

## Class 8

October 26, 2009

### Question 1: What is the aim or function of Dialectic?

235: Dialectic deals with conflicts. They may be overt or latent. They may lie in religious sources, in the religious tradition, in the pronouncements of authorities, or in the writings of theologians. They may regard contrary orientations of research, contrary interpretations, contrary histories, contrary styles of evaluation, contrary horizons, contrary doctrines, contrary systems, contrary policies.

Differences in theology are multiform. Not all are dialectical. Some differences can be eliminated by uncovering fresh data. Some are traced to different perspectives, and are due to the complexity of historical reality or of individual development and questions. But some are **fundamental**, and for Lonergan these stem from an explicit or implicit cognitional theory, ethical stance, and religious outlook. These will profoundly modify one's mentality, and are to be overcome only through an intellectual, moral, religious conversion. The **function of dialectic** is to bring such conflicts to light and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion.

A distinct set of methods is required to confront these, a set of methods that witnesses to and promotes conversion in these areas of living. Only changes in horizon, and such changes as constitute conversion, can overcome such conflicts. Dialectic as a functional specialty would uncover such conflicts, eliminate more superficial ones, and promote the articulation of basic stances.

To posit dialectic as a distinct set of theological operations calling for a distinct method is one of Lonergan's unique contributions: a method for meeting head-on issues that arise, are crucial, and cannot be dealt with by the methods of interpretation, history, doctrines, or systematics.

There arise, then, issues in the doing of theology that are existential, intensely personal, and of crucial significance for work in the functional specialties that we have seen as well as in those we are yet to see. Lonergan's method takes explicit concern for these issues and introduces a distinct set of methods for confronting them. In fact these methods, of dialectic and of foundations, are the hinge point of the overall method that Lonergan proposes. 254: 'The basic idea of the method we are trying to develop takes its stand on discovering what human authenticity is and showing how to appeal to it. It is not an infallible method, for [we] are easily unauthentic, but it is a powerful method, for [our] deepest need and most prized achievement is authenticity.'

This aim is conceived in a positive, not a polemical fashion. Engaging in dialectic aims at (129) 'a comprehensive viewpoint,' 'some single base or some single set of related bases' that enable us to understand how the many viewpoints exhibited in Christian history and in the Christian present are to be understood.

**Question 2: What is a horizon?**

A horizon is the limit of what one can see or ask about from a particular standpoint. 237 (not a definition, but a statement): ‘Horizons ... are the structured resultant of past achievement and, as well, both the condition and the limitation of further development.’ In this sense horizons may be regarded as the ultimate context of all our other contexts, the boundaries that limit our capacities for assimilating more than we already have attained.

**Question 3: Explain the following statement on p. 236: ‘Differences in horizon may be complementary, or genetic, or dialectical.’**

Lonergan finds three types of relations and of differences among horizons.

First, there are complementary relations and differences. E.g., to some extent I live in a different world from a computer scientist, but I recognize the need for him/her and his/her world. **Singly our horizons are not self-sufficient, but together they constitute a shared world.** If that is the case, horizons are related in a complementary fashion. ‘Workers, foremen, supervisors, technicians, engineers, managers, doctors, lawyers, professors have different interests. They live in a sense in different worlds. Each is quite familiar with his own world. But each also knows about the others, and each recognizes the need for the others. So their many horizons in some measure include one another and, for the rest, they complement one another. Singly they are not self-sufficient, and together they represent the motivations and the knowledge needed for the functioning of a communal world.’ Recall the development of skills, in the discussion of the human good.

Second, there are genetic relations and differences. Horizons are related as successive stages in a process of development. Each later stage presupposes earlier stages, partly to include them, and partly to transform them. They are parts, not of a single communal world, but of a single biography or history. E.g., if I were to learn computer science, then my earlier and my later horizon would be related genetically.

Third, there are dialectical relations and differences among horizons. 236-37: ‘What in one is found intelligible, in another is unintelligible. What for one is true, for another is false. What for one is good, for another is evil. Each may have some awareness of the other and so each in a manner may include the other. But such inclusion is also negation and rejection. For the other’s horizon, at least in part, is attributed to wishful thinking, to an acceptance of myth, to ignorance or fallacy, to blindness or illusion, to backwardness or immaturity, to infidelity, to bad will, to a refusal of God’s grace. Such a rejection of the other may be passionate, and the suggestion that openness is desirable will make one furious. But again rejection may have the firmness of ice without any trace of passion or even any show of feeling, except perhaps a wan smile.’

**Question 4: What is the difference between a horizontal and a vertical exercise of freedom? How is this related to the issue of conversion and breakdown?**