

# Where does Hermeneutics Lead?

## Lonergan and Heidegger on the Phenomenological Hermeneutics of the Subject and its Purpose

### I. Reorienting Phenomenology: A Hermeneutics of Factual Appropriation <sup>1</sup>

I would like to begin by distinguishing by contrast what I understand by the term hermeneutics. One common account of hermeneutics considers it to be just one among a range of roughly equivalent philosophical positions that can be taken up or put down at will as it serves or fails to serve the task at hand. Or it considers hermeneutics, if not one option among many, at least a secondary exercise grounded in a derivative set of implications drawn from the primary philosophical task, which is generally thought to be either epistemology or metaphysics. I don't think either of these positions is tenable when looked at closely. If one affirms the reality that all our thinking about thought and about being takes place in language<sup>2</sup> and denies the possibility of a single abstract language that would be a universal idiom of sorts (Russel's logical atomism, for example), then, it seems to me that one is committed to the priority of hermeneutics, in some sense, for any philosophical enterprise.

If this is correct, however, then to the convinced hermeneutist it is worth stating honestly that, despite a certain distaste for the term from its early figures, *hermeneutics is epistemology*<sup>3</sup> (at least from Heidegger and Gadamer forward) and it also includes what Lonergan calls *cognitional theory*. Hermeneutics, so understood, endeavors to understand both how the world appears for us such that we can come to understand it and also how it is that humans understand the world in a distinctly human way, namely, by articulating perspectives and at times by transcending them.

It was a disagreement over the hermeneutic character of philosophy ("philosophy" understood here as phenomenology) that led to the break between Heidegger and his *Vaterfreund*, Edmund Husserl. Heidegger contends that Husserl's return to life – *zu den Sachen selbst* – fails to grasp the way in which life – the concourse between Dasein and world – generates the categories of its own interpretation.<sup>4</sup> He argues that rather than beginning with the *fact* of science and proceeding to derive a more basic set of categories (intentional forms) as Husserl does, the deeper and primary possibility of phenomenology is to engage in the original clarification of facticity as such. Not to *order* being, but to discover the meaning of being as it gives itself from itself. He calls this a hermeneutics of facticity. Yet, for this to be truly originary – a primordial science

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<sup>1</sup> Lonergan defines hermeneutics as the study of "the principles of interpretation" and distinguishes it from "exegesis" which is the application of those principles to a given text (MIT 153). By "principles" Lonergan means not primarily rules for reading, but cognitional processes.

<sup>2</sup> Or at least that the pre-linguistic acts of the mind are always expressed in language that precedes us and of which we are never simply the masters.

<sup>3</sup> See Merold Westphal's article of this title reprinted as Ch. 3 in his *Overcoming Onto-Theology*. There he writes, "But hermeneutics... is a reflection on the nature and limits of human knowledge... It is a species [of epistemology] diametrically opposed to foundationalist epistemologies, but it belongs to the same genus precisely because, like them, it is a meta-theory about how we should understand the cognitive claims of common sense, the natural and social sciences, and even of metaphysics and theology" (49)

<sup>4</sup> "'To be' means for [Husserl] nothing other than true being, objectivity, true for a theoretical, scientific knowing. Here there is no inquiry into the specific being [Sein] of consciousness, of the experiences, but rather into a distinctive manner of being an object for an objective science of consciousness."

[*Urwissenschaft*] – such a hermeneutics cannot privilege or presuppose any theoretical framework. This methodological restriction ultimately leads Heidegger to rethink of the leading senses of being, intuition, and understanding. In this rethinking, he attempts to move from a consideration of phenomena “on hand” for consciousness to the givenness of both consciousness and phenomena in facticity.

In this endeavor, Heidegger maintains the basic Husserlian claim that phenomenology must be descriptive, yet he comes to see that such descriptions cannot pretend to rest on pure eidetic insight into something present in a pristine form in consciousness. Instead, if phenomenology is to grasp consciousness as it is prior to scientific conceptualization, it must grasp it in the prior multiplicity of its worldly experience – i.e., in its hermeneutic employment. Hermeneutic here means at least four things.

First, hermeneutic phenomenology is *dialectic* because Dasein is essentially determined by its potentiality for discourse and discourse is always between two. Moreover, (and in a second sense) the phenomenon that Dasein is and the phenomena it questions are often only partially given. Indeed, Dasein is the signal example of this, its phenomenality is that of a presence perforated by the absence of its possibility. Thus, phenomenology as an exercise of clarification is a dialectic between what is manifest and what is hidden.

Second, and for that same reason, hermeneutic phenomenology is *interpretive*.<sup>5</sup> Because Dasein is always already dissipated amidst worldly concerns and affairs, it is only partially given over to itself, yet that partialness is also a plurality of involvements and identities. Thus, as the subject of its own investigation Dasein is never simply *on hand* for itself, but must be reconstituted – *gathered* in Augustine’s language to which Heidegger is indebted – and so interpreted. This has significant implications for fundamental ontology because if Dasein is to be the starting point for discovering the meaning of the question of being, then getting a correct interpretation of its peculiar phenomenality will be methodologically determinative.

Third, because it is the interpretive key for all other interpretations of being, hermeneutic phenomenology is *transcendental*. It is a working out of the conditions on which the possibility of any other ontological investigation depends.

Finally, hermeneutic phenomenology is *existential*: “[The] hermeneutic [of Dasein] is an analytic of the ‘existentiality of existence’. This is the philosophically primary sense.”<sup>6</sup> This last sense supplies the leading sense of interpretation in *Being and Time*. A phenomenological hermeneutics begins with the being whose mode of being (i.e., existentiality) is that it questions its being.

Heidegger has eschewed the clarified seeing of eidetic consciousness for the hurly-burly flux and melee of factual life from which we must wrest an authentic interpretation of Dasein. It is precisely this return to the concrete that necessitates a hermeneutic approach that uncovers not only what is self-evident in our awareness, but uncovers what lies hidden or buried as well as what is preeminently unapparent: the not-yet. *It is because Dasein’s existence is ek-static, already out ahead of itself in some sense, that to grasp it requires interpretation rather than only intuition.*<sup>7</sup> In other words, because Dasein is in part its projection of possibility there can be no complete affording intuition: it essentially escapes original givenness. There is no Archimedean point or

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<sup>5</sup> “The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting” (SZ37 /BT62).

<sup>6</sup> SZ, H38

<sup>7</sup> Indeed we could say that the hermeneutic turn is precisely the rethinking of the Kantian/Husserlian notion of intuition. Heidegger calls it “hermeneutic intuition” in one of his earliest courses.

perspective from which to grasp the world.

The foregoing makes clear why, for Heidegger, *a phenomenological hermeneutics* must be a kind of appropriation, what he describes as the “appropriation of understanding in the being that understands.”<sup>8</sup> Like Lonergan, Heidegger contends that the basic form of human understanding is operative at the pre-theoretical level of factual life; that it is the “ground” of all other forms of understanding, and that, to grasp this first principle of knowing and being requires the individual – Dasein – to attend to her own enactment. For both thinkers, like Kierkegaard before them, any knower – the religious believer, Hegel, or, God forbid, the assistant professor – is also a particular individual and therefore someone who must come to understand truth not merely objectively, but also subjectively.<sup>9</sup> For both thinkers, our first truth, the truth of existence, determines the manner in which it (and all other truth) is grasped. And for both the original form of that “grasping” is interpretation understood as self-appropriation.

This primordial relation to oneself and, through oneself, to beings is manifest in questioning.<sup>10</sup> For Heidegger as for Lonergan, questions are the spontaneous response of inquiring intelligence to a world that precedes it and that confronts it with a plenitude that it cannot master. For both, the question that dominates contemporary thought is the question of meaning,<sup>11</sup> and for both that is further specified as the question of the meaning of being. For both, again, the question of the meaning of being involves at least two equiprimordial components: the meaning of the world mediated by meaning and the origin or ground of meaning. The meaning of being is both constitutive of Dasein (or intentional consciousness) and therefore in a sense precedes it. Yet, it is also constituted by that very consciousness, which is to say that it doesn’t make sense to speak of a human world apart from the human meanings that give impetus and shape to its institutions, values, progress, and decline.<sup>12</sup>

## II. Questioning Subjectivity

For both Lonergan and Heidegger an interrogative posture is characteristic of human being – we might say that questioning is the movement of human becoming. For this reason, both share a deep concern with *truth*. Both, I think, would agree with Aristotle that “truth” is “to say of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, what is at stake in this word “to say”? Aristotle clearly means it metaphorically. To say is to articulate whether in speech or written word or deed. To say is to give an account (*logos*) of what is. *But who is it who speaks, writes, and acts?* This account of truth is complicated precisely because of the kind of being that questions its being (and all other beings).

This is of course, the problem of temporality and historicity which is forcefully expressed in Heidegger’s thought and becomes a defining preoccupation of Lonergan’s work. How are we

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<sup>8</sup> SZ, H150

<sup>9</sup> From Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript: “The subjective thinker’s task is to understand himself in existence” (CUP 351).

<sup>10</sup> “Dasein is the being that questions its being” (cf. SZ, H7-8). Of course moods too, for Heidegger, are indispensable; however, we will focus on the central phenomenon of questioning because it is a shared priority with Lonergan.

<sup>11</sup> Lonergan, Bernard. 2010. “Hermeneutics” (1962) in *Early Works on Theological Method*. UT Press. There he argues that meaning is the fundamental category of the human sciences as *Geisteswissenschaften*.

<sup>12</sup> Lonergan writes in “The Analogy of Meaning,” for example, that “meaning is constitutive of (1) communication, (2) potentiality, (3) human knowing, (4) human living, and (5) human society. See: Bernard Lonergan. 2010. “The Analogy of Meaning” (Sept., 1963) in *Early Works on Theological Method I*. UT Press.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, Book IV.7

to discover and assent to truth as historical beings? That question is really two questions: *How do we as historical beings assent to truth?*<sup>14</sup>, and *What does it mean to assent to truth that is itself historical?*

Loneragan's preoccupation with the question of history for philosophical and religious truth led to an interest in hermeneutics as I've defined it and that interest grew in proportion to his developing appreciation of the scope, complexity, and centrality of meaning in human life. The world of mature humans, according to Lonergan – lettered and unlettered, scientist, humanist, and soldier – that world is a world *mediated by meaning*. While that insight is already operative in the work *Insight*, it is not until *Method in Theology* that we have the full measure of Lonergan's philosophical engagement with its implications and his resulting account of hermeneutics. It is there that *Insight's* hermeneutics of cognitional interiority<sup>15</sup> is supplemented in two key ways.

First, to his three conscious operations – experiencing, understanding, and judging – is added a fourth, deciding. And with this addition Lonergan recognizes what Ivo Coehlo calls “the existential priority of the horizon of deliberation.”<sup>16</sup> The recognition of a fully distinct fourth “level” of conscious intentionality does not just provide a more complete account of human consciousness, it also has implications for the appropriation and application of the method conscious performance grounds. It requires a reorientation from *insight to love* as the ground of one's conscious performance – from knowing and judging to valuing and doing as the boarder and more ultimate context for grasping the subject as subject. (More on that in a moment.)

The second, supplement is a greatly expanded account of meaning characterized by a particular attention to its communal mediations. Like the first supplement, here too Lonergan's development comes from a greater appreciation of the way that history (= temporality) is determinative for a faithful account of the subject. His *Method in Theology* is also a “Method in Hermeneutics” in the four senses outlined above – dialectical, interpretive, transcendental, and existential. The term “method” can be misleading to those unfamiliar with Lonergan. Method, here, is not a set of rules external to the subject, but a set of decisions about one's conscious performance in response to questions and answers. It is, the process by which intelligent persons engage with history in such a way that insights become successive and cumulative without ceasing to be historically conditioned. To put it simply, it is the means by which we come to know being in time; the means by which we can come to an understanding of truth in the midst of development and in view of future development.<sup>17</sup> The function of this method is to enable an authentic and on-going self-appropriation of one's knowing and living that can accommodate a peculiarly human temporality in which, to recall Kierkegaard, all knowledge even if “objectively true” is also always “subjectively held” by concrete people in diverse circumstances with varying degrees of bias.

With its emphasis on meaning, *Method* supplies an essential complement to the unrestricted desire for knowledge of *Insight*: that is, the love of others which forms the traditions within which we come to self-consciousness. Where *Insight* focuses on the nature of human consciousness, the formal unrestrictedness of its inquiry, and its development and aberrations, *Method* articulates the inverse direction of development wherein communities, cultures, and traditions make possible and condition that individual development. Lonergan calls these two movements, the way from “below

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<sup>14</sup> And how is that assent founded upon and therefore conditioned by our historical situatedness?

<sup>15</sup> The terms comes from Fred Lawrence.

<sup>16</sup> Ivo Coehlo, *Method and Hermeneutics*, p.7. In relation to *Insight*, he notes that in *Insight* there is a certain relation between *universal willingness* and the *universal viewpoint*, however, the level of decision is never asserted to form part of the *integral heuristic structure* at its base (MH 88).

<sup>17</sup> Lonergan interprets St. John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* as a call for development.

upward” and the way from “above downward.” These two vectors of the subject’s becoming must be taken together if we are to have a clear picture of the development and performance of human intelligence. Indeed, they constitute the deep, existential structure of hermeneutics:

By acknowledging the priority of the way from above downwards [in Method], Lonergan joined Gadamer’s hermeneutics in stressing...that intellectual development’s rhythm of believing to understand and understanding to believe is both inevitable and reasonable because it describes just how reason works.”<sup>18</sup>

The integration of these vectors leads to Lonergan’s “integral hermeneutics” that can acknowledge both the individual and her community; both the conditioned and communal nature of truth; its historical situatedness and yet the desire for transcendence propelled by our native impulse to inquiry. Lonergan, according to Lawrence, had “integrate[ed] Augustine’s hermeneutics of love into his foundational methodology.”<sup>19</sup> Love, here, is not only a way of speaking about the traditions that always already precede us and so constitute the conditions of possibility for our authentic performance – it is that. But it is also a properly epistemic virtue because “pure” reason alone is often incapable of identifying its own bias. The enlightenment’s “prejudice against prejudice” did not do away with our inevitable perspectivism it merely ignored it. It is only in loving that we can come to understand fully because only love can dissolve the bias to which we all are prone<sup>20</sup> – as individuals and as communities. Thus, Lonergan’s integral hermeneutic circle is believing to understand and understanding to believe, where to believe is to love and also to believe on account of those who love us.

### III. Ethics and Evaluative Hermeneutics

Lonergan’s reconsideration of the subject as someone who decides leads him to distinguish between *intellectual* and *evaluative* hermeneutics. To grasp what is new in this distinction we will have to recall another distinction from *Insight*.

In *Insight*, he had distinguished between “objective interpretation” and “reflective interpretation.” Objective interpretation “concerns the specific problem of correctly understanding a text.”<sup>21</sup> Reflective interpretation, by contrast, is the “historical contextualization” of a particular meaning in light of previous and subsequent meanings. Thus, it “reflects” on the place of a particular author’s meaning within a genetic (or dialectical) development. This level of meaning is also reflective in a second (and more basic) sense insofar as it also requires of the interpreter “an explicit account of who the interpreter him or herself is.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, it includes or presupposes a reflection on the conditions that make interpretation *per se* possible.

In *Method* Lonergan distinguishes between his earlier account of “intellectual hermeneutics” and “evaluative hermeneutics”. Intellectual hermeneutics is,

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<sup>18</sup> Lawrence, 32

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>20</sup> I think Lawrence and Lonergan’s account here share certain similarities with the way Heidegger understands *angst* in *Being and Time*. In both cases, something distinct from calculating rationality pulls us away from our uncritical involvement in the world so as to make possible a new evaluation and self-appropriation, authenticity for Heidegger and ongoing conversion for Lonergan

<sup>21</sup> Summarized by Pat Byrne in “Lonergan on Objective and Reflective Interpretation” (Unpublished Typescript)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Moreover, this “upper blade” includes both the “universal viewpoint, which envisages heuristically the range of possibilities of human meaning and also the possible forms of human expression. Byrne continues later: “A fundamental objective of Lonergan’s method of reflective interpretation is to make the interpreter himself or herself simultaneously a subject for interpretation and self-understanding” (18).

“a matter of understanding the thing, the words, the author, and oneself, of passing judgment on the accuracy of one’s understanding, of determining the manner of expressing what one has understood.”<sup>23</sup>

This is the account of interpretation outlined in *Insight*, and it includes both objective and reflective understanding. Yet, because *Insight* has yet to distinguish decision as a fully autonomous fourth level of consciousness, the account of hermeneutics is only intellectual. With the clarification of the fourth level of decision and its priority in *Method*, Lonergan adds an account of “evaluative hermeneutics,” which add to the tri-partite cognitive structure of meaning, the additional dimensions of “constitutive and effective acts of meaning.” This “evaluative interpretation” pertains to values and therefore to feelings<sup>24</sup> and so it is a matter of *intentional response* rather than *understanding*.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, and more importantly, the expansion of hermeneutics to include dimensions of human affectivity and value means that here hermeneutics opens onto ethics: “it has to add to the interpretation that understands a further interpretation that appreciates...that discerns good and evil.”<sup>26</sup>

This is where I think Lonergan has something to add to the analysis of *Being and Time*. Heidegger claims somewhat (in)famously, that while he did not develop an ethics in *Being and Time*, he did lay the foundations for it.<sup>27</sup> In this, I think he was reformulating the Aristotelian notion that the kind of being we are tells from where we ask our ethical questions. And this will have important implications for what is considered good and evil and how we are to pursue the one and avoid the other. Yet, even if we want to grant Heidegger a generous reading, it remains the case that ethics is something of a solitary affair. The wresting of one’s authentic self from the fallenness of idle speech and *Das Mann* is the work of the *solus ipse*. While the world for Heidegger is always already intersubjective (*Mitsein*) it is nonetheless the case that authenticity is conceived of in spite of the pull of others.<sup>28</sup>

For Lonergan, by contrast, the discernment of good and evil is *collaborative*. Hermeneutics begins by acknowledging the perspectivism of individual subjects that is the inevitable consequence of historical consciousness. Yet, ethics seems to require that we share the same perspective to at least some degree. This is the goal of evaluative hermeneutics, which through its discourse with others attempts to discern error from truth. In other words, *it detects bias*: in oneself, in others, and in the authors we read and the texts we interpret. Only discourse can bring our own horizon of understanding and valuing into view and only then can it be

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<sup>23</sup> *Method*, 245

<sup>24</sup> For Lonergan, feelings are “apprehensions of value.” They indicate what we in fact value.

<sup>25</sup> It therefore, “pertains to a specialty...on the fourth level” (*Method*, 246).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 245

<sup>27</sup> What he might mean by this is at least partially clarified by his discussion of “ethos” in his *Letter on Humanism*. There he uses Heraclitus to suggest that the Greek ethos has the sense of place or the “open region.”

<sup>28</sup> One place to examine Heidegger’s account is *Being and Time*, Part One, Section IV which deals with the phenomena of being-with and the distinct form that takes between Dasein which Heidegger calls *solicitude* [*Fürsorge*] (H121-122). There he says that is deficient and indifferent modes of being-with that characterize our average and everyday experiences of the other. It has two “positive” modes. The first is to “leap in” [*einspringen*] where we take away ‘care’ from the other making that Dasein dependent. The second form is to “leap ahead” of the other [*vorausspringt*] and give ‘care’ back to that Dasein authentically and so, “for the first time.” Yet, this account remains under the caveat that it must be “interpreted in terms of the phenomena of *care*,” which Heidegger will later say reveals Dasein as a “solus ipse” caught up in an (albeit heavily qualified) “existential ‘solipsism’” (H188). While this bringing of Dasein before itself no doubt intensifies the demands of the world and those within it, it nonetheless proposes a model ethical reflection quite distinct from the “dia-logic” implied by Lonergan’s account.

evaluated. So it is by means of a full hermeneutical movement that *develops* from the reading of “texts” to an understanding of them to the interpretation of one’s own life in its possibilities and limitations in light of them that we are invited to deeper conversion – to “turn around” in our thinking. As we are reminded by the famous myth from Plato’s *Republic*: turning toward the light always involves turning towards others.

The reference to Socrates’ account of the philosopher king is not, I think, misguided insofar as the turning to the light (understanding) involves a turning towards oneself and one’s biases, but precisely for that reason it involves one in a second turning towards others. Lonergan suggests that an evaluative hermeneutics propels one into a “culture of encounter.” He writes:

“It is meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects, and allowing one’s living to be challenged at its very roots by their words and by their deeds. [...] encounter is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test.”<sup>29</sup>

In this encounter, it is the histories of others – their insights, judgments, values, decisions, and especially their questions – that form an essential element in our own self-evaluation. Lonergan agrees with Heidegger that the hermeneutic circle is universal and that it pertains not only to reading texts, but to reading oneself. Yet, he also maintains that understanding (*verstehen*) surmounts the hermeneutic circle (without dissolving it) through the self-correcting process of learning. It is thus history – the process of coming to know in time and over time – that secures for us the possibility of “transcendent”<sup>30</sup> truth not as an abstract and static reification, but as the *intelligibility of development* and the *development of intelligibility*.

Such an evaluative hermeneutics leads to ethical transcendence. It is not enough merely to advert to time as the condition of being. We must decide what to do with the time we are given. For Lonergan, this is not the solitary venture of Heidegger’s resolute Dasein. On the contrary, an evaluative hermeneutics recognizes the “the ‘we’ prior to the ‘I’” in correcting the bias that leads to oversight. It recognizes that the term of my interpretation is decision and action – what I do matters for who I am – but others are both the prior condition of my very ability to act as well as always already bound the consequences of my action. Put simply, for Lonergan, I can neither love nor do the good on my own.

Here, I’d like to recall our distinction between objective and reflective interpretation form *Insight*. Although Lonergan does not use those terms in *Method*, I think it is clear that the ethical interpretation of one’s self also places on us the demand for a *reflective* account, not merely an *objective* one. In other words, full ethical transcendence involves not only relying on the further pertinent questions and further pertinent values of the individual or a community. It also involves situating my actions – individually and collectively – in a history of development.

This makes clear that evaluative hermeneutics is not relativistic or *merely* subjective because my actions are *ek-static* in a double sense. They stand “outside” me in front of other people and also before the witness of history, which demands that I give an account of why they are part of a story of development rather than decline. The incorporation of the witness of others – individual histories – and the witness of history is the means by which I integrate what is helpful in the “hermeneutics of suspicion” without yielding to a cynicism that concedes the economics of

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<sup>29</sup> *Method*, 247

<sup>30</sup> We might understand transcendent here as the continual process of transcending new contexts, in this is it less transcendence as permanently-present and unchanging, so much as transcendent as increasingly stable over time.

power. The community is equally the condition of possibility of knowledge and its critique. Again, for Lonergan (reading Augustine) assent is understood as a kind of love born of the desire for truth. It is love that captures with equal force the irreducible subjective responsibility for the cultivation of my incarnate meaning – the meaning of my life – but also the degree of healthy suspicion and collaboration that are required for that.

What I am suggesting is that with *Method* Lonergan's *phenomenology of consciousness (Insight)* expands to include what I'd like to call a *hermeneutics of (historical) community*. The subject discovered by this hermeneutics is one in constant development (or disintegration) in two distinct ways: as a questioner and as a listener. Where Heidegger is focused on the (very real) pitfalls of the communities and traditions that constitute our world, Lonergan also recognizes their essential role in our ethical development. It is in learning to read texts, our own lives, and the lives of others we come to recognize that the perspectivism of our own viewpoint – even when judging and deciding well – requires other people. This perspectivism and the evaluative hermeneutics it leads to can, I think, accommodate the ultimate demand of the unrestricted desire to know for judgement and truth while acknowledging the *a priori* condition that what is known is always known after the mode of the knower (i.e., historically and contextually).

Lonergan calls this “revolution of outlook” the “existential dimension” of hermeneutics.<sup>31</sup> If we are convinced by his movement from intellectual to evaluative to existential hermeneutics, then we have arrived at a transcendental account in the scholastic sense (supra-generic) and the Kantian sense (a condition of possibility). More importantly, this developmental hermeneutics may provide us a way beyond the contemporary impasse at which interpretation and normativity – hermeneutics and ethics – stand opposed and unyielding.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>31</sup> *Method*, 243