

Class 6, October 12 2009

1 Research

Research is 'an enormously diversified category' but **one is doing research whenever one is making data available**. Lonergan has little to say on research, partly because it is so diversified. But he wrote later that perhaps he could and should have said more.

The methods proper to research are **learned only by doing it**, generally under the guidance of experts, and they will differ depending on just what one is doing.

1.1 General research and special research

General research is what is done by archivists, archeologists, curators, etc. It has its own ends: simply making data available; whereas one engages in **special research** as a means to working in some other specialty. General research 'locates, excavates, and maps ancient cities. It fills museums and reproduces or copies inscriptions, symbols, pictures, statues. It deciphers unknown scripts and languages. It collects and catalogues manuscripts, and prepares critical editions of texts. It composes indices, tables, repertoires, bibliographies, abstracts, bulletins, handbooks, dictionaries, encyclopedias.'

1.2 Resolving differences

What are the relevant data for theology? Christian theologians have differed on the relevant data, especially regarding the tradition. Do they lie only in scripture, in scripture and tradition, in whose tradition? In tradition only up to a certain date, in the ongoing tradition?

The answer to such question is a function of doctrines, but each should begin where he/she stands, engage in collaborative work with others in open dialogue, and work out the differences. If the differences are brought out into the open, their grounds can be uncovered (Dialectic). Some of these will be eliminated by further research, interpretation, and history. Some will be seen to be a result of cultural differences and can be bridged by transpositions. And some may be rooted in the presence or absence of conversion.

2 Interpretation

2.1 Objective

127: The objective of interpretation is **to understand what is meant in the text**, and to grasp that meaning **in its proper historical context, in accord with its proper mode and level of thought and expression, and in the light of the circumstances and intention of the writer**.

Critical realist: possible to know w. probability or certainty the mg of a text by raising & answering all relevant questions. Ben Meyer, N.T. Wright, James Dunn

2.2 Learning and interpretation

Why is it that there is not a flood of books and articles giving an exegesis of Euclid's Elements, but an unending series of exegeses of, e.g., the fourth gospel? In **Euclid** one is dealing with a straightforward systematic statement about objects, where the meaning of each term is univocal and explained. **One has to study to learn about the objects**, but once one has learned geometry there are no exegetical problems with Euclid. But whenever a text is written in a **commonsense or artistic or religious mode different from one's own, and the more it includes symbolic and intersubjective elements, elemental meaning, and the more it entails the effective and constitutive functions of meaning, which open upon foundational issues, the more there arises the problem of interpretation.** 152: '... statements may be transported to other communities distant in place or in time. Horizons, values, interests, intellectual development, experience may differ. Expression may have intersubjective, artistic, symbolic components that appear strange. Then there arises the question, What is meant by the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, the book? Many answers seem possible, and none seems quite satisfactory. **Such in general is the problem of interpretation.**'

Four factors have heightened the problem in our time: (1) world consciousness and historical consciousness, making us aware of many different cultures at the present time and of the great differences that separate present from past cultures; (2) the pursuit of the human sciences, where meaning in a fundamental category, and so interpretation a central task; (3) the confusion in cognitional theory and epistemology – interpretation is a particular case of knowing; (4) modernity and its ambiguities, not to be rejected or accepted wholesale, but demanding that interpretation be kept distinct from other specialties.

2.3 Exegetical operations

There are three sets of basic exegetical operations: understanding the text (sections 2-5), judging the correctness of one's understanding (sections 6-7), and stating what one judges to be the correct understanding of the text.

2.4 Understanding the text

Understanding the text has four main aspects, and they are aspects of a single coming to understand.

2.4.1 Understanding the object

The task of understanding the text has as its objective **'to know what happened to be the objects, real or imaginary, intended by the author of the text'** (156). There are **four conditions** for understanding what happened to be the objects intended by the author of the text. In discussing them Lonergan moves **from the more proximate to the more remote.**

Does this account for historical-critical and theological interpretation?

The first condition is a preunderstanding of the object that is actually intended in the text. While it is true that I can know all about the objects treated in a text, and yet the whole task of interpretation still may remain before me, because I want to understand the object **intended**, still **some preunderstanding of the object intended is a condition for understanding the text**. And in fact the more I know about the object the better. Interpreters are already endowed with at least a general or potential familiarity with the objects, and only from this can they proceed to understand how the author intended the same objects.

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What is being opposed here is the Principle of the Empty Head, or presuppositionless hermeneutics. The more one knows about the objects, the more likely it will be that one can understand what another said about them. Anything more than simply repeating the author's own words is mediated by my experience, understanding, and judgment. **The wider my experience, the deeper the development of my understanding, the more balanced my judgment, the greater is the likelihood that I will discover just what the author meant.** Otherwise I am just looking at signs. In interpretation I am guided by the signs to proceed from my general and habitual knowledge to a precise knowledge of just what this person meant. Otherwise I am in the dark, and I will be relying on guesswork or personal preferences and wishes.

This may be enough.

2.4.2 Understanding the words

'Understanding the object accounts for the plain meaning of the text, the meaning that is obvious because both author and interpreter understand the same thing in the same way. However, as in conversation, so too in reading, the author may be speaking of *P* and the reader may be thinking of *Q*. In that case, sooner or later, there will arise difficulty. Not everything true of *P* will also be true of *Q*, and so the author will appear to the interpreter to be saying what is false and even absurd.'

If it isn't ...

The author then is speaking of one thing, and I am thinking of another. If I maintain my position, I am just a controversialist, not an interpreter. To be an interpreter, more work is required. I consider the possibility that I myself am at fault. I read further, I reread. Eventually I stumble on the possibility that the author is thinking not of *Q* but of *P*, and with that correction the meaning of the text becomes plain. I have to read and reread, engage in the self-correcting process of learning, enter and surmount the hermeneutic circle, which is done only by understanding. 159: 'The meaning of a text is an intentional entity. It is a unity that is unfolded through parts, sections, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words. We can grasp the unity, the whole, only through the parts; at the same time the parts are determined in their meaning by the whole which each part partially reveals.' I surmount the circle by spiraling into the meaning of the whole, 'using each new part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in reading the earlier parts.' Here I will employ the rules, techniques, methods of exegesis, to the extent that they assist me in understanding what happened to be the objects intended by the author. So I can analyze the composition of the text, determine the author's purpose, come to know the people for whom an author wrote or the occasion on which he or she wrote or the nature of the linguistic, grammatical, stylistic means he or she employed. But all of this is for the sake of arriving at an understanding of the text. The essential observance is to note my every failure to understand clearly and exactly and to sustain

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my reading and rereading until my inventiveness or good luck have eliminated my failure to understand.

So all of this is a part of the aspect of interpretation called 'understanding the words.'

2.4.3 Understanding the author

It is not always sufficient that with the *author* by his or her *words* I understand the object to which his words refer, or that I overcome relatively simple misunderstandings by sustained rereading and inventiveness. There may still be further difficulties. I might still be lost. I might have to understand the author himself or herself, his or her nation, language, time, culture, way of life, and cast of mind. Here Lonergan is introducing what he will come to call the scholarly differentiation of consciousness, which is largely a matter of acquiring an understanding of the common sense of other peoples. '... just as common sense itself is a matter of understanding what to say and what to do in any of a series of situations that commonly arise, so understanding another's common sense is a matter of understanding what he would say and what he would do in any of the situations that commonly arose in his place and time.'

Scholarship

2.4.4 Understanding oneself

Even all this – preunderstanding, diligent re-reading, careful observance of exegetical methods, scholarly understanding of another's mentality – may be insufficient. Major texts, classics, may call for a new horizon, a revolution in one's own outlook, a conversion, a rethinking of everything on the basis of a radical change, before one can understand what happened to be the objects intended by another. There is an existential dimension of hermeneutics. Conversion is the basic step, but there is the labor of thinking out everything from the new and profounder viewpoint. The classics are never fully understood; we always want to learn more from them. They ground a tradition, and create the milieu in which they are studied and interpreted. They produce a preunderstanding from which they will be read, studied, interpreted. That tradition may be genuine or unauthentic, watering down the original message.

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This existential aspect of interpretation moves one on to the functional specialties of dialectic and foundations. The primary task has shifted.

2.5 Judging the correctness of one's interpretation

2.5.1 The criterion

How do I know if my interpretation is correct? or probable? If and to the extent that it meets all relevant questions. What are relevant questions? Those which arise out of moving from my own initial context into the context of the author. 162-63: 'The relevant questions usually are not the questions that inspire the investigation. One begins from one's own *Fragestellung*, from the viewpoint, interests, concerns one had prior to studying the text. But the study of the text is a process of learning. As one learns, one discovers more and more the questions that concerned the author, the issues that confronted him, the problems he was trying to solve, the material and methodical

resources at his disposal for solving them. So one comes to set aside one's initial interests and concerns, to share those of the author, to reconstruct the context of his thought and speech.' This is the ec-static aspect of interpretation, setting aside one's own initial interests and concerns, and reconstructing the context of the author.

2.5.2 Context

But what is a context? Heuristically, the context of the word is the sentence, the context of the sentence is the paragraph, etc., but actually a context is the interweaving of questions and answers in limited groups. The group is limited because everything focuses on a single topic. But determining what that topic is is difficult: it is the unity that embraces the interrelated multiplicity of questions and answers in a single and unified, however complex, understanding. The subtle interweaving of questions and answers is described on 164-65, but we can go on to section 7, 'A Clarification.'

Entering the author's context entails a reconstruction of the process that moved the author forward. But this does not mean re-enacting the author's life. It might entail understanding some things about an author's development that the author did not grasp clearly, as Lonergan reconstructed the process of Aquinas's development on grace in a way that Aquinas himself probably never did. There are sources and circumstances I may never know, of course, so I won't understand the text itself better than the author did. Furthermore, reconstruction is not the same as reliving the author's life. It is grasping the principal operators (questions) that moved an author or a community forward. If the text is artistic and symbolic, adequate understanding of the objects intended demands a capacity to feel what the author felt and to respect the values that the author respected. But again this is not a matter of re-enacting the author's psychic life.

2.5.3 Actual judgment

167: 'If there really are no further questions, [one's] interpretation will be certain. But there may be further relevant questions that [one] has overlooked and, on this account, [one] will speak modestly. Again, there may be further relevant questions to which [one] adverts, but [one] is unable to uncover the evidence that would lead to a solution. Such further questions may be many or few, of major or minor importance. It is this range of possibilities that leads exegetes to speak with greater or less confidence or diffidence and with many careful distinctions between the more probable and the less probable elements in their interpretations.'

2.6 *Stating the meaning of the text*

Here Lonergan is concerned, not with the statement that would take place in communications, where one would tell people, for example, what the meaning of the text implies in their lives; or in systematics, where one uses a philosophy to embellish the meaning of the text; or in doctrines, where one relates the meaning of the text to a doctrine of the church. Rather, he is concerned with the expression of the meaning of a text by an exegete qua exegete. When the exegete is speaking to other exegetes, that expression will be technical, using the instruments provided by research, and functionally related to previous work in the field. When he/she is speaking to one's pupils, he/she

might consider taking them through the process by which one arrived at one's own conclusions. When speaking to the theological community, to exegetes in other fields, and to those engaged in other functional specialties, then, first, he/she will respect the originality of each author and not attempt to transpose to another language prematurely but be content to convey an impression of the foreign, the strange, the archaic. . But the possibility of explanatory understanding should not be overlooked. What would this be? 172-73: 'If people were shown how to find in their own experience elements of meaning, how these elements can be assembled into ancient modes of meaning, why in antiquity the elements were assembled in that manner, then they would find themselves in possession of a very precise tool, they would know it in all its suppositions and implications, they could form for themselves an *ex notion* and they could check just how well it accounted for the foreign, strange, archaic things presented by the exegetes.' Thus chapter 3 on Meaning, and the stages of meaning offers the beginning of such an account.