

A Post-Hegelian Philosophy of Religion

1 Lonergan wrote this paper for a 1980 Conference in Winnipeg, the XIVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions. He is attempting to offer a philosophy of religion to members of the Association. The theme of 'philosophy of religion' comes up again, causing us to wonder what the connection is between this paper and 'Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon.'

2 'Post-Hegelian' here means 'not worked out a priori as the necessary implications of Hegel's dialectical logic' (see 202). Like the German Historical School and the History of Religions School, Lonergan withdraws entirely from the necessity attributed by Hegel to dialectical logic. Still, he wants to retain something of Hegel's comprehensiveness, and he does so by 'shifting attention from Hegel's dialectical logic to a philosophic account of empirical method' (202). This will be much more familiar to most people, especially scientists. Moreover, Lonergan finds the procedure justified by appeal to Collingwood's notion, not of the philosophy of religion, but of the philosophy of history. For Collingwood the philosophy of history is 'the methodological component present in the consciousness that a scientific historian has of [his/her] own performance' (203). For Lonergan, this can be extended: '... the consciousness of every scientist includes a consciousness of the proper method of his subject ... In this fashion we are led to recognizing as many "philosophies of ..." as there are distinct sciences with appropriately differentiated methods' (204). Moreover, all of these "philosophies of ..." will 'share a common dynamism that grounds the real unity and common philosophy of scientists and, as well, enables them to appeal to [people] of common sense.' Thus the first part (actually, parts 1 and 2) of the paper will treat these common dynamics as discernible in methods generally (part 1) and then the different dynamics in distinct fields (part 2), and the final part will 'deal with the divergence and the possible unity of results that arise when different methods are employed in the same field, as in religious studies' (204).

3 **Method as General Dynamics: Part One.** The first section thus treats the common dynamics discernible in methods in general. The key to method is the relation between questioning and answering, the ongoing dynamism in questioning and answering. 'The questioner, while he does not know the answer, at least intends it. Moreover, the question itself sets a standard that leads to the rejection of insufficient answers; and insufficient answers need not be useless: they may help the questioner to pin down more accurately the precise issue he wished to raise. Further, such clarification may bring to light the existence of intermediate questions that have to be resolved before the initially intended question can be met' (204). This ongoing process can be the common concern of associations of scientists, where 'questions raised anywhere can be known elsewhere; they can give rise to an array of insufficient answers that successively beg for a clarification of the issue or issues; and the

clarifications will hasten, as far as is possible at the time, the new answers which initial questions may have done more to intimate than to formulate' (205).

4 From this relation of questioning and answering, Lonergan goes on to add that (1) questions are of different kinds, (2) each kind has its own immanent objective and criterion, and (3) the objectives stand in an ascending order with each completing what its predecessor had attained (see 205). With this we are already familiar and need not repeat it: the three kinds of questions, where the objectives stand in an ascending order. But again there is the mention of what elsewhere has been called the passionateness of being, the tidal movement, undifferentiated eros. 207: '... this triad of questions and answers are only part of the ascensional structure of our intentional activity. Its hidden root is the unconscious ...' (207). Walter Conn's work relating Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg in terms of self-transcendence is referred to quite positively. This allows Lonergan to speak of the successive degrees of self-transcendence. (Note that here we have another metaphor: 'degrees' rather than 'levels,' and that there are, at least implicitly, six, as in 'Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon.')

5 **Method as General Dynamics: Part Two.** In order to know precisely what questions are to be asked, of course, one must turn from the core of methods generally to the differentiation of that core. But that is a tall order. There are mathematics and the modern natural sciences. But the success of the natural sciences does not transfer in any thoroughgoing fashion to human studies. The natural sciences are in close dependence on mathematics, and the development of modern mathematics has provided an enormous liberation from mechanist determinism. But it is philosophy, not mathematics, that would provide a parallel liberation to human studies, and only a critical philosophy that acknowledges that the events that come together to constitute human knowing are the givenness of the data, a cumulative series of insights into the data, and a probable judgment on the adequacy of the insights. Our world is a world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, and so a world that includes all mathematics but is not to be mastered within their scope.

6 So the differentiation of the core entails distinguishing the four basic functions of meaning: cognitive, efficient, constitutive, communicative. This section repeats much of what is in *Method in Theology*, including the way in which the conjunction of constitutive and communicative functions of meaning yield the notions of community, existence (*Existenz*), and history. But the latter is filled out in an original manner, drawing on Toynbee's analysis of creative minorities gone wrong.

7 **Philosophy of Religion.** 'Philosophy of ...' means 'method of ...' What is the respective relevance of divers methods to the study of religions? To limit oneself to exploring the many religious traditions and reconstructing the history of the overt data on our religious living is to limit oneself to the methods of the natural sciences. It is to avoid the special involvement, commitment, engagement that is part of religious living. What makes religion come alive? What has happened when it withers and dies? What is wanting in the exclusive use of the methods of the natural sciences is an

account of the meaningfulness of religious tradition, belief, imperatives, rituals: that is, the meaningfulness that can demand the totality of a person's response.

8 What is that meaningfulness? How is it reached? How is it investigated? For Lonergan, it is the meaningfulness of striving to become self-transcendent and of making progress on the way. It is reached by beginning in socialization, acculturation, education, but it culminates in religion. Heiler has disengaged several characteristics that can be discerned in all the world religions. It is especially enlightening to study the ascetics and mystics of the various traditions, as both Heiler and Panikkar do. For Lonergan these disclose religious conversion as a total commitment to religious self-transcendence.

9 But there are materialist, immanentist, and critical realist interpretations of these matters. For the materialist, our notion of God is a projection on the sky of idealized human qualities. But our seeking is not mere quality. It is potentiality and finality that scorn any arbitrary burking of questions. And 'projection' recalls the cinematic projector and the magic lantern, and these do not experience, or inquire intelligently, or judge on the basis of sufficient reason, or decide freely and responsibly, so that speaking of a projection does not differ from naive realism.

10 As for both immanentist and critical realist interpretations Lonergan turns first to Voegelin, whose account meets the needs of a philosophy of religion, especially with its distinction of the compact cosmological myth and the more differentiated forms of philosophy, prophecy, and the Gospel. Lonergan seems to think that if we agree with Voegelin's repudiation of all doctrine, we choose an immanentist interpretation, whereas if we distinguish a doctrinization that abolishes the experience of existing in the truth and one that articulates it, we choose a critical realist interpretation. Here the studies of Sala on Lonergan and Kant and of Ryan on Lonergan and Husserl are helpful.

Reality, Myth, Symbol

11 Each of the three terms gives rise to questions, and the questions, while quite different, can be addressed in fundamentally the same style, with the same method.

12 **Reality.** There arise problems about reality because people have lived in two worlds without adverting to the fact and grasping its implications: the world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. The issue is that 'the criteria employed in coming to know the world mediated by meaning and in coming to behave in the world motivated by values are quite novel when contrasted with the more spontaneous criteria that suffice for orienting oneself in the world of immediacy' (385). Lonergan quickly runs through a series of modern philosophers, to show that this is a complex question. For Lonergan, 'it is in the immanent criteria of the knowing subject that we may perhaps manage to discover why there are many opinions about reality and even which is probably the correct opinion' (385). These

criteria are found in questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, and questions for deliberation.

13 **Myth.** The term 'myth' is used to allude to our propensity to tell stories that allow us to acknowledge in some way what is obscure about the world. Stories are existential. There are true stories that reveal the life that we are really leading, and there are cover stories that make out our lives to be somewhat better than in reality they are. 'So stories today and the myths of yesterday suffer from a basic ambiguity. They can bring to light what truly is human, but they can also propagate an apparently more pleasant view of human aspiration and human destiny' (386). RD: this is a good entrance point for Girard's view of myth.

14 **Symbol.** It is in symbols that we find the roots of the hunches that myths delineate. Here Lonergan refers to Ira Progoff, where symbols come out of something like Bergson's *élan vital* and have a formative power.

15 Thus all three questions are resolved in some way by appealing to intentionality analysis. 387: 'It reduces conflicting views of reality to the very different types of intentionality employed by the infant, the *in-fans* that does not talk, and the adult that lives in a world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. It accounts for the oddity of the myth by arguing that being human is a being-in-the-world (an *in-der-Welt-sein*), that one can rise to full stature only through full knowledge of the world, that one does not possess that full knowledge and thus makes use of the *élan vital* that, as it guides biological growth and evolution, so too it takes the lead in human development and expresses its intimations through the stories it inspires. Symbols, finally, are a more elementary type of story: they are inner or outer events, or a combination of both, that intimate to us at once the kind of being that we are to be and the kind of world in which we become our true selves' (387).

16 **Personal Background.** There follows a brief story in which Lonergan outlines how he arrived at his views.

17 **A Threefold Conversion** and **A Fourth Conversion** outline how *Method* provides the basis for the 'distinct advance' represented by psychic conversion, which 'occurs when we uncover within ourselves the working of our own psyches' (390).