to anybody else.

Question: Please relate the notions of bureaucracy and cosmopolis.

Lonergan: Well, they are related pretty much as opposites. At least that is the way the idea developed. The idea of cosmopolis comes out of the negation of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is the subordination of instruments to people with power. Cosmopolis is directed to the ideal of wisdom and virtue for as many as can take it. And you can't plan utopia. The truth of the matter is as Carl Becker, who was not a religious man, said in one of his essays, the function of history is not to help you predict the future but to face it.

Question: In view of the innumerable texts on economics, why have you chosen Robert Gordon's book *Macroeconomics*?

Lonergan: Well, it was *a* book on macroeconomics that I wanted because that was what I wanted to talk about. And I took Gordon because it was already available in the bookstore. Other people considered it a good text. It is an intermediate text, and there is a minimum of presuppositions. It does not make macroeconomics depend on microeconomics. There are certain theorems common to both, but you can start equally well from either one, and that's ... He can make terrific use of graphs. He gets the equivalent of differential equations by using a succession of graphs and having various things constant in one graph and some different, and something else constant in another graph, and so on. And that is what differential equations mean. It is a beautifully constructed textbook. It is just as well constructed as Samuelson's, which is a terrific textbook. You know, the type of printing firm that can do a work like that is fantastic.

It provides a lot of information on topics relevant to my own quite different purpose. We did together the first 8 chapters of Gordon. We didn't go on to his discussion in the remaining 11 or 12 chapters on the relevant merits of monetarism. He can put matters of fact with brutal clarity. Inflation: Is the Federal Reserve Board responsible? The Federal Reserve Board can't fight Congress, it can't fight labor, and it can't fight business. And it has to be able to fight all three if you are to hold down inflation. That is putting it a little stronger than he does, but he is right in on problems like inflation, unemployment, and so on. He talks about government spending freezing out capital investment; and once you admit that, then you will not complain about the breakdown of increasing productivity. Unless you have a flow of capital investment, you are dropping off from what is known as the takeoff. The difference between having 5% of GNP going in to replacing things that are worn out and having no new capital investment, no innovations, or having 20% going to innovation, which is the source of the difference between the countries that have been neglected, the Third World, and the rich countries, is that they spend more money on innovation. They spend less proportionately on consumption, but if you are doing a lot of innovation you can have a lot of consumption too. He lists the countries that are spending a lot on innovation. They are West Germany, Japan, and France. The least are the United States and England. So he gives you a very objective picture, and he isn't afraid to use big numbers. The white chips in his poker game are 10 billion dollars, the red a hundred billion, and the blue a thousand billion. So he gives a concrete lead to some of the things I'm talking about in circulation analysis. And it is a help in a course when people ask, 'Well, are you sure you are talking about something?'

Question: To what extent did your Jesuit formation, and in particular your experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*, influence your later thinking? For example, are not 'self-appropriation' or 'self-transcendence,' 'conversion,' and 'discernment in reflection' aims of the *Exercises*?

Lonergan: Oh, they probably had some influence. These are things you take for granted ... It is a matter I'll get around to when I settle down to write my autobiography.

Question: The titles of the chapters in Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* correspond to many of those in *Insight*. Is there a link? Dewey in his *Logic of Inquiry* makes a clear-cut distinction between common sense and scientific inquiry-understanding. Did you read Dewey before working out your own position?

Lonergan: Well, I never read Bradley, and I only read Dewey a bit on education when I was giving a summer course on education. However, actual reading isn't the whole story. Newman speaks of a liberal education as a matter of picking up a great deal of knowledge by the simple process by which a grand piano gathers dust on its top. It is the sort of thing that is in the air. I heard of Bradley, and I heard of Dewey, and I knew that Dewey started off as a Hegelian, and that's a pretty good start even though I disagree with Hegel, and so on and so forth. As for Dewey a friend of mine, an expert on Dewey, who did his Ph.D. at Columbia on Dewey remarked that Dewey is the best cognitional theorist produced by the United States. So to find a resemblance to Dewey is quite a compliment.