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*Generalized Empirical Method:
Perspectives from Bernard Lonergan*



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The Lonergan Review is the journal of the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University. Its mission is to link explicit self-knowledge – Lonergan’s “self-appropriation” – with the various academic disciplines and professions. By doing this it seeks to foster authentic human cultures of high ideals, open to religion, the Catholic intellectual tradition, and service of the poor.

Submissions:

Electronic submissions, word document, double-spaced, including endnotes. Articles are approximately 3,000 to 8,000 words and follow *The Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press). References to Lonergan’s writings that have appeared in the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan must cite that edition, but may also cite older editions.

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Preface

*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine gems.
When he finds one of great value, he goes away and sells
everything he has and buys it.
(Matthew 13, 45-46)*

WHAT IS A “GEM?” It is a precious stone that is not easily found. It could be close by but because of its smallness, we can miss it. But if we find it, it is worth a great deal. Far from being hidden, it deserves to be brought out into the light.

So the authors of the papers in this first volume of *The Lonergan Review* feel strongly about the generalized empirical method, “the GEM,” that is at the core of Bernard Lonergan’s work. Bernard Lonergan was a Canadian Jesuit born in Buckingham, Quebec, on December 17, 1904. He studied at Jesuit schools in Canada, England and Rome and eventually taught in Canada, Rome and the United States. In 1957 he published *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* and in 1972 *Method in Theology*. He was the Stillman Professor of Divinity at Harvard University in 1971-1972 and Distinguished Visiting Professor at Boston College from 1975 to 1983. In 1970 the Canadian government named him Companion of the Order of Canada. He died in Pickering, Ontario, on November 26, 1984.

The University of Toronto Press is currently publishing the over twenty-five volumes of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, among them two volumes on macroeconomic theory. Every year seminars and conferences are held throughout the world on Lonergan’s thought.

There are several journals dedicated to his work, including *The Loner- gan Workshop* and *Method: Journal of Loner- gan Studies*. *The Loner- gan Review*, published by the Loner- gan Institute at Seton Hall University, joins in this line of tribute and implementation.

These papers constituting the first volume of *The Loner- gan Review* are the product of a number of seminars on Loner- gan's thought held at the *Università del Sacro Cuore* at Piacenza, Italy. These seminars, under the direction of Professor Lucio Guasti, aim at highlighting the general empirical method at the basis of the various methods in the curricu- lum. The participants represent the various disciplines: mathematics, biology, art, history, education, philosophy, theology. It is an impres- sive array, all in one way or another prizing the method at the founda- tion of all methods as a gem of great price, a rock that can provide the foundation for integrating all the scholarly disciplines.¹

This core structure of our consciousness is, as Valter Danna in his paper brings out, "elusive" and not easily identified. Loner- gan's works, largely conceived as "exercises in self-appropriation," can be difficult to crack. But it is an effort well worth the struggle. "Everyone can attain some degree of self-appropriation," Loner- gan maintained, and for those who find philosophical issues difficult, what are needed are simplified studies and better teachers.² And he pointed to Aristotle in a famous passage as making a similar point. Aristotle granted that his ideal of the theoretical life was too high for a human being and if one lived it, one would do so not as a human, but as having something di- vine within one.

Nonetheless he went on to urge us to dismiss those that would have us resign ourselves to our mortal lot. He pressed us to strive to the utmost to make ourselves immortal and to live out what was finest in us. For that finest, though slight in bulk, still surpassed by far all else in power and in value.³

Loner- gan sought to discern the basic patterns of the human spirit as it seeks to understand, to judge and to decide in the different methods

employed in the various sciences and scholarly fields. Sometimes he called the elucidation of this basic method “generalized empirical method,” at other times “transcendental method.” One is tempted to see in this difference in terminology the empirical culture of the Anglo-Saxon world on the one hand, and the more humanistic, hermeneutically inclined, European world on the other. The contributors to this volume employ both terminologies.

Imre Lakatos, the famous Hungarian philosopher of science, often wrote of “progressive research programs” that opened up ever wider areas of questioning, as opposed to programs that went nowhere. A progressive research program is marked by its growth, its discovery of new facts, the development of new experimental techniques, more precise predictions, etc. Those of us who have been involved in “Lonergan studies” can testify to the ever new and expanding applications of his basic insights. In this issue of the *Lonergan Review* we turn our attention to education and the curriculum, the focus of the Lonergan seminars held in Piacenza, Italy.

In the introduction to the present essays, the fruit of the 2008 seminar in Piacenza, Professor Guasti, whose research is in international education, calls attention to the explosion of information in modern times and the proliferation of fields of specialized studies. This explosion confronts educators with tremendous challenges: How begin? What to focus on? How to bring students themselves to the point where they can make their own choices as to their own specializations? What “transformations” should we aim at facilitating? In an extremely fast-paced and even feverish-paced world, in which new knowledge is growing exponentially, “assessment” is the name of the game and “standards” are the ideal goals we set ourselves.

But who are “we?” Do our standards reflect our deepest selves and our highest aspirations? Or do they reflect our desire to manipulate others in the race we know not where? Let us take some time to reflect on who we are, what we are doing and where we are going. Let us reflect on our methods and on “the method” at the core of the human spirit. And let us relate such reflections to our world.

As Lonergan once remarked, “concepts have dates.” If many of us still reverence the traditional wisdom of the classics of civilization, the challenge is to show how those classics can still be relevant to the twenty-first century. Is there anything to learn from Plato? Aristotle? the Scriptures? Augustine? Aquinas? Newman? What do they reveal to us about “the discovery of mind” and the discovery (in Augustine’s image) of the Mind above our minds?

Bernard Lonergan was a Catholic priest and a theologian. He believed in the Spirit of Christ bringing alive the human spirit – wherever it may be, in whatever culture. He looked at human bias as deeply as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, and he beheld the terrible wars of devastation that afflicted humanity in the twentieth century. But his basic point was positive: to point out what is the true and the good and in that light to name the biases, individual, social and general that keep the human spirit from recognizing what is the true, the good and the beautiful.

The mission of *The Lonergan Review* can, therefore, be stated quite simply:

The mission of *The Lonergan Review* is to link explicit self-knowledge – Lonergan’s “self-appropriation” – with the various academic disciplines and professions. By doing this it seeks to foster authentic human cultures of high ideals, open to religion, the Catholic intellectual tradition, and service of the poor.

The Lonergan Review has a social and cultural aim: to bring about what Lonergan called *cosmopolis*, that is, a critical culture.

What is necessary is a *cosmopolis* that is neither class nor state, that stands above all their claims, that cuts them down to size, that is founded on the native detachment and disinterestedness of every intelligence, that commands man’s first allegiance, that implements itself primarily through that allegiance, that is too universal to be bribed, too impalpable to be forced, too effective to be ignored.⁴

Such a critical culture will become operative through the ordinary organs of culture; for *cosmopolis*

...invites the vast potentialities and pent-up energies of our time to contribute to their solution by developing an art and a literature, a theatre and a broadcasting, a journalism and a history, a school and a university, a personal depth and a public opinion, that through appreciation and criticism give men of common sense the opportunity and help they need and desire to correct the general bias of their common sense.⁵

Initially *The Lonergan Review* will be focusing on the issue of method within the particular disciplines: the arts, the sciences, economics, education, etc. Our next volume will be on method in economics and will be the result of the conference held at Seton Hall University June 19-20, 2009: "Forging A New Economic Paradigm: Perspectives From Bernard Lonergan."

Finally, some thanks are in order. First of all, we are grateful to the Conference of Italian Bishops, especially its commission on culture, the *Servizio nazionale per il progetto culturale*, whose contribution made possible the seminars in Piacenza. In particular, a heartfelt thanks goes to Bishop Luciano Monari, previously of the Diocese of Piacenza/Bobbio and now the bishop of Brescia, who from the years 2000 to 2008 encouraged and sustained these seminars dedicated to Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan was Bishop Monari's teacher in Rome in the early 1960s. I did not know him at the time, but perhaps we sat side by side in the crowded *magna aula* of the Gregorian University.

Also, a special word of gratitude to Monsignor Robert Sheeran, President of Seton Hall University, for supporting the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute and the Center for Catholic Studies. Thanks also to the Lonergan Center and the Jesuit community at Boston College for their hospitality while I edited this volume. Also, a special thanks goes to Professor Harley Brookes for his contribution to the translation of parts of this volume. Thanks also to Jen Kendall and other friends for their

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RICHARD M. LIDDY

Notes

- 1 See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 19. There he notes that “the most important part of the rock” will be uncovered in his chapter on religion.
- 2 See Bernard Lonergan, “Questionnaire on Philosophy: A Response,” *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Vol. 17 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert Doran and Robert Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 362-366.
- 3 Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection*. Papers by Bernard Lonergan, SJ, edited by Frederick E. Crowe SJ. (New York: Paulist, 1985) 27: referring to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177b 26-1178a 2.
- 4 Bernard Lonergan, *CWL*, Vol. 3, *Insight*, eds. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 449.
- 5 Bernard Lonergan, *CWL*, Vol. 3, *Insight*, 454-455.