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Moral Theology and the Human Sciences

- 1 The paper was written for the International Theological Commission, of which Lonergan was an original member. Frederick Crowe tells us that in his covering letter to Cardinal Seper, Lonergan indicated that projects that would implement his ideas ‘involve so much collaboration with nontheologians or so much creativity on the part of theologians that their investigation cannot be fitted into current structures of the Theological Commission.’ A very telling comment! It would be well worth the time to investigate the history of the Commission simply to see the extent to which general categories, such as those employed in the human sciences, are regarded as important.
- 2 Lonergan begins the essay with a distinction of three cases, in order ‘to indicate something of the diversity of the issues involved’ in **the issue of the relation between moral theology and the human sciences operating in conjunction in the renovation of society** (see p. 307).
- 3 The three cases are: (1) neither the science itself nor its possible applications are in doubt (e.g., medicine, for the most part); (2) the science is not sufficiently determinate to yield fully concrete applications, and so feedback is required to discover ever better policies, plans, procedures (e.g., sociology, as evidenced by the various approaches treated in Gibson Winter’s *Elements for a Social Ethic*, footnoted in note 2); (3) the science is open to suspicion for ideology, dialectical conflict, serious defects (e.g., economics).
- 4 What, then, is human science? As science, it must honor the empirical principle: there are no true factual judgments without a foundation in relevant data. But relevant data include the data of consciousness as well as the data of sense, and so the empirical principle is not behaviorist or positivist, nor does it confine human knowledge to the world of experience, nor does it confuse factual judgments and judgments of value, which are not factual but normative. A human science follows the same path as any other science: ‘... observations yield descriptions, contrasting descriptions yield problems, problems sooner or later lead to discoveries, discoveries are formulated in hypotheses, hypotheses are expanded in processes of experimentation, experiments yield new observations which either confirm the hypothesis or lead to new discovery, hypothesis, experiment, and so on indefinitely’ (303). Such science is hypothesis, theory, system, not knowledge. It claims no more than probability. It does not offer demonstration, but the best available contemporary opinion. And it implies a continuity of theory and practice as distinct parts of a single reality.
- 5 As human, human science is subject also to a dialectical principle. The data on human beings are ambiguous. Human actions may be good or evil. Our statements may be true or false. Our development may be authentic or unauthentic. This ambiguity

affects the very data on which the science rises and rests. Error, evil, unauthenticity are not merely an absence of intelligibility, as with mathematical surds, but an unintelligible absence. Dialectic then applies to the process itself insofar as it results from bias. This is ‘the minor dialectic of sin. It changes progress into decline and decline into disaster’ (305). But there is also a major dialectic in the subjective spirit of darkness that not only would act out of bias but justify the bias itself, resort to ideology to do so, resort to power to get its way, set off a contrary ideology in those suppressed. ‘Ideologies themselves splinter, divide, conflict. In the resultant confusion [people] speculate on utopia, put their confidence in leaders, or sink into apathy and despair’ (306).

- 6 This can happen to the scientific community as well, and the moral theologian operating in conjunction with human scientists must consider not only the moral issues that arise in the objects studied in the human science but also the moral issues that arise in the subjects that do the studying. ‘... just as sin and the justification of sin by ideology are to be found on the side of the object [the data of human science], so too they may infect the scientific subject. In particular, ideology is contagious ... [and] the warfare of conflicting ideologies is stultifying.’ Where is the science to turn, especially if its practitioners eschew all theological and philosophical issues?
- 7 The fifth section turns to ‘Functions of Moral Theology’ in these considerations. And it goes back to the three cases with which the essay began. It is of course in case 3 that the challenge comes to light: ‘... the perpetuation of social evils by the strict justice of “an eye for an eye” is broken by Christian charity. The determinisms of the technology, the economy, the polity, the sociocultural heritage can be withstood by Christian hope. The ineffectualness of truth in the midst of passionately competing ideologies is remedied by the power of faith’ (309). The general procedure to be followed is one of advancing positions and reversing counterpositions, where the diagnostic is set by religious, moral, and intellectual conversion. ‘Positions are developed by finding ever more situations in which faith, hope, charity advance the cause of the good. Counterpositions are reversed inasmuch as Christian acceptance of suffering robs evil of its power to blind, to threaten, to endure’ (309). Specific procedures depend on the case. In case 1 the matter is fairly simple. In case 2 moral theologians and human scientists will be involved in an experimental process that brings about a development of social policy. Lonergan draws some suggestions from Gibson Winter, for whom different schools of human science can be drawn upon for different results, and further inspiration from Paul Ricoeur, who engaged in radical criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis that in effect advanced its positions and reversed its counterpositions. And he goes on to indicate that economics needs similar radical criticism.

Self-transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious

- 8 This has become one of the most helpful introductions to Lonergan’s thought in general, and we have it available not only in this volume but also on compact disc.

The paper is divided into five sections: the self; self-transcendence; intellectual self-transcendence; moral self-transcendence; religious self-transcendence.

- 9 The Self. The first distinction is between substance and subject. ‘When one is sound asleep, one is actually a substance and only potentially a subject. To be a subject, one at least must dream. But the dreamer is only the minimal subject: one is more a subject when one is awake, still more when one is actively intelligent, still more when one actively is reasonable, still more in one’s deliberations and decisions when one actively is responsible and free’ (314). The being of the subject is becoming: one becomes oneself. And the subject has more and more to do with his or her own becoming. The critical point in this increasing autonomy is reached ‘when the subject finds out for himself that it is up to himself to decide what he is to make of himself’ (315). One discovers that deeds, decisions, discoveries ‘affect the subject more deeply than they affect the objects with which they are concerned. They accumulate as dispositions and habits of the subject; they determine him or her; they make him or her what they are and what they are to be’ (315). Before this discovery subjects were making themselves, but after it this making of oneself is open-eyed and deliberate. ‘Autonomy decides what autonomy is to be’ (315), as contrasted with the drifter. This does not mean that we know ourselves very well; we do not. ‘... we cannot chart the future; we cannot control our environment completely or the influences that work on us; we cannot explore our unconscious and preconscious mechanisms. Our course is in the night; our control is only rough and approximate; we have to believe and trust, to risk and dare’ (315). This critical point is never transcended; what has been achieved is ever precarious, and what is to be achieved can be ever expanding, deepening. ‘To meet one challenge is to effect a development that reveals a further and graver challenge’ (316).
- 10 Self-transcendence. Self-transcendence occurs, not in the drifter but in the autonomous human subject. The account in this section describes six stages: dreamless sleep, dreaming, waking, inquiring, reflecting, and deliberating. These are enough to lay the ground for talking about intellectual and moral self-transcendence in the next two sections. Being in love will be added when he comes to speak of religious self-transcendence. What he says in this section is probably familiar to all of you, so I’m not sure we need to go into detail except to take questions. The conclusion also is familiar: ‘... human authenticity is a matter of following the built-in law of the human spirit. Because we can experience, we should attend. Because we can understand, we should inquire. Because we can reach the truth, we should reflect and check. Because we can realize values in ourselves and promote them in others, we should deliberate. In the measure that we follow these precepts, in the measure we fulfil these conditions of being human persons, we also achieve self-transcendence, both in the field of knowledge and in the field of action’ (319).
- 11 Intellectual self-transcendence. Here too we begin on familiar ground, with the contrast between the infant’s world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning. But: ‘Only too easily people can drift from infancy through childhood and a long educational process only to practice adult cognitional procedures with no clear notion

of what they are doing ... Intellectual self-transcendence is taking possession of one's own mind.' He appears, then, to identify intellectual self-transcendence with intellectual self-appropriation. But note that at the end of the section he refers to this as 'explicit intellectual self-transcendence.'

- 12 Moral self-transcendence. The stage is set by the story of the photograph taken in Prague illustrating ethical space. Lonergan draws many 'morals' from the picture: (1) there is nothing recondite about morality; (2) good and evil bear witness to each other; (3) people commonly are unwilling to accept blame, passing it along to those higher up or lower down or to the right or to the left; (4) we pretend or rationalize there is a justification for our cause; (5) ideology systematically rationalizes injustice; (6) we are impotent against large-scale, organized evil like 'clusters of nations armed with thermonuclear bombs,' and we are caught in a moral impotence of our own on a smaller scale. For Lonergan, one becomes a moral being by transcending oneself. '... when one's basic questions for deliberation regard not satisfaction but values – the vital values of health and skill, the social values that secure the vital values of the group, the cultural values that make worth while social goals and the satisfaction of vital needs – then moral self-transcendence has begun. One has ceased to need the carrot of desire and the stick of fear; one has become a self-starter, a principle of benevolence and beneficence, a genuine person whose words and deeds inspire and invite those that know him or her to aspire themselves to moral self-transcendence, to become themselves genuine persons' (324-25).
- 13 Religious self-transcendence. Stable achievement in the realm of self-transcendence occurs when one falls in love. Then one's being becomes being-in-love. The familiar trio of domestic, civic, and religious love is gone through, and the Judeo-Christian experience that he relates has parallels in other religions. Religious love is 'the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality, of our questions for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation,' etc. – all matters familiar already to you from other writings of Lonergan. Here, though, he also emphasizes that religious experiences are highly ambiguous, and that what really reveals a person is their outward deeds. 'A person can be profoundly in love with God yet fail to find it in his inner experience' (326). The dynamic state is conscious without being known. And it expresses itself in 'the religious word,' in various expressions of religious meaning and value: intersubjectivity, art, symbol, language, the portrayed lives or deeds or achievements of individuals or groups. The spoken and written word are especially important in the development and clarification of religion. Through them religion enters the world mediated by meaning and regulated by value, endowing it with its deepest meaning and highest value. Before that, it is the prior soundless word that God speaks to us by flooding our hearts with love, withdrawing us out of the world mediated by meaning and towards a world of immediacy in which image and symbol, thought and word, can lose their relevance and even disappear. The outward word, though, has a constitutive role to play. It is personal, social, and historical. Religious expression moves through the various stages of meaning and speaks in its different realms. What accounts for the difference between religious thinkers is far less differences in their religious

experience and far more differences in the culture in which their thinking and writing is embedded.

- 14 Finally, ‘moral self-transcendence is more likely to occur if religious self-transcendence has occurred. Intellectual self-transcendence is more likely to occur if both religious and moral self-transcendence have occurred’ (331).

Mission and the Spirit

- 15 What in terms of human consciousness is the transition from the natural to the supernatural (especially within an evolutionary view of the universe)? That is the question of this paper. The first consideration is vertical finality. Here Lonergan takes up a topic that he first discussed some thirty years earlier, in ‘Finality, Love, Marriage,’ and again in ‘The Natural Desire to See God.’ (CWL 4).
- 16 Finality is relation or orientation to the end. There is absolute finality, horizontal finality, and vertical finality. Absolute finality is to God, the ground and goal of every instance of the good. Horizontal finality is to a proportionate end, the end that results from what a thing is, what follows from it, and what it may exact. Vertical finality is to an end higher than the proportionate end. Older, classicist views acknowledged an instrumental type of vertical finality, in that ‘lower order’ beings could serve the purposes of ‘higher’ entities. But an evolutionary view of the universe adds the participative type of vertical finality: ‘subatomic particles somehow enter into the elements of the periodic table; chemical elements enter into chemical compounds, compounds into cells, cells in myriad combinations and configurations into the constitution of plant and animal life,’ etc., etc., as we move on into consciousness and culture (24).
- 17 A second section is entitled ‘Probability and Providence.’ It represents an attempt to indicate how contemporary thought about providence has to adjust to an evolutionary view: probabilities of emergence and probabilities of survival. The reconciliation is in the last paragraph: God ‘plans where [human beings] turn to probabilities. Nor does there come into existence, outside [God’s] planning, any agent that could interfere with his comprehensive design’ (25).
- 18 Next, ‘The Supernatural.’ ‘... any higher order is beyond the proportion of lower orders and so is relatively supernatural to them. But the infinite absolutely transcends the finite. It follows that the divine order is beyond the proportion of any possible creature and so is absolutely supernatural’ (25-26). There is vertical finality involved in our relation to God if it is true that we somehow enter into the divine life and participate in it. Here Lonergan draws on Rahner to speak of a threefold personal self-communication of divinity to humanity: in Christ the Word became flesh; through Christ we become temples of the Spirit and adoptive sons and daughters of the Father; in a final consummation we know the Father as we are known by the Father. (RD: I prefer the fourfold self-communication of *De Deo trino*.) Finality to that end is vertical finality and evolutionary finality. Vertical finality under all manifestations is

not inevitable but possible. Its ends can be attained, but need not be attained. There need not be just one end beyond a given proper proportion, and in fact the more elementary something is, the more numerous are the higher ends beyond its proper reach. Vertical finality is also obscure, and vertical finality to God is also shrouded in mystery, able perhaps to be intimated through elemental meaning but not unambiguously so. The emergence, unfolding, development, maturity of vertical finality follow an analogy of evolutionary process, to be understood in accord with emergent probabilities and under divine planning and action.

- 19 Next, 'The Human Subject.' Intentionality analysis yields a view of the human subject that fits in this evolutionary perspective. It begins from and remains with the given, with human intentional operations dynamically related in their self-assembling pattern. This dynamism rests on operators that promote activity from one level to the next, operators that alone are a priori: questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, questions for deliberation. Three types of operator yield four levels of operation. Each lower level is an instance of vertical finality, and that finality is already realized as the higher levels function: from experience to understanding to judgment to decision. Vertical finality is also self-transcendence: 'By experience we attend to the other; by understanding we gradually construct our world; by judgment we discern its independence of ourselves; by deliberate and responsible freedom we move beyond merely self-regarding norms and make ourselves moral beings' (29).
- 20 But here Lonergan introduces something new, which in this essay he calls 'the passionateness of being' (29). All of this was introduced into Lonergan's work after our conversations on psychic conversion and my suggestion of speaking of another operator or set of operators. He was not quite ready to go that far yet, but spoke for some time of quasi-operators.
- 21 The passionateness of being, then, is not intentionality as such. Rather, it 'has a dimension of its own: it underpins and accompanies and reaches beyond the subject as experientially, intelligently, rationally, morally conscious.' As underpinning, it is 'the quasi-operator that presides over the transition from the neural to the psychic' (29). As accompanying, it is 'the mass and momentum of our lives, the color and tone and power of feeling' (30). As overarching or reaching beyond, it is 'the topmost quasi-operator that by intersubjectivity prepares, by solidarity entices, by falling in love establishes us as members of community' (30), where new probabilities emerge: 'Within each individual vertical finality heads for self-transcendence. In an aggregate of self-transcending individuals there is the significant coincidental manifold in which can emerge a new creation. Possibility yields to fact and fact bears witness to its originality and power in the fidelity that makes families, in the loyalty that makes peoples, in the faith that makes religions' (30).
- 22 Still, we live under the reign of sin, and so there is a need for redemption, which lies not in what is possible to nature (as all the above is) but in what is effected by grace. Here, then, he is getting to the point of the paper: What in terms of human consciousness is the transition from the natural to the supernatural? There is an

awareness of a need for redemption, as we know how progress is marred and distorted by sin and bias and rationalization. And when redemption comes, 'it comes as the charity that dissolves the hostility and the divisions of past injustice and present hatred; it comes as the hope that withstands psychological, economic, political, social, cultural determinisms; it comes with the faith that can liberate reason from the rationalizations that blinded it' (31-32). This new order comes in the visible mission of the Son and in the word that is heard as preached, mounting up the successive levels of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding; and it comes in the invisible mission of the Spirit, descending from the gift of God's love through religious conversion to moral, and through religious and moral to intellectual [and psychic] conversion' (32). The two missions are complementary: 'Without the visible mission of the Word, the gift of the Spirit is a being-in-love without a proper object; it remains simply an orientation to mystery that awaits its interpretation. Without the invisible [note the correction of the text] mission of the Spirit, the Word enters into his own, but his own receive him not' (32). It comes through the mission of the disciples down through the ages. 'So the self-communication of the Son and the Spirit proceeds through history by a communication that at once is cognitive, constitutive, and redemptive: it is cognitive, for it discloses in whom we are to believe; it is constitutive, for it crystallizes the inner gift of the love of God into overt Christian fellowship; it is redemptive, for it liberates human liberty from thralldom to sin, and it guides those it liberates to the kingdom of the Father' (32). Experience of grace, finally, is summed up in the last paragraph (32-33), which we can read in its entirety.