

The Ongoing Genesis of Methods

- 1 The paper is the third in the series presented at Queen's University under the title 'Religious Studies and Theology.' The previous lecture, 'Religious Knowledge,' ended with the suggestion that 'inner conviction is the conviction that the norms of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility have been satisfied. And satisfying those norms is the highroad to the objectivity to be attained in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values.' The present lecture begins with the questions, Does such religious conviction have to be regarded as at best a private affair? What are the conditions under which the study of religion and/or theology might become an academic subject of specialization and investigation? And how are the two related to one another? The ongoing genesis of methods explains both the disarray of contemporary theologies and a significant set of stirrings in religious studies.
- 2 First, then, the origin of this dynamic of methods is found in the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This we have seen in other papers, so will not go into detail on it again.
- 3 But it raises a problem of foundations and relativism, and this is the second topic of this paper. 149-50: 'If method can revise the principles and laws on which a successful science has been constructed, so too, it would seem, methods themselves are open to correction and revision. If methods too can be revised, then is not the whole of science just a vast structure resting upon sand?' Or is there a foundation on which the succession of methods may be based? The response: 'all such changes and modifications come under a higher law. As the revisions of existing theories, so too the developments of existing methods are just fresh instances of attending to the data, grasping their intelligibility, formulating the content of the new insights, and checking as thoroughly as possible their validity. In brief, underpinning special methods there is ... generalized empirical method' (150).
- 4 But is this just an appeal to individual subjectivity, and as such not a secure foundation? '... if individual subjectivity is understood to mean the subject as correlative to the world of immediacy, then ... individual subjectivity, so far from offering a secure foundation, gives rise to serious doubts and well-founded uneasiness' (151). But g.e.m. 'appeals not to the individual subjectivity that is correlative to the world of immediacy but to the individual subjectivity that is correlative to the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value' (151). The experience of the subject correlative to the world of immediacy is a purely private affair, but attention, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility take individuals out of the isolation and privacy of the experiential infrastructure. But this is anything but foolproof. We attain authenticity only by unflinching fidelity to the exigences of intelligence,

reasonableness, and conscience. And the shortcomings of individuals can become the accepted practice of the group, which in turn can become the tradition accepted in good faith by succeeding generations; the authentic can become alienated from their society and culture; the average people can just go along with things as they are, and the more numerous the people who concur with that decision, the less is the hope of recovery from unauthenticity, and the greater the risk of the disintegration and decay of a civilization. 'Since disintegration and decay are not private events, even generalized empirical method is experimental. But the experiment is conducted not by any individual, not by any generation, but by the historical process itself' (152).

- 5 Next, why the proliferation of methods? 147: '... increasing specialization entails increasing limitation and ... increasing limitation serves to define the possibility and encourage the actuality of additional, distinct, even disparate methods.' Section 3 is entitled 'From Method to Methods.' There are the differentiations of method within the basic procedures of the natural sciences. There are historical studies as they developed in Germany in the nineteenth century. Lonergan traces the basic ideas of the latter from Wolf through Schleiermacher, Boeckh, and Droysen, to Dilthey, and points to the 'profound difference between natural science and historical study' (154): history's understanding is a recapturing of humanity's understanding of itself. This recapturing is interpretation. It thematizes an understanding that was lived. It is 'the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit' (154). These historical studies have all the marks of a distinct specialization. They even change the meaning of 'data' from what that term means in the natural sciences.
- 6 A fourth section turns to dialectic, for 'the more human studies turn away from abstract universals and attend to concrete human beings, the more evident it becomes that the scientific age of innocence has come to an end; human authenticity can no longer be taken for granted' (147). Again, 'when human studies attempt to deal bravely and boldly with the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, they find themselves involved in philosophic, ethical, and religious issues' (155), where differences are radical, become embodied in traditions, and cannot but reflect the possibility that unauthenticity entered in at some point and remained to ferment the mass through ages to come. There was a time when it was thought that human wickedness could be evaded, since it was thought that truth consisted in necessary conclusions deduced from self-evident principles or that reality was already out there now, and objectivity was the simple matter of taking a good look, seeing all that was there, and not seeing what was not there. '... human studies have to cope with the complexity that recognizes both (1) that the data may be a mixed product of authenticity and of unauthenticity and (2) that the very investigation of the data may be affected by the personal or inherited unauthenticity of the investigators' (157). The dialectical process is exemplified in Ricoeur's distinction of a hermeneutic of recovery and a hermeneutic of suspicion, or again in Lonergan's study of the origins of Christian realism. It exemplified in historical issues, generally by the issues of progress, decline, recovery, and specifically by concrete issues of radical disagreement among historians, where the source of the problem does not lie in the data but in the investigators. And finally besides the dialectic that is concerned with human subjects

as objects, there is the dialectic in which human subjects are concerned with themselves and with one another, where dialectic becomes dialogue. Dialogue 'is particularly relevant when persons are authentic and know one another to be authentic yet belong to differing traditions and so find themselves in basic disagreement' (159) as in ecumenism and the universalist movement in the dialogue of world religions (e.g., Whitson, Panikkar, Johnston).

- 7 A fifth section is on Praxis, where the term 'praxis' has to do with a method that can deal with the unauthentic as well as the authentic, with the irrational as well as the rational. Praxis in this sense becomes an academic subject only after the age of innocence. Praxis in this sense moves from above downwards, in that its method follows from a decision.
- 8 Praxis in this sense is most relevant in the sphere of religion. As lived, religion is praxis not yet questioned, scrutinized, made explicit and thematic. Theology comes out of such questioning, and the emergence is threefold. In the ancient church questions centered on issues such as Christology and Pelagianism. In the medieval period the effort was to move from the symbolic expression of Christian thought to its literal meaning. This effort led to renewal in another way under the impact of modern science, modern exegetical and historical methods, and modern philosophies. But sound renewal is not yet a common achievement. Still, the contemporary situation seems favorable to an irenic and constructive use of dialectic and dialogue in these three areas (science, historical scholarship, philosophy). But there are differing Christian communions, and each may be represented by more than one theology. But the ecumenical movement and the dialogue of religions powerfully foster acceptance of an irenic and constructive use of dialectic.
- 9 Thus the lecture has distinguished different methods: experimental, foundational, historical, dialectical, critically practical. The conclusions reached are three: (1) '... the more religious studies and theology put to good use the whole battery of methods, the more they will move asymptotically towards an ideal situation in which they overlap and become easily interchangeable.' (2) '... such overlapping and interchangeability are ... desirable. Theology and religious studies need each other.' (3) '... praxis will include a recognition of the obstacles that stand in [the] way and an effort to remove them.' There are as many possible obstacles as there are plausible grounds for rejecting or hesitating about any of the different methods. If the methods really are sound, then the obstacles may be removed by applying both the hermeneutic of suspicion and the hermeneutic of recovery vis-à-vis the methods and their applications.

The Human Good

- 10 We will spend very little time on this article, not because it is not important but because it is not really 'new' in terms of post-*Method* material. The position is identical with that already expressed in *Method in Theology*, chapter 2. The paper as well as the earlier chapter offer 'a set of variables' that are elements of the human

good, along with a structure that forms a kind of ideal type that it is helpful to have around when describing and explaining concrete situations. The variables are skills, feelings, values, and beliefs. The structure arranges them implicitly: note that only skills and values are mentioned explicitly in the structure on p. 334; but feelings and beliefs orient the elements, and especially personal relations and liberty at the level of terminal value. We will devote to this article only the amount of time required to respond to questions.

Natural Right and Historical Mindedness

- 11 I regard this as one of Lonergan's most important papers. The issue is collective responsibility: what constitutes it? And to face that question squarely, one must answer the prior question, Are there any norms at all for individual and collective responsibility once 'historical mindedness' is admitted? In answering this question, Lonergan for all intents and purposes identifies natural law with the transcendental precepts, and also presents perhaps his most nuanced articulation of the dialectic of history. But the initial question, what is collective responsibility? Is perhaps even more important, as it signals yet a further move on Lonergan's part to the equivalent in his own thought of what for Hegel was 'objective Spirit.'
- 12 What, then, is collective responsibility? It is not something that currently can be regarded as an 'established fact,' but it is (1) a possibility, (2) that we can realize, and (3) that we should realize. Lonergan will address it by conjoining two elements already existing in 'our tradition,' namely the notion of natural right (or natural law) and the recognition that besides human nature there also is human historicity. 'What we have to do, I feel, is to bring these two elements together. **We have so to develop the notion of natural right as to make it no less relevant to human historicity than it is to human nature**' (169). If we are able to do this, we will gain at least some purchase on the constitution of collective responsibility. And, of course, if the notion of natural right (or natural law) is relevant to historicity, that means there is some way of articulating a normative stance even when one admits the reality of historical mindedness.
- 13 A note on the expression 'natural right.' I am fairly certain that Lonergan is engaging Leo Strauss and his disciples in this essay. Strauss's work figures prominently in the intellectual atmosphere of Boston College, where Lonergan was teaching at this time. And one of Strauss's more important books is entitled *Natural Right and History*. 'Natural right' was Strauss's term for what is more commonly called natural law. And his thesis, put rather simply, is that natural law cannot be reconciled with historical consciousness, that the acceptance of historical consciousness is ipso facto a capitulation to relativism. For Lonergan, of course, that is not the case. But the only alternative to relativism, provided one acknowledges historical consciousness, is found in the norms inherent in the transcendental unfolding of the human spirit in quest of intelligibility, truth, and the good.

14 Section 1 of the paper discusses 'Historicity. Historicity is the variable in any concrete human reality, whereas human nature is the constant. Historicity is 'what man makes of man,' what humans make of human destiny. We see it already in the difference between the child beginning kindergarten and the doctoral candidate writing a dissertation. But the education of individuals is a recapitulation of the longer process of the education of humankind, of the evolution of social institutions and the development of culture. In a very important set of sentences, Lonergan expresses the significance of historicity on the cultural and social levels (170): 'Religions and art-forms, languages and literatures, sciences, philosophies, the writing of history, all had their rude beginnings, slowly developed, reached their peak, perhaps went into decline yet later underwent a renaissance in another milieu. And what is true of cultural achievements, also, though less conspicuously, is true of social institutions. The family, the state, the law, the economy, are not fixed and immutable entities. They adapt to changing circumstance; they can be reconceived in the light of new ideas; they can be subjected to revolutionary change' (170). Thus norms do not exist at the level of cultural achievements or social institutions.

15 What makes for these changes? '... all such change is in its essence a change of meaning – a change of idea or concept, a change of judgment or evaluation, a change of the order or the request.' Such changes in meaning bring with them changes in cultural achievements and social achievements. Why is this the case? Because human community is an achievement of common meaning, and that common meaning informs and actuates family and polity, the legal and economic systems, customary morals and educational arrangements, as well as 'language and literature, art and religion, philosophy, science, and the writing of history' (170). Change the common meaning, and all of these dimensions of human living change as well. Challenge the common meaning, and you are challenging the achievements of the culture and its social institutions. And the common meaning can be challenged or changed in any number of ways, at the levels of experience or understanding or judging or deciding. 'Without a common field of experience people get out of touch. Without a common mode of understanding, there arise misunderstanding, distrust, suspicion, fear, hostility, factions. Without a common measure of judgment people live in different worlds. Without common consent they operate at cross-purposes. Then common meaning is replaced by different and opposed meanings. A cohesion that once seemed automatic has to be bolstered by the pressures, the threats, the force that secure a passing semblance of unity but may prepare a lasting resentment and a smoldering rebellion' (170-71). But this does not mean that every change or of challenge to the common meaning is necessarily either a good thing or a bad thing. And that raises the question, How does one determine this?

16 'Historical Mindedness,' then, means the recognition 'that to understand [people] and their institutions we have to study their history,' not just the constant human nature that they all share.

17 Now the notion of natural right or natural law arose in rebuttal to the proposal by ancient Greeks that underpinning human manners and customs there is no permanent

and binding force. The notion of natural right means that ‘underneath the manifold of human lifestyles, there existed a component or factor that possessed the claims to universality and permanence of nature itself’ (172). [Note that Lonergan’s footnote reference here is to Strauss’s *Natural right and History*.] The problem, though, is that this component or factor admits two interpretations. ‘It may be placed in universal propositions, self-evident truths, naturally known certitudes. On the other hand, it may be placed in nature itself, in nature not as abstractly conceived, but as concretely operating [note the reference to Voegelin’s ‘Reason: The Classic Experience,’ a paper that is so close to Lonergan’s cognitional theory that it could almost have been written by Lonergan himself]. It is, I believe, the second alternative that has to be envisaged if we are to determine norms in historicity’ (172).

- 18 So what is ‘nature’ as concretely operating? For Aristotle a nature is ‘an immanent principle of movement and of rest,’ and for Lonergan ‘such a principle is the human spirit as raising and answering questions. As raising questions, it is an immanent principle of movement. As answering questions and doing so satisfactorily, it is an immanent principle of rest’ (172). And so we have the familiar presentation of questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, and questions for deliberation. But then a problem is raised, for it seems that we have come up with many such principles and thus with many natures. Still, ‘the many form a series, each in turn taking over where its predecessor left off,’ and in that sense there is some unity. But even more, ‘if what the several principles attain are only aspects of something richer and fuller, must not the several principles themselves be but aspects of a deeper and more comprehensive principle? And is not that deeper and more comprehensive principle itself a nature, at once a principle of movement and of rest, a tidal movement that begins before consciousness, unfolds through sensitivity, intelligence, rational reflection, responsible deliberation, only to find its rest beyond all of these?’ (174-75) There is an underlying dynamism that is headed through intelligence, reflection, and deliberation to that ‘point beyond’ that is ‘being-in-love, a dynamic state that sublates all that goes before, a principle of movement at once purgative and illuminative, and a principle of rest in which union is fulfilled’ (175), and so that is grace. Language such as ‘tidal movement’ and reference to its beginning before consciousness, unfolding through the four levels, and overarching intentional consciousness calls to mind affective dimensions of the person that have their roots in the vertical finality of underlying neural manifolds, and so it relates easily to talk of psychic conversion.
- 19 This ‘whole movement is an ongoing process of self-transcendence’ (175), and that is shown at each level. And ‘self-transcendence reaches its term not in righteousness but in love and, when we fall in love, then life begins anew. A new principle takes over and, as long as it lasts, we are lifted above ourselves and carried along as parts within an ever more intimate yet ever more liberating dynamic whole’ (175). It is in this ongoing process of self-transcendence, and here alone, that we can find what would ‘determine norms in historicity’ (172).
- 20 The paper moves on, in section 3, to discuss ‘The Dialectic of History.’ For the concern for ‘natural right’ or natural law, for norms in historicity, was prompted by

the question of collective responsibility. To what extent do the norms in historicity that can be determined from this portrayal of natural law or natural right have some pertinence, not to individual responsibility but to collective responsibility? That is the question. This 'normative source of meaning' (the phrase is introduced for the first time at the beginning of this section, but it is what he has been talking about) reveals no more than individual responsibility. In a transposition of the Hegelian idealism of objective Spirit, Lonergan writes, 'Only inasmuch as the immanent source becomes revealed in its effects, in the functioning order of society, in cultural vitality and achievement, in the unfolding of human history, does the manifold of isolated responsibilities coalesce into a single object that can gain collective attention' (176). And that collective attention is the beginning of assuming collective responsibility, responsibility precisely for this single object that has coalesced out of the manifold of isolated responsibilities.

- 21 The question is a real one because 'the normative source of meaning is not the only source, for the norms can be violated' (176). And to the extent that the norms are violated we find in the 'single object' 'not only social order but also disorder, not only cultural vitality and achievement but also latitude and deterioration, not an ongoing and uninterrupted sequence of developments but rather a dialectic of radically opposed tendencies' (176). Then we find that the issues that in a single individual might be infinitesimal in the total fabric of social and cultural history take on the dimensions of collective triumph or disaster. Civilizations do decay and die, and on a less general scale the same thing can happen to communities of all kinds: civic, religious, educational, artistic, practical. In the dialectic of history we find the 'experimental verification or refutation of the validity' of an entire way of life: an experiment devised and conducted not by human choice but by history itself. And in the same dialectic we find the link between natural right and historical mindedness. 'The source of natural right lies in the norms immanent in human intelligence, human judgment, human evaluation, human affectivity. The vindication of natural right lies in the dialectic of history and awesomely indeed in the experiment of history' (176).
- 22 Lonergan then sets forth the elements of the dialectic of history under six headings. As I mentioned above, this is the most nuanced presentation of the dialectic of history to be found in Lonergan's writings (except perhaps in the early manuscripts).