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# Introduction

## *Understanding What It Is To Understand*

“At least we can make a beginning by asking  
what precisely it is to understand.”  
(*Insight*, 39)

The title for volume XII of *The Lonergan Review* will be familiar no doubt to many of its readers. It is taken from Lonergan’s often-quoted statement in his introduction to *Insight*. He states in a general way the value of the work to be undertaken by author and reader over the next 700 or so pages. The full passage reads:

Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and you will not only understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern opening upon all further developments of understanding.<sup>1</sup>

The promissory tenor of the statement presupposes something we can perhaps no longer presuppose, namely, the self-evident value of understanding human understanding. What is the value of—should it prove real—a fixed base and invariant pattern for a transcultural and transdisciplinary account of understanding? What might one do with such an account, one that could ground, *and thereby make possible*, all

manner of diverse inquiry and communication—interdisciplinary, multicultural, historical, symbolic, theoretical, mystical, and practical among others? Should Lonergan's claim prove true, would we still have an appetite for learning that reality is something we can make sense of? For learning that reality is something we might understand together?

There is really a double promise in Lonergan's charter: one of understanding and another of communicating. These are, of course, coordinate with one another, interdependent, mutually entailing. They are distinct moments in the single complex movement of the circular hermeneutics of human understanding: part and whole, individual and community, judgment and horizon, intelligibility and possibility. In this context what is meant by communication is not merely the expression of understanding, but also *conversation*. This conversation is always already prior to and ingredient in understanding.

The essential place of conversation in the structure of cognition is doubly manifest. First, in the discursive nature of even the loneliest consciousness whose inner monologue is, in reality, always experienced as a dialogue, "the dialogue of the soul with itself."<sup>2</sup> What is more, this "soundless solitary dialogue we call thinking,"<sup>3</sup> is always mediated in language which is the indelible mark of history and community on even this, our most interior space. The place of conversation in understanding is manifest in a second way in the community within which any thinker can always be found. Conversation is the context and currency of the community from which an inquirer has always begun to question and amidst which and in light of which he or she always responds.

When we grasp the interior hermeneutics of understanding and communication and the nature of communication as conversation we can then see the further possibility of *consent*: that is, a consent beyond individual assent. We understand that as *knowing* beings we might be also *consenting* beings, which is to say, knowers who *agree with* one another, who have understood something of the same truth, who have understood that what each has understood is the same. This is to be beings possessed of a further insight that our individual judgments are also shared judgments. It is to have grasped that some measure of truth is achievable

and—the essential point—that it is something we can share in together.

Thus, this dimension of communication in human cognition grounds the possibility of human community.

Community is a matter of a common field of experience, a common mode of understanding, a common measure of judgment, *and a common consent*. Such community is the possibility, the source, the ground, of common meaning; and it is this common meaning that is the form and act that finds expression in family and polity, in the legal and economic system, in customary moral and educational arrangements, in language and literature, art and religion, philosophy, science and the writing of history.<sup>4</sup>

To communicate with another, especially about what is good and bad, is perhaps the fullest meaning of Aristotle's suggestion that friends must share a perception of the world. Shared perceptions are the components of a shared life and of the common meanings a shared life makes possible.

One might expect then that a break down in the plausibility of mutual consent to truth would make both the possibility and the value of an account of knowing irrelevant. Would one choose to live without friends, though she knew all other truths? The inquirer's *diakonia* in the search for truth is inevitably a shared service: We cannot ask all the further pertinent questions on our own. Perhaps a recovery of the possibility of shared inquiry, insight, judgment, and decision is needed to renew our understanding of the value of Lonergan's achievement. We know our age is not the first in which grasping the value of truth and the distinctly human route to its achievement is neither obvious nor even a widely-shared human aspiration. The world mediated by meaning has always bought its richness with fragility:

It is this larger world mediated by meaning that we know to be insecure, because meaning is insecure, since besides truth there is error, beside fact there is fiction, besides honesty there is deceit, besides science there is myth.<sup>5</sup>

Both the individual self-assembling operational structure of human consciousness and the communal and historical accumulation of insight and knowledge depend practically upon both individual and collective willingness which are not laws of nature so much as matters of the heart scarred inveterately, as Eliot reminds us, by ignorance and bias:

*Garlic and sapphires in the mud  
Clot the bedded axle-tree.  
The trilling wire in the blood  
Sings below inveterate scars  
Appeasing long forgotten wars.*<sup>6</sup>

It seems that we live in an age of despair. It is a functional despair—which is surely not to be in despair in the right way, as Kierkegaard might advise us. Our is, rather, a presumptive despair of the possibility of a shared communication in truth. One symptom of this, according to Lonergan, is a failure to judge: “the vast modern effort to understand meaning in all its manifestations has not been matched by a comparable effort in judging meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Beneath such a horizon we do not reject a shared understanding of the world so much as find ourselves incapable of envisioning it, incapable of consenting to and with one another. What may remain a philosophical possibility gradually ceases to become an existential one and beneath such a horizon “[t]he spiritual atmosphere becomes too thin to support the life of man.”<sup>8</sup>

Lonergan’s thought has much to offer this situation and his recovery mission proceeds in stages, as we know. First an emphasis on understanding as grounded in an individual’s assent to psychological fact and the consequent appropriation of his or her own cognitional life and its self-assembling structure of operations rooted in a drive to question that, “is prior to all acts of understanding and also to all concepts and judgments.”<sup>9</sup> Second, in a hermeneutics of self and community that clarifies the collaborative enterprise of reversing decline through acts of progress and an openness to redemption.

It is in *Method* that we find the second corresponding movement

of the hermeneutical circle which emphasizes the way from above downward in addition to that from below upward. Only here is the discursivity of human knowledge grasped in its full and complex sweep. A discursivity that not only moves from experience though insight to judgment and decision but also encompasses the intelligence of others in its widening ken. It acknowledges not only the importance, but the indispensability of others in authentic development of understanding, grasping that individual development is analogous to the development of traditions because in both, “development is a gradual accumulation of insights that complement, qualify, correct one another,”<sup>10</sup> and in neither is this a process that can be undertaken successfully in isolation from the questions and concerns of others: “To grasp the contemporary issue and to meet its challenge calls for collective effort. It is not the individual but the group that transforms the culture.”<sup>11</sup>

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Clarifying the cognitional structure of human consciousness shows the ground of communication, and communication—with being, with others, with God—is the final cause of cognitional structure. Yet, if Lonergan never tired of stressing the invariance of the structure of consciousness, he likewise never claimed it needed no further elaboration.

...the pattern in which they [i.e., cognitional operations] occur is acknowledged as invariant, not of course in the sense that further methodical development are impossible, nor in the sense that fuller and more adequate knowledge of the pattern is unattainable,...

<sup>12</sup>

Both further methodical development and fuller, more adequate knowledge depend on supplementary insights and insights are into images. Ryan Miller’s article critically rehearses the images Lonergan offered to us and proposes a few new ones for our consideration. On the authority of Fred Crowe, Miller draws our attention back to the

importance of diagrams in the generation of insights and, in particular, for insights pertaining to cognitional structure and theory. His essay asks whether Lonergan's cognitional theory still lacks "a comprehensive diagram" and whether this lack might contribute to its relative lack of widespread understanding and acceptance. Miller goes on to consider the diagram in chapter 9 of *Insight* and to raise some question about its explanatory adequacy and its relation to things like the patterns of experience. Next, he turns to the blackboard diagram of the "Dynamics of Knowing" from Lonergan's lectures at University College, Dublin in 1961. Finally, Miller considers the expanded account of consciousness articulated in *Method* which he renders as a table. After raising some further pertinent questions he proposes five principles for future elaborations of cognitional theory. He offers his own diagrams and concludes with a thought-provoking proposal for what this analysis might mean for debates about a fifth level of consciousness.

Clayton Shoppa's article moves us from a consideration of cognitional structure *in se* to its epistemological and metaphysical consequences. Shoppa explores Lonergan's relationship to the debate in contemporary philosophy between realism and anti-realism by way of an engagement with the work of philosopher Richard Sebold. Sebold is a trenchant critic of anti-realism in key philosophers. He defines realism as the basic position that there exist mind-independent realities and anti-realism as the position that reality is mind-dependent. Shoppa's critical engagement follows two related trajectories. The first questions whether Sebold's critique holds for "continental" philosophy as a whole. Sebold builds his argument by engaging Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Husserl. Shoppa complicates that narrative through a careful consideration of Heidegger who, like Sebold, has engaged those four figures extensively and in reference to similar concerns. The second critical trajectory examines the adequacy of Sebold's account of realism which Shoppa finds wanting when compared with the more robust and empirically grounded critical realism of Lonergan. Ultimately, Shoppa argues, because Sebold uncritically accepts the subject-object split his position is a species of dogmatic realism which, if maintained

consistently, makes reality a brute fact that leaves the inquirer with little left to think about.

Eric Mabry turns us from the history of philosophy to the history of theology. His essay is part of a project on Lonergan and Aquinas which examines the latter's hypothesis of the *esse secundarium*, that is, the act of existence which occurs when the Divine Logos becomes incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. Mabry seeks to clarify what the most likely meaning is of Aquinas's attribution of a "secondary act of existence" to the incarnate Christ. He leads his readers through a careful appraisal of the major interpretations of Thomas's textually ambiguous position, arguing ultimately that the Dominican's use of the formulation *esse secundarium* in the *QD de Unione* is not an aberration but rather "compatible with all of his other discussions of Christ's *esse*." The *esse secundarium* "is a supernatural and substantial act received in the human essence of Christ." Mabry provides a *ressourcement* essential to any authentic and lasting *aggiornamento*; it is also an essential context for understanding Lonergan's use of *esse secundarium* in his Christological systematics.

Chris Berger turns us from the theoretical to practical in his essay, "Common Sense Problems with Positive Law: Habermas, Lonergan, and the Problem of the Concrete." There Berger takes up the question of the foundation of positive law and political legitimation. He takes Habermas as a philosophically robust example of the attempt to legitimize law in human discourse. He assesses this account in light of Lonergan's account of commonsense thinking, evaluating, and deciding and claims that "what common sense does organically and without systematization, law does artificially, intentionally, and systematically." Yet, commonsense positive law so-conceived suffers from general bias. Berger offers not a new solution but a critical assessment: "at least until a better alternative is presented, we do need to be aware of the ways that our discourse can go wrong, potentially quite disastrously, and despite our best intentions and our best efforts, bring about results we would hold to be illegitimate. Discourse, by itself, is not a sufficient safeguard, and the best way to ensure that such disastrous results occur is to dismiss or disregard the weak points in the system." It is a

critical invitation to be aware of the fragility of our shared endeavors in self-governances and, in particular, to take more careful account of the recurring bias to which they are perennially prone.

The final essay is taken from the writings our beloved and dearly departed Robert Doran, S.J. Published here, to the best of my knowledge for the first time, is Bob's graduate thesis on Lonergan and Newman. He sums up his intended contribution clearly in the opening lines:

It would seem a reasonable hypothesis (yet to be verified, it is true) that Lonergan's *Insight* can be viewed as a systematic transposition of the discourse of Newman's *Grammar* and an explicit statement of the epistemology and metaphysics therein implied. That is to say, the "common sense" description given by Newman can be related by and large to Lonergan's cognitive theory and then, once the world of human interiority has been systematically conceived and this system personally affirmed, the questions of epistemology and metaphysics can be dealt with.

What follows is a careful comparison of key theses in Newman's *Grammar of Assent* and their relation to aspects of Lonergan's thought. Among them number the exact sense of the *rational* character of faith, a careful study of human conscious performance, and differing ethical systems derived from the dialectically linked horizons of the religionist and the rationalist. On this last point Doran is a particularly illuminating reader of Newman, whom he reads as showing how these different "types of moral personality and their genesis are intrinsically connected with options regarding the process and import of knowledge." The rationalist, according to Newman, is caught up in a performative contradiction that overlooks the "unconscious and implicit reasonings involved in the process of his thought." Doran's assessment is that, while the *Grammar of Assent* is not a critically grounded account of knowing, it is a signal contribution to the first of Lonergan's three principal questions: What am I doing when I am knowing?



Tom Jeannot has supplied us with a thorough review article assessing the many merits of Mark Morelli's monograph, *Hegel Inside Out: Essays on Lonergan's Debt to Hegel* (Encanto, 2020). Jeannot introduces us to the rich "discursive universe" of Morelli's book which is written for two purposes: to persuade students of Lonergan's thought of the value of Hegel for deepening their understanding of Lonergan and to persuade students of Hegel's thought of the value of Lonergan for handling "perduring conflicts" in interpretation, above all, Jeannot notes, "in the Lonerganian appropriation and modification of Hegel's concept of sublation." The title of the book is taken from a reference Lonergan makes in his "Questionnaire on Philosophy: Response" (1977). He refers to "Hegel inside-out," playing on Marx's claim to have turned Hegel on his head. Morelli contends that Hegel's account is "quasi-positional" rather than counter-positional because it is grounded in the realm of interiority. Lonergan can be read fruitfully as meeting the Hegelian demand for a "philosophy of philosophies" which can account for philosophic difference and the plurivocity of reason. According to Jeannot, what Morelli, following Lonergan, achieves is "'the eversion [i.e., turning inside out] of Hegel's absolute idealism' and 'the transition from the order of logic to the order of method.' These are the movements necessary for putting the wide-open field of sublative relations to work."

Monsignor Richard Liddy reviews Patrick Manning's monograph, *Converting the Imagination: Teaching to Recover Jesus' Vision for Fullness of Life* (Pickwick, 2020). Practicing Lonergan's method, Liddy notes that Manning's work, "aims at supplying the precise images from which life-giving understanding can emerge." It attempts to assist educators in recovering religion as a "vital value" in the lives of students. Referencing Charles Taylor, Manning notes that change in our meaning-making does not first occur on the intellectual level but rather at the level of the preconscious operations of the imagination. Basing himself in Lonergan's cognitional analysis, Manning translates this into what he calls the SEE model of teaching (1) Stimulating the imagination; (2) Expanding the imagination by challenging, questioning; (3) Embracing a new way of imagining. Such could be the pattern of an individual class or of a

whole semester. Liddy concludes by noting the relevance to Manning's work of Lonergan's chapter on "meaning" in his *Method in Theology*: "In its third stage, then, meaning not merely differentiates into the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority, but also acquires the universal immediacy of the mass media and the molding power of universal education. Never has adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater."

Patrick Nolin has supplied us with a review of the recent festschrift in honor of Bob Doran, S.J., *Intellect, Affect, and God: The Trinity, History, and the Life of Grace* edited by Joseph Ogbonnaya and Gerard Whelan, S.J.. He credits the work with "demonstrating Doran's wide-reaching inspiration in the further production of insights" in fields as diverse as ecological studies, philosophy, hermeneutics, economics, systematic theology, and others. He suggests the work can be read fruitfully as a "a heuristic journey through Lonergan's transcendental precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and responding in an act of love." Nolin ends the review echoing a sentiment many readers no doubt feel, that Bob was many things and among them "a beautiful friend."

Francis Hunter offers a generous review of Father Joseph Laracy's *Theology and Science in the Thought of Ian Barbour: A Thomistic Evaluation for the Catholic Doctrine of Creation* (Peter Lang, 2021) underscoring Laracy's commitment to the mutually beneficial relationship between natural science and Catholic theology. Laracy's book is an extended engagement with the thought of the influential Protestant thinker Ian Barbour who inaugurated a new discourse in theology and science. This is of direct interest to Lonergan scholars because Barbour called his approach critical realism. Hunter summarizes Laracy's careful work to understand what Barbour is doing in defense of the compatibility thesis regarding science and religion, but also draw important distinctions between his approach and that of other Christian, specifically Catholic, thinkers.

Understanding what it is to understand. The authors presented in this volume each in some way help us grasp that this “invitation to a personal, decisive act”<sup>13</sup> is an invitation to an ongoing enterprise. Clarifying the formally dynamic structure of human consciousness is the beginning of the search for knowledge, not its end. While adverting to that structure invites “fuller more adequate knowledge” it also “open[s] upon further development of understanding.” Our authors have been concerned with both directions of inquiry: how can we better understand understanding and what else can we understand when we understand correctly. Lonergan’s clarification of the nature of human knowledge in no way foreshortens either the love of learning or the search for truth. What he does do is orient us toward both equipped with greater clarity and greater capacity.

### *Endnotes*

- 1 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL vol. 3, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 22.
- 2 Gadamer, paraphrasing Plato in *The Enigma of Health* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 167.
- 3 Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations” in *Social Research* Vol. 38, No. 3 (AUTUMN 1971), 444.
- 4 Bernard Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning” in *Collection*, CWL vol. 4, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 234.
- 5 Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” 233.
- 6 T.S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” in *The Four Quartets*, lnn. 49-53.
- 7 Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” 244.
- 8 Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” 243.
- 9 Bernard Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*” in *A Second Collection*, CWL vol. 13, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 230.
- 10 Bernard Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” 233.
- 11 Bernard Lonergan, “Belief: Today’s Issue” in *A Second Collection*, CWL vol. 13, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 85.
- 12 Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” 230.
- 13 Lonergan, *Insight*, 13.

