

Lost in Transposition? A Response to Matt Petillo at Lonergan on the Edge 2013

Time constraints demand that I skip frivolous jokes, wasteful anecdotes, even well deserved praise and thanks for colleagues and conference organizers, to dive right into the response I have prepared. I allow myself only a moment to outline the decision that Jen and I have made in accord with a perhaps useful division of labor, by which we have tried to isolate what we felt were the two aspects of these presentations most relevant to the theme of grace, conversion, and consciousness. First, in my own turn, I will take up the problematic of the distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity in a methodical theology of grace, operative in Matt Petillo's wonderful presentation. After that, Jen will respond to the issue of Lonergan and world religions in terms of the "outer word," taking up the relevant portions of Matt's and Steven's presentations. And so: without any further ado...

Not surprisingly, Matt Petillo was able—in the first section of his paper—to generate an extremely clear articulation of perhaps *the* question currently motivating the problematic of conceiving a theology of grace that is, as it were, "at home in the third stage of meaning."¹ Allow me to repeat a portion of that question: "To what degree can metaphysical categories have explanatory potential or heuristic value for a theology that derives its terms and relations from conscious intentionality? Can we retain all the distinctions of an older theoretical theology, or do they require radical revision if they are to function as valid terms within a methodical or contemporary theology?"² As you heard, following Charles Hefling, Matt stated his judgment that "while some terms and

¹ Jeremy D. Wilkins, "Grace in the Third Stage of Meaning," *Lonergan Workshop* 24 (2010): 444.

² Petillo, Lonergan on the Edge 2013 paper, 1.

relations will survive the transposition, others may not.”³ In the interest of time, Matt did not argue this position, nor did he present Hefling’s argument with which he agrees; nor is this to be seen in any way as a deficiency in Matt’s richly dense presentation. And, in any event, Matt’s purpose in that first section of the paper was not so much to argue for or against this or that position; rather, it was to urge that “[t]he verdict should not be out before the trial begins”—that is, his purpose was to incite us to intelligent inquiry and rational reflection on the matter.⁴ Granting the basic point that Matt was trying to make in that first section of his paper, I will here propose a possibly relevant hypotheses in service of the search among Lonergan scholars for further clarity on this issue.

Simply stated, the hypothesis is this: while it is not necessarily the case that *both* of the terms “sanctifying grace” and the “habit of charity” successfully transpose into methodical terms, it is the case that the *distinction* between the two realities retains a proper grounding—now in the new context of conscious intentionality—such that a methodical theology can still maintain such a distinction despite the lack of a “point for point” transposition. Put in terms of two of the key conversation partners in this debate—namely, Father Doran and Charles Hefling—the hypothesis suggests one of perhaps a few ways to integrate the view (held by Doran) that the distinction is not lost in transposition,⁵ with the view (held by Hefling) that habits don’t transpose.⁶ Toward the clarification of this hypothesis, I will offer a necessarily telescopic exposition of *part* of

³ Petillo, Lonergan on the Edge 2013 paper, 1.

⁴ Jeremy Wilkins has put the same point in this way: “[T]here is no assurance of a simple point to point correspondence between the older theoretical and the emerging methodical systematics. Taking such a correspondence for granted would mean effectively ceding priority—and control of meaning—to metaphysics rather than to the hermeneutics of interiority.” Cf. Wilkins, “Grace in the Third Stage of Meaning,” 446.

⁵ Robert M. Doran, “Consciousness and Grace,” *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11 (1993): 57.

⁶ Charles Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 650; cf. Bernard Lonergan, “The Subject,” in *Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 73.

Hefling's position, followed by a woefully inadequate glance at a possibly relevant suggestion made by Jeremy Wilkins in a couple of his recent articles. For those interested, the hard copy of this presentation includes detailed notes, with complete citations, along with fuller arguments than I am able to share in the time remaining; for the rest, my hope is that the paper reads just skipingly enough to make my point in short order, but not so swiftly that it blurs the point beyond intelligibility.

Hefling's argument about habits not transposing grounds his claim, against Doran, that the invitation to continue drawing a distinction made in a scholastic context should be politely declined.⁷ Of the three components that make up the argument, I find the last to be the most compelling. For it is there that he submits the controversy to the real test,

⁷ The article in question, published in *Theological Studies* in 2007, is called "On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran." As the title suggests, it is a response to the provocative suggestions made by Father Doran in a series of works; most proximately in his [that is, Doran's] 2005 book *What is Systematic Theology*, and his 2006 article "The Starting Point of Systematic Theology" (also in *Theological Studies*); but more remotely in the 1993 article, "Consciousness and Grace," that marked Doran's "first published attempt to move beyond [foundations] ... and into systematics"—a move that has generated not a little intelligent conversation and scholarship, including a few dissertations done right here at Marquette! I should mention also that the primary bone of contention in Hefling's 2007 article concerns the so-called "four-point hypothesis," a matter from which I am prescinding altogether in the interest of time, though not, I believe, to the detriment of the arguments presented either in Hefling's article or in my response. But it should be noted that, technically speaking, Hefling is not arguing *directly* against the drawing of the distinction of grace and charity in a methodical theology; rather, he is arguing against the validity of using the "four-point hypothesis," *a constituent part of which* concerns the distinction of grace and charity, which Hefling believes does not survive the transposition into interiority.

In the article, Hefling offers several reasons *not* to maintain the distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity in the third stage of meaning. The first reason is grounded in methodology. Hefling's point, put in his very own Heflingian style, is that the invitation to go on drawing the distinction in question was, as it were, issued *from* a Scholastic context; but without a warrant grounded in the methodical context, "we might do well to decline the invitation." Cf. Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity," 651. Cf. also 648, where he writes: "[T]he methodological basis on which sanctifying grace was originally distinguished from charity does not lend itself to being updated." Simply put, the practice of drawing the distinction between entitative and operative habits (such as sanctifying grace and charity, respectively) is a "habit" that *comes from* and, in Hefling's estimation, ought to *stay in* the now outdated context of scholasticism.

The second reason Hefling offers amounts to an argument from authority. "Lonergan," he writes, "evidently found no reason to draw an equivalent distinction in his later works." Cf. Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity," 648. Jeremy Wilkins amplifies this point by reminding us that in the medieval and renaissance contexts, this distinction was not held on "doctrinal grounds but by way of an explanatory hypothesis," namely, by the likes of Aquinas and Suarez; but that—precisely *because* of its hypothetical status—theologians were free to think the matter out differently and, if need be, as in the case of Lombard and Scotus, flat out deny the reality of the distinction. Wilkins, "Grace in the Third Stage of Meaning," 9.

namely, whether there is any “experiential data that would confirm such a distinction.”⁸

As far as Hefling is concerned, there is not. Here follows an attempted summary of his argument.

From the list of scholastic terms used to articulate a theoretical conception of grace—namely, the soul, its essence, its potencies, its habits, and its acts—“only one remains once the transposition has been effected.”⁹ The term that remains is “act[s],” in virtue of the availability of acts to the experience of the conscious subject; the others—and I emphasize the inclusion of “habits” with the list of all the others—do not remain on grounds that, in Lonergan’s own terms—quoting from his 1968 lecture titled “The Subject”—“none of these is given in consciousness.”¹⁰ The death sentence issued for habits would seem to include both kinds of habit from the scholastic catalogue, namely, the “entitative habits” that modify the essence of the soul (sanctifying grace is such a habit), and the “operative habits” that modify the soul’s potencies or faculties (the habit of charity is such a habit, modifying the faculty of the will). But, as we discover in following out the argument, Hefling does not allow sanctifying grace to perish at the hands of the transposition, and this on grounds that Lonergan himself preserved it as something of which the concrete subject is conscious—under its new and familiar name, “the dynamic state of being in love with God,” which he [Lonergan] characterized in *Method in Theology* as “the habitual actuation of the human capacity for self-transcendence.”¹¹

⁸ Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 648.

⁹ Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 650.

¹⁰ Lonergan, “The Subject,” 73; cf. Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 650.

¹¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 283; cf. Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 651.

After making this point, Hefling's article makes a crucial move, a move that is rendered somewhat obscure in my exposition inasmuch as I have opted to prescind entirely from the remote context of Hefling's discussion of the controversial distinction—namely, the context pertaining to the so-called “four-point hypothesis.” The difficult move I refer to is this: Having begun his article with¹²—and indeed having progressed several stages through his argument towards¹³—the judgment that the dynamic state of being in love indicates what in the old terminology was named sanctifying grace,¹⁴ Hefling goes on—or at least seems to go on—to hypothesize that this dynamic state really refers to the functions, not of sanctifying grace alone, but of sanctifying grace *as well as* the habit of charity. These functions are, respectively: (1) the transformation of the conscious subject as subject and (2) the reorientation of that same subject's conscious acts. He seems to be arguing, in other words, that the dynamic state of being in love with God really is a sort of “amalgam”¹⁵ of *both* sanctifying grace *and* the habit of charity, and that the amalgam is notionally distinct, not from one or another of the scholastic pair, but from the scholastic pair *as pair*: that is, sanctifying grace together with the habit of charity. It is on these grounds, if I have correctly understood the argument, that the distinction doesn't transpose.

¹² Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 645.

¹³ Hefling, “On the (Economic) Trinity,” 656.

¹⁴ In this move Hefling seems to be following the Lonergan of *Method in Theology*, where he states that the dynamic state of being in love with God “really is sanctifying grace but notionally differs from it.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 107. It should be noted, however, that at the 1974 Lonergan Workshop at Boston College, Lonergan himself—albeit in oral remarks—characterizes the dynamic state as “an amalgam” of grace and charity; this would seem to be a development from the position published in *Method*. I owe this insight to Wilkins, who is in turn indebted to Doran. Cf. Jeremy D. Wilkins, “Grace and Growth: Aquinas, Lonergan, and the Problematic of Habitual Grace,” *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), 730, n. 22.

¹⁵ Cf. previous footnote. The comment from the 1974 lecture would seem to support Hefling's position, though he does not use it in support thereof, nor does he seem to be aware of the usage. I am not suggesting that Hefling *used* the word amalgam; that is Lonergan's word. What I am suggesting is that the word fits Hefling's account, and that something like this account may have been in Lonergan's mind when he used the word in the first place.

But it isn't just that the distinction between the two realities doesn't transpose. It is also that the formality under which they were once considered doesn't transpose. A "habit" as such," Hefling writes, "has no place among ... the terms appropriate to a methodical theology."¹⁶ The reason he gives is this: "[a] habit is a metaphysical entity, a form, inferred from the regular recurrence of acts. The acts, in this case, are conscious ... but that which is inferred is not."¹⁷ And we're not just talking about the *operative* habit of charity here; recall that sanctifying grace, in the old terminology, was also understood as a habit—an *entitative* habit. In light of this, it no longer seems the case—as it once did—that Hefling denies the transposability to the habit of charity, but affirms it for sanctifying grace. Rather, it seems more accurate to say that Hefling denies the transposability to *both*, if both are considered in their metaphysical terms, which is to say, *as habits*. And yet there is something available to consciousness, once we've transitioned to the third stage of meaning. What perhaps throws us off is that he—following the Lonergan of *Method in Theology*—notionally distinguishes this experiential datum from, but really identifies it with, sanctifying grace, even though his [that is, Hefling's] argument would seem to suggest that [as I've said] it is really identical to the *combination* of grace and charity. Either way, what Hefling leaves us with, unless I have totally misunderstood the argument, is the following: the dynamic state of being in love with God is a transposed conception of the realities formerly known as sanctifying grace and the habit of charity—bundled into one, and stripped of their metaphysical form.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity," 651.

¹⁷ Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity," 651. Cf. the similar point made by Wilkins, note 20 below.

¹⁸ Not a little is condensed, if not entirely left out, on the way to this conclusion. For example, of considerable import is the implicit distinction between the *reality* of what is called a habit, and that reality as *notionally understood* in metaphysical terms, i.e., as "habit." As the forgoing has argued, Hefling does not deny that the realities of habits transpose; quite the contrary, he seems to argue that they do—just not "as habits" in the metaphysical sense. Cf. Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity," 651. In evidence of this is

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I move now into the high-stakes final minute of my presentation. And alas, I have scarcely begun. Let me end, then, in a blaze of further questions:

What if one wanted (with Doran) to hold on to the old distinction *but at the same time* (with Hefling) deny the transposability of habits as habits? What if one wanted (with Doran *and* Hefling, though in different ways) to maintain the “real identity” between the dynamic state of being in love with God and sanctifying grace *but at the same time* (against *both* of them, though for different reasons) admit into a methodical theology a reality that is at once really distinct from the dynamic state, but not itself given in consciousness?

I suggest to you, that in one of his most recent articles,¹⁹ Jeremy Wilkins has articulated the broad lines of a way forward in precisely this vein. Like Hefling, he notes that “the habit”—and by this he means the habit in general—“itself is not an immediate datum of consciousness.” But this does not render it entirely outside the realm of interiority; in addition to the conscious, habitual acts themselves, and the pertinent, attendant feelings, there is the “conscious element that corresponds to the existence of the habit.” That conscious element? The inference, or the affirmative judgment that one *has* the habit.

the fact that Hefling treats *both* sanctifying grace *and* the habit of charity as “habits,” as entitative and operative respectively; the point of the article is not that the realities referred to by these terms are not accessible to consciousness, but that they are not so accessible *as habits*. Nor is this contradicted by Lonergan’s use of the word “habitual” in his definition of the dynamic state (“the habitual actuation of the human capacity for self-transcendence”; *Method in Theology*, 283).

If the conclusion that I have arrived at—namely, that Hefling’s understanding of the dynamic state of being in love with God *is* a transposed conception of grace and charity, bundled into one, and stripped of their metaphysical form—is correct, a further question emerges. Why identify this reality with sanctifying grace more so than with the habit of charity? See note 14 above about Lonergan’s later practice of treating the dynamic state as an “amalgam,” something which Hefling himself seems to do, though he does not—at least, not in the article in question—seem to be aware of Lonergan’s “development” in this regard.

¹⁹ Jeremy D. Wilkins, “Grace in the Third Stage of Meaning: Apropos Lonergan’s ‘Four-Point Hypothesis’,” *Lonergan Workshop* 24 (2010): 443–67.

Still, what is desired is an explanatory definition, grounded in interiority, of habits in general, and of the habit of charity in particular. I cannot now do more than parrot the words that Wilkins offers as a possibly relevant way forward. For Wilkins, a habit in general “seems to be an integration of a flexible circle of schemes of recurrence in the function of the subject.”²⁰ The schemes of recurrence relevant to the habit of charity in particular would be those related to the “efficacious befriending of God and all things in God.”²¹

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To repeat Matt’s question, with which I opened my response: “Can we retain all the distinctions of an older theoretical theology, or do they require radical revision?” Though there are many that believe we *can* retain all of the older distinctions, I believe that a revision is in order. And inasmuch as that revision is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and above all, charitable or loving—in that measure, such a revision will be radical, indeed.

Thank you.

²⁰ The full quote to which this and the two prior citations belong: “A habit ... seems to be an integration of a flexible circle of schemes of recurrence in the function of the subject. The habit itself is not an immediate datum of consciousness; its existence is inferred from the consistent, prompt, and joyful performance of the pertinent conscious operations and occurrence of the pertinent feelings. The conscious element that corresponds to the existence of the habit is not the *habit*; it is the affirmative judgment with its borrowed content.” Wilkins, “Grace in the Third Stage of Meaning,” 449.

²¹ Wilkins, “Grace and Growth,” 740.