

Lonergan's *Insight* on Our Human Predicament¹

James O. Englert

"The problem is real. . . . its dimensions
are the dimensions of human history."

Bernard Lonergan
Insight

1. INTRODUCTION

In a perceptive essay entitled "The Message in the Bottle,"² Walker Percy engages in a fascinating literary-philosophical thought experiment. He imagines an individual shipwrecked on an island and suffering from amnesia. The island is a pleasant enough place, and the inhabitants are very friendly; further, their educational and industrial institutions are quite advanced. The castaway is well accepted, and enters fully into island-living.

Being a resourceful fellow, he makes the best of the situation, gets a job, builds a house, takes a wife, raises a family, goes to night school, and enjoys the local arts of cinema, music, and literature. He becomes, as the phrase goes, a useful member of the community.³

But a rather strange series of events follows. Developing the habit of walking along the beach, the castaway periodically discovers bottles washed ashore – each containing a message. The messages are of various sorts, and the bulk of Percy's essay consists in delineating differing manners in which they could be sorted out: whether the messages are empirically verifiable or not, for example, and whether they pertain to 'everyday' or more 'theoretical' matters. But he finally distinguishes between a 'Piece of Knowledge' and a 'Piece of News;' characteristic of 'News' is the manner in which it involves the one who hears it.

In summary, the hearer of news is a man who finds himself in a predicament. News is precisely that communication which has bearing on his predicament and is therefore good or bad news.⁴

¹ Prepared for the course, Lonergan's *Insight*: Foundations of Theology (RGT 5570Y), Professor Robert M. Doran, S.J., Regis College, Toronto, 1985-1986.

² Walker Percy, "The Message in the Bottle," in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

If news is discovered, it is both disclosive of the predicament (and thus of the castaway's 'forgetfulness') and of possibilities for engaging oneself in that predicament's solution.

When I first encountered Percy's 'experiment' several years ago it struck me as highly suggestive. For there is surely a developing 'sense' in our age of living in a predicament. From Eliot's evocation of our human "wasteland" to Percy's own story of being "lost in the cosmos" at a time "near the end of the world;" from Elie Wiesel's haunting holocaust questions as to how IT could have happened in the most scientifically advanced culture ever known, to the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumentalized reason; from Christopher Lasch's portrait of a 'culture of narcissism' to Jonathan Schell's nuclear nightmare of 'a republic of insects and grass:' there is a profound sense that things are not as they ought to be. But so often, it is precisely that: a 'sense.' Images and stories evoke feelings of homelessness, both for the conservative living in a human world 'no-longer' experienced as civilisation, and for the radical ever aware of living in a human world of 'not-yet' realized values. This felt 'sense' is of profound importance in raising questions, focusing issues, and motivating concern; of itself, however, it is disclosive neither of the real nature and extent of the predicament, nor of the possibilities of any truly foundational solution.

The present essay considers possible disclosures with regard to such issues in one contemporary classic, Bernard Lonergan's *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.⁵ One question guides the inquiry: 'What is the nature and extent of our predicament?'

There are serious difficulties in approaching this monumental book with such a narrowed focus. First, there is the fact that *Insight* is deliberately written from a "moving viewpoint,"⁶ with later positions presupposing and expanding earlier considerations. One cannot hope to have grasped the breadth and depth of such expansion in an initial reading of the work, much less to be able to express it in a limited essay such as this; the structure of this essay can, however, hope to express basic elements of that movement. Secondly, the tight interconnectedness of the book's massive scope is remarkable; bracketing considerations not

⁵ Bernard J.F. Lonergan. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

⁶ Lonergan explains what he means by "moving viewpoint" in the "Introduction" to *Insight*, pp. xxiii-xxvi.

directly related to present concerns is necessary, but the limiting effect of this must be continually kept in mind. Thirdly and most significantly, *Insight* involves not so much a theory to be learned as an invitation to be accepted. The task is not a matter of deducing logical implications from Lonergan's philosophical positions for explaining our situation and possible response to it. Rather, the task involves attending to one's conscious self, understanding one's performance precisely as conscious, and personally affirming one's own understanding of that conscious performance; disclosure of our predicament emerges, not as a logical deduction, but as an act of understanding that demands a process of personal reflection and the subsequent commitment of self-involving judgment. The challenge to that personal engagement can only be noted here.

The present essay unfolds in three approximations of the development of the human subject and her/his world. First, the foundational reality of human consciousness as invariantly structured yields a notion of development and of progress. Secondly, progress – as a matter of fact – is not sustained; that failure reveals further elements of consciousness and yields a notion of decline. Thirdly, our predicament is considered precisely as the inability to sustain development and to reverse decline on our own resources. A brief conclusion will simply note the possibility of receiving 'messages in a bottle' that contain 'news from across the sea' concerning that predicament and its possible solution.

2. CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS: THE HUMAN SUBJECT

Our aim is coming to know something of the situation in which we find ourselves. But there is a critical⁷ question which stands in the foreground of the effort to know something about anything, *viz.*, 'what does it mean to know?' A central contention of Lonergan is that much of the confusion in specific fields of human **knowledge** stems from confusion with regard to this issue of human **knowing**. It is this concern that is truly foundational for all inquiry and reflection.

⁷ Attaining a truly 'critical' position entails attention-to and understanding-of the manner in which one's own cognitional processes contribute to and shape one's knowledge.

The issue is posed in three central questions: ‘What am I doing when I am knowing?’ (cognitional theory); ‘Why is doing that knowing?’ (epistemology); ‘What do I know when I do that?’ (metaphysics). The order of the questions is essential; the beginning point is the actual performance of cognitive acts that are operative in all instances of human consciousness, but ordinarily without thematization. The initial effort, then, is to make explicit the nature of those acts and the structure of their interrelatedness. Only then does the question arise as to why the performance of these acts results in ‘knowing.’ And finally, from the structure of the knowing there emerges the possibility of grasping a parallel structure in what-is-known that makes the knowing possible.

But the beginning is in the performance of conscious acts. And so the first task here is to briefly present the broad outlines of what I understand to be Lonergan’s ‘position’ on the human subject.⁸

2.1 Cognitional Structure

The concern of *Insight* is not primarily the articulation of a theory of subjectivity that can be considered vis-à-vis other possible theories; though, of course, there is a sense in which it is that. Rather, the basic referent is not another theory, but the subjectivity of the reader her-/himself. The aim is to make possible a fundamental insight into my-self as a human subject. As with any basic insight, this will consist in “a circle of terms and relations, such that the terms fix the relations, the relations fix the terms, and the insight fixes both.”⁹ An understanding of my own cognitional performance will consist, then, in grasping diverse conscious acts (“terms”) precisely in terms of their interrelatedness (“relations”). It is this grasp, Lonergan argues, that can bring a startling unity not only to human knowing, but to the whole of human knowledge. The terms and relations refer to ‘levels’ of conscious activity, which implicitly characterize all human living and knowing; grasping the structure of these ‘levels’ may enable one to transcend

⁸ The three basic positions of *Insight* are those on the subject (chapter 11), on being (chapter 12), and on objectivity (chapter 13). The position on the subject is considered in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the present essay, the position on being in section 3.2, and the position on objectivity in section 3.3.

⁹ *Insight*, p. 12.

the drifting characteristic of so much of our lives. It may, in other words, provide a certain control to our grasp-of and grappling-with the predicament in which we find ourselves.

In delineating the 'structure' of our knowing, one thing above all else must be borne in mind: the structure is a **dynamic** unity. It is, in other words, a unity precisely insofar as higher levels presuppose lower levels, and lower levels call forth higher levels. These 'levels' are not independently existing 'faculties,' but components of a 'whole' existing only within the dynamic functioning of that whole. This unity/whole is my very self as human knower, as human subject. Being-a-subject is a matter of what happens when I emerge from dreamless sleep; the dream itself is an initial emergence into consciousness.¹⁰ But upon waking there emerges the first level of truly conscious activity: experience.

At its most primitive, experience is the pure sensation of the kaleidoscopic world of infancy; in William James' magnificent phrase it could be characterized as "a bloomin', buzzin' confusion." It is a world of the immediately seen, felt, and heard – without the mediation of patterning images, words, and concepts.

But the dynamic nature of our subjectivity is profoundly evident in the rapidity with which we move beyond this earliest stage. We begin to make differentiations, and sensations become patterned into perceptions. Sensitive data comes to be organized so that the overwhelming confusion becomes a 'world.' In these forms of sensation and perception, the level of experience continues to ground our conscious living; but the flow of experience itself comes to be 'patterned' in distinctly different ways.¹¹ Our sensations are not random but organized, not isolated but linked in a continuous flow. Immanent in our experience itself is "a factor variously named conation, interest, attention, purpose"¹² which gives the dynamic flow of experience a certain direction and unity. One possible direction to that dynamic flow is the formation of images which can give rise to questions; with the emergence of questions there is

¹⁰ For Lonergan, "consciousness" is an awareness immanent in affective states and dreams as well in such operations as imagination, inquiry, understanding, conceptualization, reflection, judging, deliberating, and deciding. It is not a matter of explicit knowledge, but rather of self-presence. Accordingly, much of what depth psychologists refer to as "unconscious," Lonergan would term "conscious" but undifferentiated.

¹¹ In *Insight*, Lonergan considers the biological, aesthetic, intellectual, and dramatic patterns (pp. 182-189).

¹² *Insight*, p. 82.

movement beyond the level of experience, propelled by a desire for ‘something more.’ This desire, which Aristotle termed “wonder,” is evident in the persistent questioning of children.¹³ There is a primordial desire arising out of our experience that would move us beyond our experience. It is expressed in asking questions about experience; but before ever being expressed it is operative as the “pure question” that gives rise to the formation of images that would suggest specific questions that seek understanding.

At this point, experience comes to be understood not simply in itself but as providing **data** for further conscious activity; that activity is fundamentally the performance of asking questions. As Lonergan remarks: “When an animal has nothing to do, it goes to sleep. When a man has nothing to do, he may ask questions.”¹⁴ And the asking of questions is the prior condition for the occurrence of the act of understanding, which is Lonergan’s first central concern. It is this act of insight that moves us from the first to the second level of consciousness: understanding.

The act of insight can be considered in terms of description or of explanation. Descriptively, a fascinating anecdote is narrated by Rollo May in *The Courage to Create*. May recalls a research project on “the meaning of anxiety” in which he was engaged as a graduate student. He had an operative hypothesis concerning the impact on a group of unmarried mothers exercised by their relationships with their own mothers. About half the subjects being studied fit the hypothesis perfectly; the rest, however, did not fit it at all. All of the subjects had experienced maternal rejection; but only half experienced the anxiety that had been hypothesized. He recalls long days puzzling over the data, without result; the problem seemed simply insoluble.

Late one day, putting aside my books and papers in the little office I used in that shelter house, I walked down the street toward the subway. I was tired. I tried to put the whole troublesome business out of my mind. About fifty feet away from the entrance to the Eighth Street station, it

¹³ Lonergan recalls Aristotle’s notion of “wonder” as the foundation of philosophy (*Insight*, p. 9); this notion parallels the scholastic “agent intellect.” Reference to the innate wonder of children recalls a developmental study which found that in a very unrestricted environment, one group of three year olds asked an average of three hundred questions daily! The study was presented in a volume entitled *Unexpected Vistas*; unfortunately, I do not have the volume with me at present and am unable to give any further reference.

¹⁴ *Insight*, p. 10.

suddenly struck me “out of the blue,” as the not-unfitting expression goes, that those young women who didn’t fit my hypothesis were all from the proletarian class. And as quickly as that idea struck me, other ideas poured out. I think I had not taken another step when a whole new hypothesis broke loose in my mind. I realized my entire theory would have to be changed. I saw at that instant that it is not the rejection by the mother that is the original trauma which is the source of anxiety; it is rather rejection that is lied about.¹⁵

The accuracy of that specific theory is not, of course, the present point; of significance, rather, is the event of ‘catching on.’ It releases that tension which results from frustration of the desire to know; it emerges as an unexpected ‘leap,’ and not simply a logical deduction. Unlike the immediate connection between opening one’s eyes and ‘seeing,’ the act of understanding is not a function of out circumstances but of inner conditions. Further, whereas it emerges from and makes intelligible concrete data, it grasps the abstract and universal in the concrete. And finally, the insight enters the habitual context of the mind; the initial ‘grasping’ did not have to recur time and time again as further thinking continued, but rather had become an available resource.

There is something in this that helps us to understand what goes on in every instance of coming to understand. Most such instances lack the drama of May’s sidewalk enlightenment, but the elements of the act remain constant. If description enables a growing familiarity with the act of understanding, explanation moves toward grasping those elements (‘terms and relations’) which constitute the act. The key elements are: the question, the image, the insight, and the concept. There must first be a real awakening of intelligence, a releasing of the desire to know from the immediate concerns of living. The process is propelled by the release of imagination from these concerns to cooperate with the intellectual striving. An image can organize the data in such fashion that the intelligibility of the data can be grasped. That grasp is the act of insight, or catching on. Subsequently, that grasp is expressed in concepts – e.g., in the expression of May’s revised hypothesis.

Two things are of great importance here. The first is to note the distinction between insight and concept; the act of understanding is the foundation for the concept, not *vice versa*.

¹⁵ Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 60. Cf. Lonergan’s parallel telling of the story of Archimedes in *Insight*, pp. 3-6.

The insight itself is **preconceptual**, even though it moves to expression in concepts.¹⁶ There is a two-fold importance to this: (a) the concept is not necessarily a fully adequate expression of what is grasped; and (b) the learning and repetition of concepts is no guarantee of real understanding.

Secondly, even though imagination plays an essential role in the process, the real distinction between understanding and looking/imagining must be grasped. One of Lonergan's most central and oft-repeated insistences is that knowing is not a matter of 'taking a look' at an already-out-there-now-real. In this, an inadequacy of May's expression can be recognized. He did not, in fact 'see' the mothers' deception as the cause of anxiety; rather, he understood it. And no mere looking or imagining could have made possible the hypothesis that he eventually formulated. Something else – something more – had occurred: the act of insight. And failure to advert to this occurrence, Lonergan maintains, lies behind much of the confusion that plagues not only philosophy, but also the social scientific analyses which guide economic, political, and cultural decisions.

It can be said that empiricism results from failure to attend to the constitutive role of insight; remaining purely at this level, however, is the heart of idealism. An empiricist is one who confuses pure experience with knowing. The idealist recognizes that insight carries one beyond the level of sense; because that 'going beyond' is a construction of mind, however, s/he refuses to recognize this as real 'knowing.' Moving beyond empiricism and idealism, accordingly, necessitates a fuller understanding of human knowing.¹⁷

A major contribution of Lonergan has been that of drawing attention to the fact that as the dynamism of consciousness does not rest with pure experience but impels toward understanding, so too it does not rest with understanding – precisely because further questions

¹⁶ Aquinas had distinguished between the "inner word" that is spoken within intellect and the "outer word" of expression. This distinction is basic to Lonergan's position. It is the "inner word" which means reality; the "outer word" means the "inner word." Accordingly, it is the "inner word" that knows reality. The inner word is uttered by insight, but is itself the concept (or, later, the "Yes/No" of judgment).

¹⁷ From the outset ("Introduction," p. xxviii), Lonergan distinguished his position clearly from "materialism" and "idealism."

arise. And it is the performance of that questioning that enables recognition of a third level of consciousness.

But first, two types of questions must be differentiated. The question that has emerged to this point takes the form: 'What it is?' Arising from sensitive experience and the working of imagination, the mind is seeking a possible intelligibility. Thus: **What** is the factor common to May's group of young unmarried mothers who do not exhibit symptoms of anxiety? Insight answers that question; it consists in the grasp of possible intelligibility in the data. But *de facto* that is not the end of the process, because not every act of understanding is **correct** understanding. Insights, as the saying goes, are 'a dime a dozen;' the problem is that many – if not most – simply happen to be wrong. It is a common enough occurrence: 'catching on' to something, only later to find that this initial 'catching on' had not been correct. Thus, a second type of question flows from the occurrence of insight: **Is** it really so? And this question initiates the process of reflection. The term of that process will be an affirmation or negation: 'Yes!' or 'No!'¹⁸ And with the utterance of such a **judgment**, there is far more personal involvement and commitment than at the prior level of understanding. It is at this point that I live as a reasonable or an unreasonable human being. For judgments are not forced. If 'the evidence is not in,' it is unreasonable to pass judgment; but conversely, if the evidence is in, it is unreasonable to refrain from doing so. And it is the human subject who bears responsibility for reasonably affirming/negating or failing to do so.¹⁹

The process of reflection, then, is a matter of 'weighing the evidence;' and from this we come to understand something of the nature of the act of judgment. The process of reflection terminates in a second type of insight (or act of understanding) which grasps that the evidence is sufficient for the judgment in question. Thus, to understand the nature of judgment is to understand what it means to grasp the sufficiency of evidence. And this Lonergan states as follows: "To grasp evidence as sufficient for a prospective judgment is to grasp the prospective

¹⁸ In judgment as in understanding, there is again a distinction to be grasped between "inner word" and "outer word." Cf. note 16 above.

¹⁹ On the subject as responsible for her/his judgments, cf. *Insight*, pp. 272-273.

judgment as virtually unconditioned.”²⁰ The elements of this are three-fold: (1) a conditions; (2) a link between the conditioned and its conditions; and (3) the fulfillment of the conditions.

A prospective judgment is a ‘conditioned’ insofar as a question for reflection has arisen; evidence is needed before a judgment would reasonable terminate the process of reflection. Then, there must be a grasp of what sufficient evidence would be; thus, “It would be reasonable to make judgment *x* if *a*, *b*, and *c* are the case. Finally, if it is grasped that *a*, *b*, and *c* are in fact the case, then the virtually unconditioned is grasped and the inner word of judgment proceeds. To be a “wise” person (in Thomistic categories) is to be one who has developed a certain facility in grasping what the conditions are in particular cases and further in grasping the actual fulfillment of those conditions.

The reflective act of judgment, then, stands to the question for reflection (‘Is it so?’) as the act of insight stands to the question for understanding (‘What is it?’). But the interrelatedness of ‘levels’ of consciousness is further evident in the fact that the fulfilling conditions for the judgment are found at the level of experience, in the ‘presentations’ which are given to consciousness at that level. Lonergan’s example is of a person who returns home after a day’s work, only to find windows smashed, sate on the floor, and smoke in the air; the worker makes the quite restrained judgment, ‘something happened!’ The conditions for that judgment are data on the level of experience: memory of the house as experienced this morning, and present acts of seeing, touching, and smelling. Significantly, the link between the prospective judgment (the conditioned) and the conditions is “a structure immanent and operative within cognitional process.”²¹ It is simply the way consciousness operates.

This ‘structure’ is operative throughout all human knowing, including that knowing which enters into the fabric of living our everyday lives. One can think of a young woman who has been dating a young man for some months. She has not only experienced the things that he has said and done and her own speech and actions, but she has experienced her own feelings as well. The question sticks with her and arises in her mind – sometimes at the most

²⁰ *Insight*, p. 280.

²¹ *Insight*, p. 282.

unlikely moments: what is going on? And the answer dawns on her: “I’m in love!” It is clear that she has insight into her experience; but is the insight correct? That is the question for reflection. And the ‘evidence’ will, of course, be quite different in such a situation than it would when dealing, e.g., with scientific judgments, but the basic structure remains operative. There is a prospective judgment posed by the question, ‘Am I really in love?’ Subsequent reflection is for the sake of grasping what the conditions would be for making the judgment, and then of grasping whether those conditions are fulfilled. There could be recollections of previous experience: perhaps she has frequently thought herself to be ‘in love,’ and can understand herself as easily infatuated. Perhaps, there are emotional or social pressures on her to be ‘attached’ to someone, perhaps to be married. The questions for reflection would obviously arise from the particularities of her situation and her life-story. The point here is not the specifics; rather, the essential point is the absolute centrality of judgment in reasonable and responsible human living, as well as human thinking. To be responsible in my own living involves allowing questions to emerge, and facing the questions in honest reflection; the questions themselves form the conditions for a prospective judgment. There is no external calculus for determining when those conditions have been fulfilled. The criterion for that fulfillment is the fact that, having given questions a chance to arise and having satisfactorily answered them, no further questions emerge; it is in this sense that the conditions for judgment are fulfilled. Having reflected honestly and perhaps engaged in conversation with others so that further questions are given the opportunity to surface, the answer may be possible, ‘Yes, I am in love.’

The process in dramatic living, of course, will seldom lead to the complete resolution of all relevant questions.²² But reasonableness involves acknowledging to oneself that there are unresolved questions; consequent judgments will be characterized by greater or lesser degrees of sureness and confidence. But the point is that – in living as well as learning – understanding is not enough; and to the extent that we allow our consciousness to operate in accord with its

²² Lonergan refers to the temperamental difficulties of “rashness” and “indecision” which conflict with the reasonable exercise of judgment. Cf. *Insight*, pp. 284-285.

own natural dynamism, we know that. There is in consciousness a demand that our understanding be adequate to our experience; this is the demand for judgment.

The structure of human consciousness, accordingly, unfolds on three levels: experience, understanding, and judgment. But that structure remains a unity because of the driving dynamism of the pure question, which manifests itself as a desire for more than raw experience and for more than even bright ideas; the process reaches an initial term only in the act of judgment, subsequent to grasping that conditions have been fulfilled.

2.2 Self-Appropriation

Lonergan's essential position on 'the human subject' is that self-knowledge involves experiencing, understanding, and affirming oneself precisely as a unity/identity/whole²³ who experiences, understands and judges – i.e., as one who **knows**.

The conditioned emerges in the question: Am I a knower? The link between conditions and conditioned is that I would be a knower if I were a concrete unity who senses, imagines, has insights, formulates those insights, reflects on those formulations, grasps the virtually unconditioned (i.e., the fulfillment of conditions), and makes judgments. The fulfillment of conditions for this particular judgment (*viz.*, 'I am a knower') is experienced in consciousness itself. I am aware of my-self²⁴ in these operations; this awareness grounds the fulfillment of conditions for this prospective judgment. There follows the unique judgment of **foundational** significance: I am a knower. This judgment – insofar as I personally commit myself in it on the basis of grasping the fulfillment of conditions in my experience of my-self – can provide the foundation for all subsequent conscious praxis. This foundation is genuinely 'critical;' it is not the imposition of an extrinsic theory, but the affirmation of a discovery in my-self or an invariant, dynamic structure. To the extent that I understand and know what it means to

²³ "Thing" has a quite specific meaning for Lonergan, spelled out carefully in chapter eight of *Insight* (pp. 245-270). Basically, a "thing" is that which is known by an insight that grasps a unity/identity/whole in concrete data.

²⁴ There is a distinction to be made between three kinds of "presence:" (1) the way an object is present in a room; (2) the way one person is present to another; (3) the way a person is present to her-/himself, which grounds the distinctiveness of (2) from (1). Consciousness is this presence to oneself.

understand and know, I have a personal foundation for all further operations involved in understanding and knowing. This foundation is what Lonergan means by self-appropriation.²⁵

The dynamism that I am unfolds on three interrelated levels: empirical, intelligent, and rational consciousness. The unity of that unfolding is precisely the dynamic interrelationship of the 'levels.' Thus understanding is understanding-of-experience, but experience is for-understanding; judgment is an affirmation/negation of experience, but insight calls forth the reflection leading to judgment. In the act of understanding I become more my-self than in simple experience, but my experiencing remains essential; in the act of judgment I become more my-self than in my insights, but those acts of understanding remain essential. This is the notion of **self-transcendence**; there is a real becoming of my subjectivity insofar as the dynamism of my consciousness moves through inquiry to understanding and through reflection to judgment. There will emerge as well a further dimension of this becoming, in the experienced conscious demand for my action to correspond with my judgments;²⁶ but the core of *Insight's* position on the subject rests on the unique judgment that I am a knower in affirming my own understanding of my own (experienced) conscious acts. Foundationally, I am an unrestricted desire to know that moves me from one level of consciousness to another. The criterion of my own genuineness, then, is the degree to which at each level I remain open to the emergence of those conscious acts which promote that transcending movement. That openness is what would characterize the fully authentic human subject.

But if this is knowing, the further question is raised as to what the knower knows. That is to turn from subject to object. In both cases, however, the structure of the knowing remains invariant.

²⁵ Cf. *Insight*, chapter eleven, especially pp. 328-332.

²⁶ In *Insight*, "decision" is considered in the context of ethics; it is posited as an aspect of the third level of consciousness – rational self-consciousness.

3. CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS: THE OBJECT

The act of judgment is what enables one to grasp that idealist accounts are insufficient in their expression of what goes on in cognitional process. Their adequacy lies in grasping the constructive function of mind; their inadequacy stems from inattentiveness to the fact that some constructions of mind actually grasp reality – namely, those constructions which are affirmed following grasp of a virtually unconditioned. With idealism, Lonergan insists on the need to go beyond the level of experience and empirical presentations; in contrast to idealism, however, he focuses on the central role of human judgment in really knowing the real world. But what is that world which can be known? An important element for dealing with that question is the notion of **heuristic** structure.

A heuristic, Lonergan remarks, is “a principle of discovering.” It is essentially a matter of naming the unknown, such as the function of ‘x’ in algebra. What happens in the working out of an algebraic equation is a making explicit the elements of the cognitional process of discovery. “By making explicit the fact that one is heading towards some unknown one makes things more precise.”²⁷ This is a process of anticipation, a making explicit the structure of questioning that one brings to the data. The *a priori* element to this is not a matter of content (such as the Kantian ‘categories’), but a matter of process. As one works ‘upwards’ from the data toward understanding, there are certain expectations that guide the operations of imagination and questioning intelligence. What structures can we anticipate in the world to be known by intelligent understanding and reasonable judgment? Two approaches to dealing with this question can be but briefly set forth here: (a) scientific anticipations which make possible a grasp of world process as a world of emergent probability; and (b) metaphysical anticipations of the world-to-be-known as a universe of proportionate being.

²⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: An Introduction and Companion to Insight*, edited by Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D Morelli (Toronto: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1980), p. 75.

3.1 Emergent Probability

Consideration of the procedures of modern science enables Lonergan to delineate types of scientific method, each of which discloses a type of intelligibility to be grasped in the world. A method, then, is a heuristic anticipation of a specific type of intelligibility. Four such methods²⁸ are considered: classical, statistical, genetic, and dialectical. The latter two methods will be considered later with regard to the notions of development and decline, respectively. Here the point to be noted is simply that the complementarity of classical and statistical scientific methods makes possible the grasp of a certain order that may be anticipated in the world-to-be-known; Lonergan terms this order “emergent probability.”

Heuristic anticipation is a matter of the type of questions that are to be asked in attempting to understand a given range of data. The type of questioning associated with the giants of modern science (e.g., Newton, Galileo, Einstein) is **classical** method.²⁹ The classical inquirer is in search of ‘the nature of’ something, which s/he expects to be characterized by regularity and invariance. In other words, classical method anticipates the discovery of ‘laws’ which will have explanatory validity in all places, at all times, and for all observers. When such anticipation is judged to exhaust the total intelligibility of the world-to-be-known, there results the world-view of mechanist determinism,³⁰ which envisions the universe as a machine; i.e., the world-to-be-known is “a set of imaginable parts, each of which stands in determinate systematic relations to all the others.”³¹ In such an envisionment, all events must be posited as radically determined; reality is simply the working out of already-determined laws. It should be noted that such a world-view depends not on the content of already-discovered laws but rather on the structured anticipation that such laws are exhaustive of the world’s intelligibility.

Lonergan, however, argues that there is a further type of intelligibility in the world-to-be-known. The argument rests on a distinction between two types of insight. Classical method

²⁸ An excellent brief account of the four methods is found in John F. Haught, *Religion and Self-Acceptance* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 129-130.

²⁹ The basic presentation of classical method is found in *Insight*, pp. 35-46, and in *Understanding and Being*, pp. 83-84.

³⁰ *Insight*, pp. 203-205, 254-255.

³¹ *Insight*, p. 131.

rests on the “direct insight” which grasps intelligibility in data; it consists in a grasp of regularity. There is also, however, what he terms an “inverse insight” which consists precisely in grasping that there is no intelligibility in the data to be grasped: “one understands that there is nothing to be understood.”³² The example given is the Aristotelian anticipation that for every occurrence of movement there must be a cause. Newton’s insight was fundamentally a matter of understanding that constant velocity does not require a cause. Like rest, it is simply a given. There is no explanation to be rendered for constant velocity. One has expected (classically) a certain intelligibility, but has grasped that there is none. This Lonergan names “inverse insight.” The fundamental occurrence of such insight gives rise to the notion of “the empirical residue.” Key to this is the realization that

- 1) particular places and particular times differ as a matter of fact, and
- 2) there is no intelligibility to be grasped by direct insight into that fact.³³

This is simply a given, and forms the basis for all scientific collaboration. Insofar as p is similar to q in all respects except for difference in place and time, they are to be understood similarly. There simply is no intelligibility immanent in the particularity of place and time; but grasping that lack of intelligibility is itself an insight of no small moment.

This inverse insight grounds the delineation of a second heuristic structure for scientific understanding. Classical method anticipates regularities, it anticipates that data will be systematically related; in this, a limitation of classical method appears. For it is possible that data may have some spatial-temporal unity (as an “aggregate”), but may yet have “no corresponding unity on the level of insight and intelligible relations.”³⁴ Such non-systematic elements are simply ‘left over’ by classical method, but the dynamism of consciousness is not exhausted by this procedure; there remains the possibility of questioning this ‘left over’ data to find an intelligibility that classical method neglects. This further procedure is **statistical** method, and the intelligibility which it seeks is that of probability.

³² *Understanding and Being*, p. 65.

³³ *Insight*, p. 26.

³⁴ *Insight*, p. 50.

In the simplest example, a given toss of a coin is subject to all relevant classical laws. But to purely classical anticipation, the frequency of **occurrence** of ‘heads’ and ‘tails’ is merely ‘left over’ data without systematic explanation; statistical science is a matter of seeking intelligibility in this non-systematic component. The intelligibility to be grasped can be an ideal frequency (i.e., a fraction) from which actual occurrences will not diverge in any systematic fashion. Thus, the ideal frequency of a coin toss will be determined to be 1/2. In any series of actual coin tosses, there will be a fluctuation around that ideal fraction. This fluctuation is merely random; but the ideal around which the fluctuation occurs is an intelligibility that can be grasped. This ideal frequency can be reached only through the occurrence of insight; it cannot be seen or touched, but only understood. It is, in other words, a real intelligibility. Thus, the mind can abstract from the random oscillations of actual occurrences and grasp a constant ideal norm.³⁵

Lonergan contends that these two structured anticipations are complementary. Classical laws are dependent on “other things being equal;”³⁶ statistical method inquires into the frequency with which such ‘other things’ are actually equal and the event in question actually occurs. There is a grasp of regularity in both, but the type of regularity differs. Classical regularity is a matter of being able to know what will happen if certain conditions are fulfilled; statistical regularity is a matter of the frequency with which those conditions actually are fulfilled. *Insight* posits a number of ways in which the procedures of classical science and those of statistical science complement each other as ways of knowing.³⁷ But the argument then moves on to posit a complementarity in the world-to-be-known. At its most basic, this involves the reality of both regularity and randomness in the world; further, these realities are complementary in the unfolding of world process. Lonergan names that unfolding process “emergent probability.”

³⁵ Statistical and classical methods are contrasted in *Insight*, pp. 53-54.

³⁶ *Insight*, p. 65.

³⁷ *Insight*, pp. 105-114.

The key to understanding this world-order is the notion of a “scheme of recurrence.”³⁸ Essentially, a recurrent scheme is a series of events in which the occurrence of each event conditions the occurrence of other events in the series such that a cycle is formed. There is a regularity in the recurrence of the mutually conditioned events. Thus, as I write this I am aware of growing quite tired. This ‘event’ of tiredness has its immediate conditions in the activity -- physical and intellectual – of the day. That activity was enabled (conditioned) by the fact of (at least relative) alertness, which itself resulted from physical and psychic energy, both of which are dependent on nutrition and sufficient sleep. But the occurrence of sleep has its own physical and psychic conditions. Thus when I finish writing this section, the possibility for sleeping on which tomorrow’s activity depends is itself immediately dependent on other factors; accordingly, tomorrow’s activity is remotely dependent on those same factors. There is an intelligibility in the regular recurrence of the mutually conditioned events; as long as each of the events continues to occur (i.e., as long as ‘other things are equal’) the intelligible scheme continues. However, there is a probability for the continued survival of the scheme itself.

This general notion carries explanatory power for a remarkable range of events. This explanatory power is extended when it is realized that the successful functioning of a given scheme can itself be a conditioning factor in the functioning of other schemes; thus, there are recurrent series of schemes. And the world of our experience is filled with such rhythms, routines, and regularities. This kind of recurrence is present at all levels of reality, from the regularity of subatomic ‘events’ through the functioning of human consciousness. At each level, already functioning schemes have a certain probability of survival, dependent on the survival probabilities of each of the conditioning events in the scheme.

But in addition to this probability of survival, there must also be considered the probability of a scheme emerging. This means that presently operative schemes were not always functioning; they “emerged” at a particular point because all the conditions for their

³⁸ As examples of such recurrent schemes Lonergan notes the planetary system, the circulation of water over the earth’s surface, the nitrogen cycle, the routines of animal life, and the repetitive economic rhythms of production and exchange. Cf. *Insight*, p. 118.

emergence had been fulfilled. And future schemes – not presently functioning – will emerge precisely insofar as the conditions for them are fulfilled.

Thus, to return to a prior example, a person may presently be experiencing a certain degree of insomnia. There is either an erratic pattern of sleeping, or a serious imbalance between waking and sleeping time. But this situation need not remain. There may be unresolved anxiety, excessive consumption of caffeinated beverages, physical inactivity and other factors which are part of the present imbalanced scheme. The conditions for the emergence of a new scheme are the resolution of anxiety-producing issues, decrease in caffeine intake, physical exercise, and resolution of other factors which may be identified. The fulfillment of those conditions, however, is by no means automatic; there is a certain probability to the fulfillment of each condition and thus an overall probability to the fulfillment of all the factors which condition the emergence of the new scheme.

Again, this is true at all levels of reality. And it is precisely this insight that grounds Lonergan's understanding of world process.

Emergent probability is the successive realization in accord with successive schedules of probability of a conditioned series of schemes of recurrence.³⁹

This is the evolutionary inner design of the world, known through the complementarity of classical and statistical heuristic structures. Such a world admits of increasing systematization, since even complex schemes with low probabilities of emergence will emerge because of "large numbers" and "long intervals of time."⁴⁰ But the survival of any scheme remains always probable rather than certain; there is, accordingly, also the possibility of breakdowns and blind alleys in the process.

In the world-to-be-known there is both regularity and randomness; but it is a developing regularity, and random events can enter into that development. It is, in short, a world of emergent probability.

³⁹ *Insight*, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁰ *Insight*, pp. 122-123.

3.2 The World of Proportionate Being

But it is also possible to consider the nature of the world-to-be-known in a more fundamental, metaphysical manner. This consideration begins with the notion of being as the objective of the pure desire to know. Thus, in judgment we have noted that the human person wants to grasp what-is; s/he is not satisfied with pure experience or mere bright ideas. What the human person is 'after' in that desire is being. Thus, being is what is to be known in intelligent understanding and reasonable judgment. In the very structure of consciousness, then, there is a latent metaphysics which is operative in the dynamic desire to understand, and to understand correctly. One's dissatisfaction with pure experience implies something about being, namely that it is more than what-can-be-experienced. Further, one's dissatisfaction with unverified hypotheses implies that being is more than intelligible forms to be grasped. In other words, empirical, intelligent, and rational consciousness are operative in all human knowing, but this is not grasped without the unique affirmation involved in self-appropriation. It is this affirmation that renders latent metaphysics explicit.

It is self-knowledge, therefore, that provides the critical foundation for metaphysics; it enables the explicitation of elements that can be anticipated in any act of knowing. There will be a content of that act that corresponds to experience (potency), a content that corresponds to understanding (form), and a content that corresponds to judgment (act). The categories of traditional metaphysics are given a critical grounding in the cognitional operations of human subjects. And this critical grounding supplies a heuristic structure anticipating all possible knowledge.⁴¹

There is a further differentiation to be noted between 'central' potency/form/act and 'conjugate' potency/form/act. Central form is what is grasped in understanding an individual "thing;" it is insight into 'this' person, 'this' planet, or 'this' molecule. The potency for this form is the pure givenness of individuality. And the central act is the existence of 'this thing.' But there is also a second kind of form, namely 'conjugate.' This is what is known in explanatory correlations between sets of data. It is not a matter of insight into one concrete thing, but

⁴¹ *Insight*, pp. 431-444.

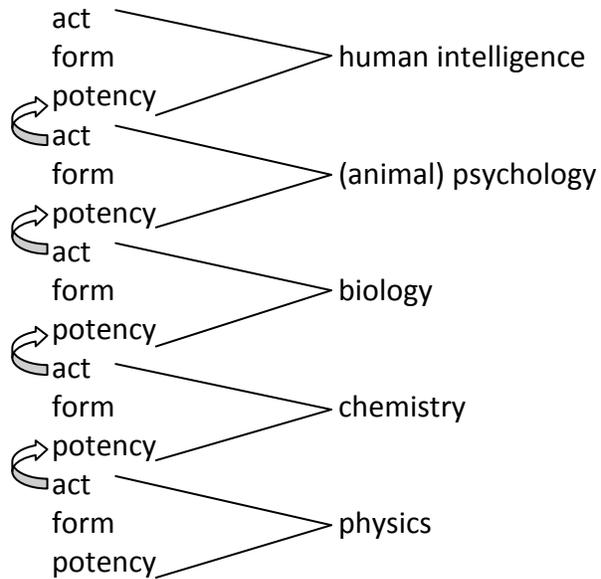
rather into the fact that two sets of data are 'of the same kind.' The potency for this is the empirically residual fact of succession-in-time and conjunction-in-space, and merely random divergence from ideal frequencies. Conjugate act is the occurrence of events.

Joined with the notion of schemes of recurrence, the present notion of conjugate potency/form/act proves to be of immense explanatory power. Genera come to be differentiated in terms of distinct immanent intelligibilities (conjugate forms); thus, e.g., subatomic particles are differentiated from chemical elements. Differences between various chemical elements are 'specific' differences rather than 'generic.'

It becomes possible on the basis of these heuristic anticipations to grasp the emergent structure of the world-to-be-known. Insofar as subatomic events (acts) are systematic within their proper genus, they are understood in the discipline of physics. However, it is possible that in addition to systematic events at this level, there will also be events that are purely random from the point of view of the physicist. It is further possible that these random events may enter into recurrent schemes which constitute a higher systematization, i.e., chemical elements. The random acts of subatomic particles – precisely as random – constitute the potency for the emergence of a higher conjugate form, whose intelligibility is grasped in the discipline of chemistry. Such chemical schemes continue to recur, but may also give rise to events (acts) that are non-systematic as regards chemical intelligibility; these acts from the potency for the emergence of the cell. Similarly, events which are random at the biological level become potency for psychic integration; random psychic events become potency for intelligence. The basic structure of emergence is that non-systematic occurrences at a lower level can become systematic at a higher level and yield the need for a new conjugate form.⁴²

The emergence of order in the universe as we know it and the isomorphic order of the sciences can be diagrammed as follows:

⁴² *Insight*, pp. 262-265.



Each higher science reflects a ‘higher viewpoint’ that can neither be deduced-from nor reduced-to the prior sciences; they emerge as sciences to grasp the higher intelligibility that emerges from what is purely coincidental at lower levels. Each higher genus sublates the prior levels. Thus, the recurrent schemes of the subatomic level remain operative within chemical elements; the higher form does not eliminate the lower; rather it brings events/acts that are not within recurrent schemes in the lower genus into schemes that constitute systematization at the higher level. There is a sense, then, in which the lower levels do constitute a principle of limitation: chemical elements do not survive the disruption of subatomic schemes (e.g., fission). That limitation is real, but not total; there is a real transcendence of the lower level in the emergence of the higher. There is in the universe a real becoming; it is, in fact, a universe of emergent probability.

But in its very **becoming**, it is fundamentally a world of **being** proportionate to human knowing. For it is this world that the dynamism of human consciousness desires to know; and the structure of this world is isomorphic to the structure of consciousness. That structured consciousness in its dynamic desiring is the notion or anticipation of being. Lonergan’s basic position on being, accordingly, is that the desire for being is what impels the movement of consciousness; and being is what is known in intelligent understanding and reasonable judgment.

3.3 Objectivity

The focus of the foregoing considerations has been on the objective of the human subject's desire. The final point is simply to note that 'objectivity' is that which enables the attainment of that objective.

In one sense, then, every correct judgment is truly objective; if the conditions are fulfilled, they are fulfilled in being, and the validity of the judgment is radically public – i.e., available to other intelligent and reasonable persons.

But there is a key meaning to objectivity beyond this absolute sense, for reasonable judgment is attained by reasonable persons. Thus, there is a normative demand for that attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness which alone can ground the occurrence of absolute objectivity in the grasp of the virtually unconditioned. Objectivity is not a matter of somehow 'getting outside of my-self,' but rather of being radically faithful to the demands which constitute my-self precisely as conscious.

The ground of normative objectivity lies in the unfolding of the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know. Because it is unrestricted, it opposes the obscurantism that hides truth or blocks access to it in whole or in part. Because it is detached, it is opposed to the inhibitions of cognitional process that arise from other human desires and drives. Because it is disinterested, it is opposed to the well-meaning but disastrous reinforcement that other desires lend cognitional process only to twist its orientation into the narrow confines of their limited range.

Normative objectivity is constituted by the immanent exigence of the pure desire in the pursuit of its unrestricted objective. . . Hence, to be objective, in the normative sense of the term, is to give free rein to the pure desire, to its questions for intelligence, and to its questions for reflection.⁴³

Objectivity is thus a matter of authentic subjectivity, i.e., subjectivity that is radically open to facing the demands emergent from its own desire to know. Insofar as one is characterized by that openness, subjective operations are enabled to attain to the objective of that desire, namely "being." And insofar as being is attained, one's subjective consciousness is truly objective; beyond experiencing and thinking, at that point it truly **knows**.

⁴³ *Insight*, p. 380.

4. DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS

The previous sections may seem to have wandered some distance from the initial concern with our human ‘predicament.’ The fact, however, is that the broad lines of that human predicament can only be understood in terms of a real grasp of what it means to be human subjects. For the structure of human knowing has been presented as isomorphic to the structure of the world-to-be-known, and the human world – human society and human history – shares in that structure. “Human history itself is under emergent probability.”⁴⁴ And our predicament is precisely in that history: something is awry in the emerging trends of our time. Needed are heuristic structures for considering that actual emergence and also for considering possibilities of what could emerge. The metaphysical elements of proportionate being and the notion of emergent probability provide such structures.

Further, three basic positions have been affirmed: on the subject, being, and objectivity. But besides the positions, there are **counterpositions**: human subjectivity is reduced to behaviorist notions of stimulus-response (empirical consciousness) or idealist notions (intelligent consciousness) of human inability to get beyond mere phenomena; being is mistaken for an already-out-there-now-real that is known by experience, rather than by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation; objectivity is held to be a matter of ‘taking a good look,’ rather than fidelity to the demands of human consciousness as restless desire. The proper unfolding of human living – personal and social – can rest only on the foundation provided by the positions. Counterpositional mistakes distort that living, and render it problematic.

The initial concerns of this essay have been with these foundational matters. Explicit concern with our ‘predicament’ emerges at this point. In fact, human subjects are not perfectly objective, and any human world created by distorted subjects will inevitably be a distorted

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas Dunne, *Lonergan on Social Progress and Community: A Developmental Study* [unpublished dissertation at the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto], p. 55.

world; and subjects living in a distorted world will more and more become distorted subjects. Acceptance of this distortion inhibits desire for being.

Grasping this distortion and possibilities for its reversal involves first a grasp of what it would mean for human development to proceed in the field of emergent probability in accord with the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being. There can follow recognition of blockages to this development. And perhaps finally a beginning anticipation of what would be needed to remove those blockages and restore development may be possible. For these considerations, Lonergan ‘fills out’ his delineation of heuristic structures with genetic and dialectical methods.

4.1 Genetic Method

Change in a human/social situation – like change in physical, chemical, biological, and zoological situations – is a matter of the emergence of new schemes of recurrence; as has been seen the probability of such a new scheme emerging is the probability of all the conditions for that scheme being fulfilled. Emergent probability enables a grasp of the intelligibility immanent in the emergence of a new scheme or a new series of schemes; new schemes emerge because their conditions have been fulfilled and that fulfillment is a matter of statistical probability.

But Lonergan also proposes that there is a further intelligibility to be grasped precisely in the sequence immanent in the series of schemes. At its most fundamental level, the emergence of new schemes of recurrence refers to the genera:

Subatomic → elements → life → consciousness → intelligence

There is an intelligibility to be grasped not only in the statistically probable realization of conditions for the emergence of one new scheme from another, but also in the progressive complexity of the sequence characterizing the overall development. “the anticipation of an intelligibly related sequence of systems grounds genetic method.”⁴⁵ There is a progressive

⁴⁵ *Insight*, p. 485.

tendency in this sequence; there is what Lonergan terms **finality** – the directed orientation of the entire universe of being mounting “through successive levels of higher systematization.”⁴⁶

But a point of key importance must be grasped here. This sequence-*qua*-sequence is not ‘seen’ in the universe; *qua*-sequence it is not experienced. Rather, it is known through intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation. It is known because questions emerge at the level of chemistry that cannot be answered at the level of physics; further questions emerge at the level of biology, of psychology, and then of intentionality analysis – all of which defy answering at the prior levels. The ground of the notion of finality is the incompleteness of the notion of being, i.e., the incompleteness of human consciousness which issues in desire for completeness through ever further questions. But this recognition of a striving for completeness in consciousness enables recognition of an isomorphic striving in the universe of being itself.

Just as intellectually patterned experience heads towards insights and judgments, so potency heads towards forms and acts. Just as cognitional activity mounts through accumulations of insights to higher viewpoints, so objective process involves the information and actuation of prime potency only to uncover a residue of coincidental manifolds and so mount through successive levels of higher systematization. Just as cognitional activity does not know in advance what being is and so has to define it heuristically as whatever is to be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation, so objective process is not the realization of some blueprint but the cumulation of a conditioned series of things and schemes of recurrence in accord with successive schedules of probabilities. Just as cognitional activity is the becoming known of being, so objective process is the becoming of proportionate being. Indeed, since cognitional activity is itself but a part of this universe, so its heading to being is but the particular instance in which universal striving towards being becomes conscious and intelligent and reasonable.⁴⁷

The striving which is affirmed as the foundational nature of the human subject is now grasped as one part of a universal finality that is directed toward the completeness of being. That striving of the subject is unique, however, in that it is not only intelligible but also intelligent. The normative objectivity of the subject, in other words, is a matter of cooperation with this universal striving; but it is a cooperation that can be blocked, or refused. The probabilities for the emergence of new schemes in the human world come to include the probabilities of normative objectivity being realized in concrete subjects. And this raises the question of the development of human subjects.

⁴⁶ *Insight*, p. 444.

⁴⁷ *Insight*, pp. 444-445.

The notion of development itself receives extended treatment in *Insight*.⁴⁸ Present concern focuses on one aspect of that treatment: the heuristic notions of ‘integrator’ and ‘operator.’ ‘Integrator’ refers to the fact that a higher level systematizes events that are merely coincidental at a lower level; chemical elements integrate the physically non-systematic acts of subatomic particles. Any higher system is a set of higher conjugate forms that integrate the underlying coincidental manifold. But each higher system also ‘puts out’ acts that are non-systematic in terms of its own conjugate forms; such acts serve as ‘operator’ of development. The underlying operator of all development is the principle of finality which is specified in accord with each level and each situation. The more complex and systematic the higher integration becomes, the more dynamic and expansive is the operator’s role precisely because it is progressively removed from underlying material limitation.

Genetic method must study both the integrations actually achieved in the process of development and the ways in which those very integrations promote their own development.

4.2 Personal Development

Human development involves organic, psychic, and intellectual conjugates. The psyche is a higher integration of underlying neural manifolds; but the psyche is also operator for development insofar as it puts forth sensible presentations and imaginative representations which call forth the higher integration of intellectual operations. The psyche is the point of pivotal mediation between matter (unintelligent intelligibility) and spirit (intelligent intelligibility). It participates in both the unconscious processes of the organism and the conscious processes of intelligence; it participates, accordingly, in the schemes of recurrence of each level. Thus, psychic development is an essential condition for the emergence of intellect; nevertheless, intellect goes beyond purely psychic schemes.

Loneragan especially notes two peculiarities⁴⁹ involved in this ‘going beyond.’ First, intellectual development is exceptionally free from the limitations of the underlying manifold. Intellectual conjugates do not emerge directly from the neural manifold, but rather from

⁴⁸ *Insight*, pp. 453-458.

⁴⁹ *Insight*, p. 469.

psychic representations; this involves much greater freedom from material limitation. Intellectual development becomes directly dependent on the creativity of psychic 'imagination.' Secondly, intellectual development is characterized by an exceptional principle of control. Intellect is the operator of its own development in an exceptional – because conscious – way. Imagining, inquiring, understanding, reflecting, grasping the virtually unconditioned, judging are all conscious acts that serve not only to integrate prior acts but also to call forth new and higher acts. To borrow a mechanical metaphor, intellectual development is 'self-propelled' in a highly unique fashion. And the capacity for grasp of the virtually unconditioned is the primary principle of control.

In intelligence itself, concepts integrate the achievement of present schemes; it is the performance of questioning, however, that serves to operate further development.

The consideration in *Insight* of human development is, therefore, a consideration of the integration and operation of organic, psychic, and intellectual conjugates in the human person. Lonergan develops this analysis in five points which can be but briefly presented here.

First, the total person (organic/psychic/intellectual conjugates) is involved in any of the patterns of experience (e.g., dramatic, aesthetic, intellectual), but the emphasis placed on a particular level and the relationships between the levels will change depending on one's present 'interest.' Intellectual operation occurs in the dramatic context of everyday living as well as in the research laboratory; but the kinds of experience and the types of psychic representations that emerge into the activity of questioning differ considerably from one pattern to another.⁵⁰

Secondly, there is in development generally a "law of effect" such that development occurs along the directions in which it meets the least resistance. This is modified in intellectual development, however, insofar as one can anticipate resistance and take steps to meet them. The imagination of possibilities other than the easily successful and the desire for development

⁵⁰ *Insight*, p. 470.

can lead one to act outside of presently operating psychic/intellectual schemes in such a way that higher integrations are called for.⁵¹

Thirdly, total human development occurs only through the integration of the various levels. This necessity for integration operates 'in both directions.' Change in one's psychic representation of oneself ('self-image') calls for thoughtful reflection and possible judgments with regard to one's habitual behavior. Such a change demands also to be integrated in one's organic schemes; not, for example, the way in which self-image is intimately connected with chemical dependency and eating disorders. Intellectual development also has to be integrated in the other dimensions of one's self. I recall the remark of Mircea Eliade to the effect that contemporary Christians think of the world as God's creation; he questions, however, whether many 'feel' the creation. The intellectual conviction may not be integrated in one's psychic imagining-of and embodied participation-in the world. The 'law of integration' is an insistence that the survival of newly emerging schemes depends on their penetration of all levels of human living.

Because man is a unity, his proper development is no more than initiated when a new scheme of recurrence is established in his outward behavior, in his thinking and willing, in his perceptiveness and feeling, in the organic and neural basis of his action. Generally speaking, such an initiation of development invites complementary adjustments and advances, and unless they are effected, either the initiated development recedes and atrophies in favour of the dynamic unity of the subject, or else that unity is sacrificed and deformed to make man a mere dumping ground for unrelated, unintegrated schemes of recurrence and modes of behaviour.⁵²

Fourthly and of central importance is the law of tension between limitation and transcendence. Development is from the subject-as-one-is towards the subject-as-one-is-to-be. But the subject-as-one-is is a unity of already functioning schemes (feelings, patterns of behavior, imaginative structures, conceptualities, socialized expectations of order); there is a protective tendency within such schemes to prevent their disruption. But there is also the tendency of finality, which puts forth new acts that are coincidental in terms of established schemes but invite new ones: new feeling, images, conceptualities, etc. The negotiation of this tension necessarily involves admitting it into consciousness, acknowledging the import of both

⁵¹ *Insight*, pp. 470-471.

⁵² *Insight*, p. 472.

poles of the tension. Development is from who-I-am; there are real limitations. But there are real possibilities as well. Human thinking and living need not be bound by merely received patterns; the creativity of imagination can transcend the merely given to disclose new possibilities. The human subject is both the 'already-accomplished reality' of established schemes and the 'not-yet reality' of the unrestricted desire for being.

Fifthly, this tension between limitation and transcendence must be brought into consciousness; this 'must' Lonergan terms the "law of genuineness."⁵³ The genuine person is one who lives deliberately in that tension, consciously attempting to avoid displacement of the tension either in the direction of limitation (in the extreme, 'depression') or transcendence (in the extreme, 'schizophrenia'). There must be real awareness of my hesitations, fears, inadequacies, etc.; but these must not prevent the equally real awareness of possibilities for transcending the living and thinking which are occasioned presently by those limiting realities. To be genuine involves a realistic apprehension of (a) where one is 'starting from,' (b) where one would like to be, and (c) the steps that must be taken to enable one's development from (a) to (b). Real genuineness is fully aware of weaknesses and failures, but is equally characterized by confidence and assurance. But at this point, Lonergan offers an initial insight into the nature of the predicament in which we find ourselves. As developing human subjects, we must fulfill this law of genuineness; yet in fact it seems that we cannot. It is a truly foundational problem.

Such genuineness is ideal. It goes far beyond the native endowment of detachment and disinterestedness that we possess in the pure desire to know. For it proposes the accumulations of direct, introspective, and reflective insights that are needed to discriminate between issues. Some are momentous, some important, some secondary, some minor, some merely silly. Without due perspective and discrimination, the exercise of genuineness, as described above, results only in the earnest person with a remarkable flair for concentrating on the wrong questions. There is, then, a vicious circle to be broken, for we cannot become wise and discriminating without concentrating on the right questions, and we cannot select those questions unless we already are wise and discriminating.⁵⁴

Understanding of human development, accordingly, is guided by the general heuristic structures for the study of all development; in addition, there are notions specific to the

⁵³ Limitation-and-transcendence and genuineness are considered in *Insight*, pp. 472-477. I have found Dunne's brief explication of this to be helpful; cf. *Lonergan on Social Progress and Community*, pp. 72-74.

⁵⁴ *Insight*, pp 477-478.

integral development of human persons. In addition to these preceding considerations, two further aspects of personal development will be noted here before turning to a brief analysis of the social impact that personal genuineness would have.

The first additional point is the attention that Lonergan gives to the notion of “mystery.”⁵⁵ In this analysis, he extends the structure of subjectivity to include a “sense of the unknown.” At the level of intelligent consciousness, we ‘know the unknown’ through the fact of unanswered questions. But there is also a prior operator at the psychic level that orients the subject into the unknown; Lonergan terms this psychic orientation “mystery.” At the psychic level there is felt awareness of the subject’s existence in different spheres: (a) the familiar, ordinary, common; and (b) the strange, uncanny, unfamiliar. Mystery is symbolic expression arising from the experience of the uncanny.

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for example, narrates the story of large peculiar toadstool that sprung up in a Javanese village where he was going field work. People were coming from miles around to see it. At first this interest puzzled Geertz, but he eventually came to an understanding which he expressed as follows:

Toadstools play about the same role in Javanese life as they do in ours, and in the ordinary course of things Javanese have about as much interest in them as we do. It was just that this one was “odd,” “strange,” “uncanny” – *aneh*. And the odd, strange, and uncanny simply must be accounted for – or, again, the conviction that it could be accounted for sustained. One does not shrug off a toadstool which grows five times as fast as a toadstool has any right to grow. In the broadest sense the “strange” toadstool did have implications, and critical ones, for those who heard about it.⁵⁶

‘Mystery’ is the symbolization of such experienced uncanniness in an authentic fashion which promotes the engagement of consciousness in the unfolding process of inquiry, understanding, and reflection. But this ongoing questioning carries with it affective tonalities of awe, because it involves recognition that

⁵⁵ *Insight*, pp. 546-549. Lonergan’s terminology here involves a contrast between “mystery” and “myth.” By “mystery” he essentially means symbolic expressions which promote the authenticity of the subject, i.e., the unrestrictedness of the desire to know. By “myth” is meant a counter-positional symbolism that blocks the unfolding of that desire.

⁵⁶ Clifford Geertz, “Religion As a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), p. 101.

There is a dimension to human experience that takes man beyond the domesticated, familiar, common sphere, in which a spade is just a spade.⁵⁷

Genuineness also involves openness at the empirical level of one's sensibility to this uncanny realm. Normative objectivity is, thus, extended 'down' to the subject's conscious experience.

But there is also an extension 'up' to the subject's deliberation and decision subsequent to judgments. In chapter eighteen ("The Possibility of Ethics") Lonergan extends the notion of judgment to include judgments of value. Briefly, we experience objects as desirous or repulsive to us at the sensitive level. Our desire seeks satisfaction. But this in itself is insufficient; we move beyond our individual desires in the establishment of an intelligent order that serves to order the desires of individuals for the good of the community. This ordering corresponds to the level of intelligent consciousness. But further questions can arise as to the worthwhileness of any particular order. As the notion of being enables and demands judgments of truth; so does the notion of the good enable and demand judgments of value. But the full implementation of a judgment of value is in human decision and action. This is self-transcendence in the realm of 'doing.' Genuineness demands that living be an extension of authentic knowing. There is an imperative 'ought' in the nature of consciousness which demands that judgments of value give rise to action consistent with those actions.

Human development, accordingly, involves the attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible operation of finality in concrete human subjects. Genuineness generates development. But besides genuineness there is also inattention, unintelligence, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility. Thus, the notion of development is but a first approximation to the full reality of human subjectivity as system-on-the-move. Darker data must be attended to. Before doing so, however, we turn to a brief consideration of "social progress" as a heuristic notion for grasping dimensions of the social fact generated by human genuineness and development.

⁵⁷ *Insight*, p. 534.

4.3 Social Progress

Loneragan's actual treatment of social progress is in the context of a dialectical analysis of the interrelationship of progress and decline. It is, therefore, a notion which will more properly appear in the next section after a consideration of bias. It is but mentioned here simply to note the connection between the notions of human development and social progress.

Human intelligence is practical; it enables subjects quite literally to make their world. This is most clearly evident in the technological realm

As inventions accumulate, they set problems calling for more inventions. The new inventions complement the old to suggest further improvements, to reveal fresh possibilities and, eventually, to call forth in turn the succession of mechanical and technological higher viewpoints that mark epochs in man's material progress.⁵⁸

The implementation of a practical insight involves a real development in being; that development enters into the subsequent data which experience presents to consciousness for further inquiry and further insight. But this practical effectiveness is true not only of technology, but of the economy and the state as well. Human subjects – through the implementation of their practical insights – do transform the human world in which the drama of human living goes forward. And in this there is a key point to be grasped. An economy is a creation of human intelligence and human action. The counter-positional tendency to conceive being as already-out-there-now has disastrous consequences when dealing with social realities, because it gives rise to the impression that economic-social orders have an aura of ironclad necessity to them. In fact, they have been devised by human intelligence and can be changed by human intelligence. But their appearance – on the counter-position – is one of massive factuality, of sheer irrevocable givenness.

When technology/economy/polity is affirmed as the implementation of practical insight it becomes possible to investigate development in terms of integrators and operators, in terms of already operative schemes of recurrence and the conditions which must be fulfilled for the emergence of new schemes. But the essential foundation for any development in this regard is precisely the genuineness of those subjects whose practical insights are being implemented.

⁵⁸ *Insight*, p. 208.

The presuppositions of social progress, then, are essentially twofold: (1) attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible human subjects; and (2) a technological, economic, and political order structured in such fashion as to make possible the implementation of the insights of such persons.

There is such a thing as progress and its principle is liberty. There is progress, because practical intelligence grasps ideas in data, guides activity by the ideas, and reaches fuller and more accurate ideas through the situations produced by the activity. The principle of progress is liberty, for the ideas occur to the man on the spot, their only satisfactory expression is their implementation, their only adequate correction is their implementation, their only adequate correction is the emergence of further insights; on the other hand, one might as well declare openly that all new ideas are taboo, as require that they be examined, evaluated, and approved by some hierarchy of officials and bureaucrats, for members of this hierarchy possess authority and power in inverse ratio to their familiarity with the concrete situations in which the new ideas emerge; they do not know whether or not the new idea will work; much less can they divine how it might be corrected and developed; and since the one thing they dread is making a mistake, they devote their energies to paper work and postpone decisions.⁵⁹

‘Development’ and ‘progress’ are general notions that assist inquiry into dimensions of reality; it is painfully apparent, however, that the human world is not exhausted by such notions. Development suffers breakdowns, and in the place of progress there emerges a spiral of decline.

5. BREAKDOWNS

Elements of human consciousness have been differentiated in the foregoing considerations, all interrelated and operative in the unrestrictedness of the ‘objective subject’s’ desire to know. But consciousness is a polymorphic reality, operative in many patterns and consisting in many desires. From this fact emerges a far more complex understanding of human subjectivity. The desire to know is operative in anyone who wakes from sleep and tries to live some semblance of an ordered life; this operative desire is a fact which constitutes us as human beings. But the ‘pure’ and ‘unrestricted’ nature of the desire is far from being simply a fact.⁶⁰ That must be achieved, and this achievement comes only with the detachment of the

⁵⁹ *Insight*, pp. 234-235.

⁶⁰ In a 1960 essay, Lonergan speaks of openness as: (1) fact, (2) achievement, and (3) gift. Openness as fact is the desire to know which, when functioning, is immediately given. Openness as achievement is the attainment of the actual operation of consciousness in coincidence with the exigencies of the pure, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. Openness as gift is the enlargement beyond finite consciousness of encounter with God. Cf. “Openness

desire to know from other spontaneous desires for satisfaction, security, power, etc. Without such detachment, the desire is not 'pure.'

Further, the very patterns of experience – when insufficiently differentiated – can become confused and interfere with the development of genuine openness. Without this openness, the desire to know is not unrestricted.

The basic breakdowns of human development, then, stem from ways in which the fundamental human desire for being becomes 'interested' and restricted rather than unrestricted and pure. There are many ways in which the occurrence of this breakdown occurs, but the primary analysis in *Insight* regards bias.

5.1 Bias

Bias is essentially a 'flight from insight' for various reasons and with differing underlying causes. Four such orientations against insight are considered: dramatic, individual, group, and general bias.

Dramatic bias is essentially a psychic censorship which restricts the emergence of images into consciousness. Such images are repressed precisely because they would give rise to questions and possibly to insights. The repression is a bias of the limitation-transcendence tension in the direction of limitation. Presently operative schemes of imagining, thinking, acting could be called into question by the emergence of certain images; such threatening images can be repressed, censored.

Insights are unwanted, not because they confirm our current viewpoints and behaviour, but because they lead to their correction and revision.⁶¹

When this occurs, 'genuineness' is radically compromised at a very foundational level. The operative desire may be for security, or for avoidance of the pain that would have to be faced if certain images (e.g., certain painful memories) were allowed to surface; the desire to know is anything here but pure.

and Religious Experience," *Collection*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 1198-201.

⁶¹ *Insight*, p. 193.

There can also be socially operative corollaries to this. Certain images may be perceived as dangerous in that they would raise questions about existing orders, and are accordingly repressed. The image in question may be a scene of poverty, which could raise questions about current ordering of the distribution of goods. It could be the image of war atrocities, which could threaten comfortable assumptions about the rightfulness, e.g., of a national cause. It could be stories of ordinary persons in a society much like ours who in our century became collaborators in genocidal madness; such stories are able to raise haunting questions, dangerous questions. So dangerous that the stories themselves may be repressed, or at least sufficiently trivialized so that emergent questions will focus simply on then-and-there without any haunting reference to here-and-now.

Images can suggest the possibility-of and need-for transcendence; as such they can be deemed dangerous by personal and/or social schemes whose transformation is suggested. It is possible for such images to be repressed/censored, and that is a fundamental breakdown of personal development and social progress.

Individual bias⁶² is a matter of egoism. Intelligence is operative – at times keenly so – but that operation is directed purely by self-interest, not by disinterested desire. As such, it is an incomplete use of intelligence; its object is not the transcendence of self toward the universe of being, but rather the interests of self as presently constituted. The criterion of truth is not the virtually unconditioned, but personal satisfaction.

Socially, individual bias restricts one's questioning of the functioning of social orders to concern for one's own concrete benefit. Questions of the implications of present orders or of possible changes in present orders revolve around oneself, rather than the worthwhileness of those orders.

Similarly, the range of questioning may be restricted to the interests of a given social group, which "is prone to have a blind spot for the insights that reveal its well-being to be

⁶² *Insight*, pp. 218-222.

excessive or its usefulness at an end.”⁶³ Dominant social classes develop an inattentiveness to the plight of other groups, so long as their own well-being is not threatened. This inattention serves to validate and reinforce their own social position. The privileged place of intelligence in the direction of social order gives way to power. Society becomes more and more stratified between the powerful and the powerless, who experience deep feelings of resentment, bitterness, and hatred. Social structure becomes determined alternately by exercise of power and the reaction of resentment. Intelligence serves that exercise of power and reaction against it; the purity of its objective is compromised, and in the limit, bloodied.

Individual and group bias tend to find correctives, however. Egoism gives rise to an ‘uneasy conscience’ because the intersubjectivity which is native to us tends to force our attention beyond ourselves. And the dominance of at least particular groups tends toward its own reversal insofar as social oppression tends to generate opposition. But there is a further bias that has proven to be intensely intractable; the general bias of common sense.

In chapters six and seven of *Insight*, Lonergan gives a generally high evaluation of ‘common sense’ as the set of insights that is built up through “the spontaneous and self correcting process of learning” that occurs in everyday, practical living. Through the collaboration which constitutes social living, such insights come to be shared and there results “a common fund of tested answers.” This functions as background knowledge that an individual carries into a situation; with further insight into that particular situation, the whole background can then be called upon to guide practical engagement in that situation. Common sense

consists in a set of insights that remains incomplete, until there is added at least one further insight into the situation in hand; and, once that situation has passed, the added insight is no longer relevant, so that common sense at once reverts to its normal state of incompleteness.⁶⁴

It is intelligence precisely as specializing in the particular and the concrete. And as far as its proper field goes it tends to be ‘profoundly sane.’

⁶³ *Insight*, p. 223.

⁶⁴ *Insight*, p. 175.

Yet there is a problem. The person of common sense tends to generalize the significance of common sense to the elimination of significance for other specializations of intelligence. Theoretical and scientific inquiries are judged to be significant only insofar as they have immediate application into concrete situations in ways that common sense can discern and appreciate. But common sense

is incapable of analyzing itself, incapable of making the discovery that it too is a specialized development of human knowledge, incapable of coming to grasp that its peculiar danger is to extend its legitimate concern for the concrete and the immediately practical into disregard of larger issues and indifference to long-term results.⁶⁵

Such an attitude can be highly sophisticated; it can permeate high levels of social and cultural responsibility. Its characteristic feature is the truncation of questioning to the immediately relevant in the here and now.

A rather sophisticated form of this truncation is caricatured in a subplot of Arthur Koestler's novel *Arrival and Departure*. The novel narrates the story of a young revolutionary who comes to realize that power can corrupt the best of revolutionary movements. The protagonist is a revolutionary student-hero who, as the story begins, is a refugee on the small island of Neutralia. Questions come to the forefront of his mind concerning both the movement's goals and its limitations. But in the midst of the story, he encounters a psychiatrist and begins to tell her his story. There follow magnificent scenes of dreams analyzed and motives considered; eventually Peter, the protagonist, suffers hysterical paralysis. Peter gains real insight into his own life. Yet there is something terribly disturbing about his psychoanalytic encounter, because Dr. Bolgar is convinced that all of Peter's socio-political questions are but disguised escapes from confronting the drama of his own personal life.

Eventually, the psychiatrist leaves the island. Peter is left to reflect. He recognizes the achievement of real insight into himself; yet the questions which had earlier haunted him remained. A subplot develops in which Peter writes a story, within the story. It was about a young man sitting on the beach, who experienced a compulsion to draw triangles in the sand. The sights of sea and sky escaped his attention; he focused solely on the triangles which he

⁶⁵ *Insight*, p. 226.

would draw in the sand, erase, and draw again. An oracle walks by and engages the man in conversation, questioning this peculiar triangular behavior; the man speaks of his wife and of his dreams. The oracle helps him to understand that he is suffering terrible disquiet because of concern that a friend may be having an affair with his wife: a love ‘triangle.’

The young man, whose name was Pythagoras, jumped to his feet. “Praised be the gods that you have solved the riddle which haunted my mind! Instead of going on drawing these foolish triangles, as I have done for the past two years, I shall now go home and give Celia a sound thrashing, as befits a reasonable man.”

He stamped with his sandals on the last figure he had drawn, then, gathering up his robe, walked away with hurried steps along the beach. He felt happy and relieved; that dark, inexplicable urge to draw triangles in the sand had left him forever; and thus the Pythagorean Proposition was never found.⁶⁶

Personal and immediate concerns are real; but so too are concerns and questions seemingly without immediate import. General bias is the restriction of questioning and concern to the here and now. The inevitable result of such restriction is a spiraling cycle of social decline, which forms the context within which we live out our predicament.

This restriction of questioning, however, also takes other forms. Brief reference has been previously made, for example, to the demand within consciousness for human living to be consistent with knowing; but this is experienced precisely as demand, not fact. It is a consistency to-be-achieved, not already-accomplished. And there are various strategies of displacing the demand. Lonergan notes the possibility of ‘dodging’ it by avoiding self-consciousness. The demand emerges most powerfully in moments of reflection; if reflection is avoided, the demand is diminished. It is also possible to engage in ‘rationalization,’ achieving the consistency by “revising one’s knowing into harmony with one’s doing.”⁶⁷ We develop excuses, and perhaps invent lies; the demand is partially placated by such a strategy. But the most cynical response is that of moral renunciation – the confession of despair. The demand for consistency is judged to be an impossible demand; it is not avoided or covered-up, but simply dismissed. Genuineness again is compromised and objectivity is restricted.

⁶⁶ Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1943), p. 159. This story-within-a-story can be read as an exploration of what Lonergan means by the terms “mystery” and “myth.”

⁶⁷ *Insight*, p. 599.

Finally, there is a distinction to be made between “essential” and “effective” freedom. The human subject is essentially free insofar as knowledge does not determine action; as noted above, there is a demand for practical consistency but no compulsion. And while action is not determined by knowledge, there are other factors which restrict the possibilities of any given subject for action. Effective freedom is the *de facto* restricted operational range of any concrete human subject’s essential freedom. There are various possible sources for this restriction. External social circumstance and/or internal psychic disturbance may restrict the range of images and questions which could ground action. There is a lag in intellectual development; i.e., I must act without the never-accomplished full development of my practical intelligence. The less that development has occurred, the narrower the range of possible courses of action that will occur to me.⁶⁸

But most fundamentally there is an unavoidable lag in the human subject’s volitional development. “Willingness” is an achieved habitual openness to making authentic decisions consistent with authentic knowing. But in fact, willingness is not a mere given but must be achieved. But the problem is precisely that: willingness is necessary for essential human living; but that willingness is not simply given but must be achieved in the decisions of human living; yet those necessary decisions are not possible without an antecedent willingness. We need to be willing in order to become willing, but in fact we are not willing. Lonergan refers to this vicious circle as our “moral impotence.” It is an experienced fact which

can be regarded as evidence that there is no use trying, that moral codes ask the impossible, that one has to be content with oneself as one is.⁶⁹

Whatever increments of development we achieve, they are the most precarious of achievements. At each level of consciousness there are possible blockages and breakdowns. And the impact – while intensely personal – extends well beyond the personal into the social world within which we live.

⁶⁸ *Insight*, pp. 619-622.

⁶⁹ *Insight*, p. 627.

5.2 Social Decline

Social situations result from the implementation of human intelligence; they are the concrete embodiment of individual and group decisions. Insofar as a decision results from authentic intelligence, the resulting social form is intelligible. But besides authenticity, there is Inauthenticity. Besides the radical openness which would constitute human consciousness as pure and unrestricted in its desire for being, there are also restrictions and entanglements with other desires. The resulting social situation is a restricted entanglement of intelligibility and unintelligibility; in addition to progress, in other words, there is the fact of decline.

Moral impotence is the **incapacity for sustained development** in human subjects; it is a radical and permanent fact in the very structure of human subjectivity. But it is also a fact that is “reflected and heightened in the social sphere.”⁷⁰ Not only does the social situation embody the irrationality of individual, group, and general bias, it also constitutes for human subjects

the materials for their practical insights, the conditions to be taken into account in their reflection, the reality to be maintained and developed by their decisions.⁷¹

Bias is reinforced, freedom is further restricted, and moral renunciation becomes culturally chic. And even for the ordinary person of good will the needed insights prove impossibly elusive.

By his own light he selects what he believes is the intelligent and reasonable but practical course of action; and as that practicality is the root of the trouble, the civilization drifts through successive less comprehensive syntheses to the sterility of the objectively unintelligible situation and to the coercion of economic pressures, political forces, and psychological conditioning.⁷²

This unintelligible situation is “the social surd,” and this cultural drift is “the longer cycle of decline.” In any given situation, common sense ‘looks’ on that situation as objective fact, ‘seeing’ in it confirmation of its distorted views and taking from it the material out of which further distortion is shaped.

The concrete effect is a cumulative departure from coherence, and the progressive assertion of power over intelligence. A Middle East ideologue butchers Western children, and a

⁷⁰ *Insight*, p. 628.

⁷¹ *Insight*, p. 629.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Western ideologue butchers Middle Eastern children – and crowds in East and West take to the streets to chant the slogans of *Realpolitik*. But in the midst of it all, detached and disinterested intelligence is increasingly regarded as irrelevant; what matters is precisely the ‘attachments’ and ‘interests’ that involve human subjects in the dominant – though irrational – schemes of recurrence that constitute the present order ‘looked’ upon as irrevocable fact. Images, questions, insights, systems proposed as **real** alternatives are rejected out of hand “as starry-eyed idealism and silly unpracticality”⁷³ because the only available criterion of what is **real** is that which is presently seen and touched.

The only ‘way out’ is the development and implementation of a truly dialectical method⁷⁴ which could enable intelligence to grasp the operative principle of progress (openness) and the operative principle of decline (bias) in the social situation. Needed are heuristic structures to enable recognition and grasp of the rational and irrational components, and to further enable commitment to the promotion of progress and the reversal of decline. Such a method would be the full engagement of the desire to know precisely as unrestricted and detached in the context of the social surd. But the problem is that the openness and willingness which constitute that desire as unrestricted and detached are precisely what is lacking. What is needed we seemingly cannot sustain, for so long as the general bias of common sense – reinforced by the attachments of group bias – remains dominant, the necessary dialectical analysis will be rejected. And decline, instead of being reversed, continues its cumulative restriction of the dynamism of human desire.

What is the subsequent course of the longer cycle generated by the general bias of common sense? In so far as the bias remains effective, there would seem to be only one answer. The totalitarian has uncovered a secret of power. To defeat him is not to eliminate a permanent temptation to try once more his methods. Those not subjected to the temptation by their ambitions or their needs, will be subjected to it by their fears of danger and by their insistence on self-protection. So in an uneasy peace, in the unbroken tension of a prolonged emergence, one totalitarianism calls forth another. On an earth made small by a vast human population, by limited natural resources, by rapid and easy communications, by extraordinary powers of destruction, there will arise sooner or later the moment when the unstable equilibrium will seem threatened and the gamble of war will appear the lesser risk to some of the parties involved. If

⁷³ *Insight*, p. 230.

⁷⁴ Lonergan contrasts dialectical method with classical, statistical, and genetic methods in *Insight*, pp. 484-485.

the war is indecisive, the basic situation is unchanged. If it is totally destructive, the longer cycle has come to its end.⁷⁵

5.3 Our Human Predicament

There is, then a truly foundational problem. Before we know all that would need to be known in order to act wisely, we must act. We must act, as well, before developing the willingness that would enable us to conform our acting to our knowing. As human subjects we are always in a process of development, and concrete living does not await the completion of that process. Accordingly, there is a lag, and it is inescapable.

This is the foundation of bias, and of the distorted social situation which results from biased human living. It results in social decline, which reinforces that very foundation. But the foundation itself is rooted primordially in a tension within human subjectivity. That tension causes social decline but is not itself essentially social. That tension is between the transcending possibilities of the human desire for being to be unrestrained and detached, and the limitation of our actual interests and attachments. The predicament is most evidently social, but no reductionist social engineering can hope to solve it.

And that again is part of the problem. It is the scientific community who might best be expected to give unrestricted reign to the desire to know; yet significant elements of that community have succumbed to the fundamental restriction of refusing to investigate human affairs precisely **as human**. Reductionist science either refuses to grant that subjectivity can be studied scientifically, or else insists that the methods for studying subjectivity be only those appropriate for studying physical, chemical, biological (and occasionally psychological) reality. We understand more and more about the lower conjugate forms of this world of emergent probability; but at the same time we perhaps understand less and less about its higher forms – that is, about ourselves.

Thus, Walker Percy proposes the need for investigating

⁷⁵ *Insight*, p. 232.

How it is possible for the man who designer Voyager 19, which arrived at Titania, a satellite of Uranus, three seconds off schedule and a hundred yards off course after a flight of six years, to be one of the most screwed-up creatures in California – or the Cosmos.⁷⁶

He is “screwed up,” Percy contends, precisely because of insisting that the only possible methods for understanding himself are those which made possible his understanding of Titania and its robotic visitor.

Our foundational predicament is in our very subjectivity, and it is complicated by a scientific bias which hinders the attainment of insight into that subjectivity. Only attention-to and transformation-of that subjectivity can hope to approach adequacy in meeting the foundational issues at the root of our personal and social predicament.

6. CONCLUSION: ‘NEWS’ FROM ACROSS THE SEA?

The notion of being receives an expansion in the final chapters of *Insight* to include consideration of possibilities for knowing transcendent as well as proportionate being. One aspect of this is the question raised as to the possibility for expecting a solution to our predicament from a realm of being that transcends our universe. In the final chapter, a quite remarkable thirty-one step delineation is given of what the basic outlines of any such solution would need to be in order truly to meet the problem. This heuristic structure goes beyond the immediate concerns of the present essay. Here, I would simply note two aspects of that structure.

First, Lonergan notes that “the solution will come to men through their apprehension and with their consent.”⁷⁷ Any solution to our predicament will come, not through the elimination of our intellectual and volitional operations but through their transformation. But if any possibility for transformation is to be recognized and accepted, there will first need to be recognition and acceptance not only of the fact of our predicament but also of its fundamental nature. And this is precisely what complicates our situation.

⁷⁶ Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁷ *Insight*, p. 697

As long as the problem is judged to be purely external to human subjects, the need for transformation of those subjects will not be apparent. Yet this 'externalization' is precisely what results from the counter-positional 'envisionment' of being; and the counter-position on the subject leads to the reductionist accounts of empiricism which repress radically necessary questions.

The dominance of purely instrumentalized notions of reason, in other words, prevents recognition of the basic nature of our predicament and the need for resources beyond our own. But after Auschwitz the age of reason is no longer innocent, and possibilities for understanding its present restrictions may become more and more tragically apparent.

And from this emerges the second point. To consider the possibility of resources being received from beyond ourselves, Lonergan insists, is neither an unintelligent nor unreasonable act. In fact, in our situation it becomes more and more possible to understand that the refusal of unrestricted openness is at the heart of our predicament; any solution can only involve a radical openness that is neither fact nor achievement, but can only come as gift.

Once that affirmation is made, responsible human living must include walking the shore, in search of a message in a bottle.