

## EXPLORING THE IDEA OF PRIVATE PROPERTY: A SMALL STEP ALONG THE ROAD FROM COMMON SENSE TO THEORY

KENNETH R. MELCHIN

I had the privilege of studying with Phil McShane in 1979-80, when he was Visiting Fellow at Lonergan University College, Concordia University, Montréal. It was the year I first began reading the work of Bernard Lonergan and Phil's was a distinctive approach that has left its mark on me. The course was announced as a reading of *Method in Theology*. But as things turned out, the book, *Method*, was simply a launching point for doing what mattered most to Phil, "reading the book of oneself."<sup>1</sup> It is one thing to read about Lonergan's "method," it is another thing to actually put this "method" into practice, learning the difficult skills and doing the hard work of getting insights into one's own operations of understanding. This was the road that Phil took us down. The strange new lands that this journey has since revealed for me have been as exotic as any that have been promised or delivered in the worlds of fiction or travel. For this, I will be forever grateful to Phil.

If I were to choose two points of focus from Phil's work that have stayed with me through the years following, they would be: stick with the method, and be content with beginnings. The first, of course, refers to the method of self-

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<sup>1</sup> On the theme of "reading the book of oneself" in Philip McShane's work, see, e.g., Philip McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations* (Hicksville, N.Y.: Exposition Press, 1975). This theme also comes up regularly in many of his more recent works. See, e.g. "Elevating *Insight*: Space-time as Paradigm Problem," *MJLS* 19.2 (2001): 203-229.

appropriation – performing the tasks of attending to our own operations of understanding as they are at work as we struggle to understand things in the world. One of the startling features of this method has been the way it began to change the way I would think about things. Understanding insight reveals that objects of experience are not as they seem as we encounter them in common sense mode. Rather, they are constituted by layers of complex intelligibilities that need to be understood in a linked succession of acts of theoretical understanding.<sup>2</sup> Discovering these various layers of what things “really are” has always been an occasion for surprise and adventure. It has seemed that the more I understood about understanding, the more my own efforts to understand things revealed both the fascination of new layers of insight and the obscurity of further mystery.

I remember Phil talking about how to understand a rabbit. Typically, in high school biology classes, the first thing we do to teach about rabbits is to kill the rabbit. But rabbits are living creatures and what can students possibly understand about real rabbits when they are confronted with corpses to dissect? If we know that understanding requires getting insights into experience, what insights can they get if we present them with a field of data that leaves out the most important experience, the encounter with the living rabbit? More than this, to understand real rabbits as they are, we can't rest content with gawking at domestic rabbits in cages. Rabbits are what they are by virtue of their own established life routines in interaction with their botanical and zoological partners in the meadow and forest ecologies of their region.

To understand what a rabbit “is” requires understanding what a rabbit “does.” But it also requires understanding how understanding “works.” It requires confronting the difference between common sense and theory.<sup>3</sup> Theory requires the much more elaborate and much more concretely grounded

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., McShane, *Lonergan's Challenge to the University and the Economy* (Washington, D.C.: UP of America, 1980), chaps. 1, 3, 5, 6. See also, “Elevating *Insight*.”

<sup>3</sup> On the relation between common sense and theory, see *Method*, 81-99.

exploration of the full set of physical, chemical, botanical and zoological schemes that interrelate through the lives of generations of rabbits. Phil's alternative was to begin by inviting us to follow the rabbit through the recurrence schemes of her daily life routines, from waking to sleeping, through the seasons of her life, through her feeding routines, her routines of escaping predators, her relationships with other rabbits, and her routines of raising young and launching future generations. More than this, such a journey takes us through the rabbit's interaction with the other life schemes of the grasses, flowers, trees, insects, birds, and animals of the meadow and forest. What emerges from this exploration is the discovery that the "real" rabbit is not confined to her envelope of skin. It is the interrelated set of all of these complex intelligibilities. I have lived in the country for the past sixteen years and from time to time have found opportunities to follow brief segments of this journey. For me, the image of the journey through the schemes of the rabbit's life have become something of a symbol for this curious portrait of Lonergan's "method" that I learned from Phil.

The second memorable point of focus from Phil's work will be familiar to all who know him; be content with beginnings. Phil never ceases to remind us that a fully explanatory understanding of things, particularly in the human sciences, stands in the far distant future. Any scholarly work we will do successfully in our lives will only be a small step along a very long road. If we and our successors travel this road well, there will be revealed worlds of complexity beyond our current imagining. This must give us pause. And the tone appropriate to our scholarly work must forever recognize this place that we occupy in the grand scheme of scholarship fully differentiated by interiority,<sup>4</sup> a place of modest beginnings.

In the pages that follow, I would like to provide a brief introductory illustration of an application of Lonergan's method that represents my own efforts to learn from the work of Phil McShane. As best I have been able, I have written these pages with Phil's two directives in mind. The focus of these

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<sup>4</sup> On differentiations of consciousness and the turn to interiority, see *Method*, 81-99, 257-262, 302-305.

explorations will be the notion of “private property.”

### **Private Property**

As an ethicist working in a Christian Faculty of Theology, I have frequently encountered efforts to clarify how we should think about private property.<sup>5</sup> Discussions of this notion crop up frequently in church documents.<sup>6</sup> And anyone concerned with alleviating the misery associated with poverty has had to wrestle with the question of how property rights have figured into the past and present history of this misery. Having read some of the literature on the topic, I have been left both illuminated and dissatisfied.<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, the right to private property has been considered one of the ethical corner stones of neo-liberal society. We cherish this right as dearly as the right to democratic liberty itself. In fact, traditional architects of liberal theory like Locke<sup>8</sup> and contemporary interpreters like Nozick<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., William O’Neill, “Private Property,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 785-790; Ricardo Antoncich, *Christians in the Face of Injustice*, trans. M. J. O’Connell (New York: Orbis, 1987), 84-126; Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1996), 166-213; Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 20-40; Lawrence Becker, *Property Rights* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> For examples in the Roman Catholic tradition, see, e.g., Joseph Gremillion, *The Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 27-35, 165-69, 306-7, 393-94. The references here are to the Roman Catholic Church documents, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), *Mater et Magistra* (1961), *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), *Populorum Progressio* (1967). See also the discussions scattered through Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); and Oliver Williams and John Houck, eds., *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> For overviews of theories of property rights and diverse approaches to rights, see, e.g., Becker, *Property Rights*; Anthony Parel and Thomas Flanagan, eds., *Theories of Property* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier UP, 1979); Jeremy Waldron, ed., *Theories of Rights* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of Locke on property rights, see, e.g., James Sauer, “Who Owns the Economy: Property, Meaning and the Social Economy,” *Journal of Alternative Political Economy* 1.1 (1999): 68-87; also published in *Humanomics* 15:4 (1999); Matthew Kramer, *John Locke and the Origins*

have made considerations of private property central to the very meaning of democracy itself. However, as society becomes more complex, as the various institutions and aspects of social living become more interdependent, the meaning of the terms “property” and “private” have become somewhat puzzling.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, we have our commonsense expectations. Something is our property if we have acquired it legally. And to say that it is private is to say that we have the right to do what we wish with it without interference from others.

However, in fact, things are not so simple. Our lives are lived in close and complex interaction with others. In a democratic society, their free choices perennially shape the material, communal, political, and economic ecologies which make our property what it is. Furthermore, governments have always retained the right to seize our property when we have infringed on others or when the public good is at stake. In recent decades, as the lawsuit has become ever more the strategy of choice for individuals who would pursue their personal claims against others who would infringe on them, the settlement of these suits has more and more involved legally enforced payments of significant sums of money. These payments amount to nothing less than state-mandated appropriations of private property. And they bear witness to a strange and hidden *public* dimension to private property. In some profoundly important sense, private property is never fully private in the sense we would like it to mean. As long as we live in a complex society where our personal choices at

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*of Private Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). His specific focus on property rights is found in pp.167-82, but the overall framework of the argument is established throughout the book.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Chossudovsky paints a compelling portrait of this complexity and interdependence on a global scale in *The Globalization of Poverty* (London: Zed Books; Halifax: Fernwood, 1998). See also, Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1995), esp. pp. 114-134. Other analyses of economic complexity and interdependence that highlight feminist perspectives can be found in Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson, eds. *Beyond Economic Man* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1993).

times enhance, at times diminish, and forever interact with and modify the welfare of others, our property will always be subtly or traumatically shaped by the work of their living. What, then, remains of the meaning of the terms “property” and “private”?

### Exploring the Idea of Private Property

Let us begin this exploration with the term, “property.” And to focus our inquiry, let us consider the purchase of a home. If there is a symbol that most surely captures our sense of property, it must be the ownership of one’s home. We have just purchased a home in a pleasant residential neighborhood. Let us examine what it is that we have purchased.<sup>11</sup>

As all real estate salespersons know, one of the first things that people look for in a home is its location. Advertisements proudly announce homes that are “on quiet streets,” “close to schools,” “close to public transportation,” “in friendly neighborhoods,” “two blocks from community centres,” “on streets with mature trees.” To think of our home as merely a building on a lot without recalling the care with which we scrutinized its location is to completely misunderstand the actual home that we have purchased. The home we purchased is a home that is situated. Furthermore, the property that we have purchased is this *situation*. Were this same building on this same parcel of land located in a slum, next to a steel smelter, or bordered by a junk yard, we most certainly would not have purchased it because it would have been something else. It would not have been the same home, it would not have been the same *thing*.<sup>12</sup> What the property is, in some profoundly important sense, is defined by the set of relations of its situation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Another example of the sort of “method” that is pursued here can be found in Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1961). For a discussion of the links between Jacobs and Lonergan, see the essays in Fred Lawrence, ed., *Ethics in Making a Living* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Lonergan has a very precise and unusual understanding of what a “thing” is. See *CWL 3*, chap. 8.

<sup>13</sup> David Oyler develops a similar type of analysis in “The Operational Situation,” *MJLS* 14.1 (1996): 37-54.

Let us examine some of the aesthetic aspect of this situation. To begin with, the home is on a street, it is a paved street, it has cement sidewalks, there are street lights on the street that light up the neighborhood at night. The other homes on the street are well kept. The previous owners of this home and the other homes have planted and maintained trees, gardens, shrubs, and lawns. While the homes have a similar basic design, the successive owners of each home, over the years, have modified its basic design in a unique direction with the addition of porches, garages, windows, doors, decks, new rooms, new roof lines, paint, hedges, fences, and chimneys.

The result of all of this activity is a functional and aesthetically pleasing complexity—a complexity that arises as much from the many decisions of homeowners to coordinate their projects with the work of others as from their efforts to express their individuality by differentiating their home from others'. The aesthetic character of our home is defined by an ecology of relations that link it not only to the other homes on the street but also to the history of all of these homes. This ecology of relations, in fact, defines the aesthetic character of the property we have purchased. Apart from this ecology, our property would not be what it is and, in all probability, would not be a home we would purchase.

Let us consider, now, the functional aspects of the property we have purchased. Our home is more than a work of art. It is also a living space and this living is in relation to a whole range of other institutions in our lives. The street on which our home resides does not simply lead onto other streets with other homes, it leads onto arteries that carry us to schools, places of work, shopping centres, corner stores, public swimming pools, parks, community centres, churches, taverns, town halls, firehalls, police stations, courts, universities, businesses, and prisons. We have purchased our home with a view to a life and one of the principal features of the situation we have purchased is the access to the various elements in this life which our home provides. So before purchasing, we gave a great deal of thought to public transportation. Or, perhaps, we looked into the traffic flows in our neighborhood. Maybe we like to walk to work. To be sure, we have thought of the

children. Will they walk to school or will they take the bus? Is there good access to child care? Will we need to carry groceries home on the bus? Of course, one of the most prominent considerations is safety for ourselves and our children. Can we walk home safely at night? Can the children walk safely to their swimming lessons? Will we need to install a security system?<sup>14</sup>

This, of course, leads us into another ecology of relations. In this case, the ecology is as much bound up with our own life decisions as it is a public fact about our home. Still, our life decisions are situated and what makes *this* house what it is for us is precisely its situation in the neighborhood or the city. The actual ecology of relations linking our home to the schools, workplaces, shopping centres, parks, and community centres presents a range of opportunities for our living within which we can make our choices. In fact, it is the *public* character of this ecology which establishes the conditions for the range of life choices open to us. This is why we bought this property, because it is situated within this public ecology and this ecology stamps our property with its functional character.

There is another ecology of relations that defines the property we have purchased and whose analysis brings us face-to-face with another dimension of the mysteriously public character of our property. This is the ecology of wires and pipes that connect our home to the homes of everyone else and to the complex technologies of communication, power, water, waste management, and drainage that are essential for its functioning. A home is what a home does, and our home does what it does by virtue of its participation in a host of public ecologies providing cable television, internet, natural gas, water, electricity, drainage, telephone, sewage, and

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Jacobs' analysis of city neighbourhoods illustrates how the interaction among diverse functions on city streets gives rise to a diversity of people and activities that typically attract the sustained interest of local residents. These interested residents who are simply watching out of interest become the "eyes on the street" that ensure the security of the neighbourhood. Her portrait illustrates how the "nature" of the secure neighbourhood is constituted by the interplay among the diverse functions, not by any single function or causal factor. See *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, chap. 2.



high-pressure water for fighting fires in the neighborhood. All of these services might seem to be reducible to private contractual arrangements with corporations and utilities. However, this is not so. In fact, the services are only made possible and available to us through public networks of cooperation that link all of the properties in the municipality together in systems of service provision and delivery. The contractual arrangements are sets of stipulations that allow each of us participation in the public schemes and they define mutual obligations associated with this participation. It is this participation in the schemes that makes our property what it is.

The analysis could go on and on. We have not begun to examine the ecologies of relations that made possible the construction of the house, the fences and hedges which define our relations with our neighbors, or the interior layout of the rooms which set the conditions for the cooperative routines among the people who share the house. Neither have we begun to explore the natural ecologies which deliver the breathable air and the drinkable water to the house, or the timber and minerals to the producers of the building materials. These, and more, contribute to establishing the precise character of the property we have purchased. The point here, of course, is that the meaning of the term “property,” if it is to bear any resemblance to the actual character of the property we have actually purchased, must embrace the *public* character of the hosts of ecologies of relations that define the situation of our home. Our home is what it is by virtue of its situation within the hosts of schemes of technical, social, aesthetic, and logistical relations. Our property is what it is by virtue of all these public ecologies.

What, then, is left of the meaning of the term “private”? It seems as if the deed to our home is like the deed to the tail of an elephant or the spoke of a wheel on a freight train. Is there anything left of our home that we can call our own?

The answer is “yes.” There does remain something significantly private about the property we have purchased. However, there are a number of things that this privacy does *not* mean. It does not mean that our home is free from linkages with hosts of other elements in a matrix of public ecologies. It

does not mean that this situation exempts us from hosts of obligations to maintain and nurture the social ecologies on which our home relies for its existence and its character. Neither does it mean that these obligations are limited to the formal contracts which we have signed to oblige others to maintain the systems in return for our payments of bills or taxes.

What privacy does mean is that the form of our home's linkages with these public ecologies is not determined down to the last detail and our role in coordinating our involvement in these linkages in accordance with the demands of our living can be recognized by others. Our connection to the water lines, to the power lines, to the telephone lines, our aesthetic presentation to the street, to the other houses in the neighborhood, and our location in relation to the schools, pools, and shops of the community admit a certain flexibility. We are connected, but the form of this connection establishes a range within which we can exercise our own decisions. The flow of water into our house is not determined by the water utility. Rather, we have taps that can turn on the water and shut it off. So it is with the busses. They come by with a certain regularity, but we are not obliged to take them every time, or even any time. Likewise, the neighbors, the shops, the workplaces, the churches and the prisons all make a range of services available to us. In each case we are connected, this connection makes a precise range of choices open to us, but, within this range, the choices remain ours to make.

To say that our home can be *private* property is to say that, within the ranges established by the capacities of the ecologies of relations that make our home the *situation* that it is, the decisions to coordinate our form of involvement in these ecologies can be deemed ours to make. It is to say that, within these ranges, limits can be established on how others are allowed to alter particular aspects of the situation of our home without consulting us, and vice versa. It is to say that these public ecologies deliver limited ranges of decisions on diverse aspects of living to us, and that within these ranges, it can be ours to decide how we will coordinate them into a life whose concrete form is our own. In a democratic society, to say that

our property is private is to say that in each of the ecological spheres that bear upon the situation of our property, the determinate ranges within which this liberty can be exercised by us, without intrusion from others, can be assured by the institutions of government.

However, to say that our property can be private is also to say that we will have a responsibility for the public impact of our decisions and, within determinate ranges, this responsibility will properly be ours to bear. In each sphere of our home's situation, the range of personal decision-making that is assured for us is not simply the work of the courts. Nor is it simply the work of the utilities, the corporations, or the municipalities implicated in the service delivery. Rather, because each of these ecologies is a forum for public participation, each person's participation can shape the overall character of the whole system and, thus, the property of others. To say that our property is private is to say that, for better or for worse, the impact of our participation in public ecologies is our responsibility to bear.

### **Property Rights**

To this point, we have only established the grounds for the *possibility* of private property, we have said nothing about why it might make sense for us to accord to each other some sort of *right* to property. We have said nothing about whether private property might be a *good thing*, whether the right to property should be forbidden, permitted or promoted and protected. In fact, this exploration of the fully public character of the schemes that define our property might suggest that we tread with caution. I suggest that the method we have been following can offer some clues on how to begin answering this question.<sup>15</sup>

I think there are four kinds of *goods* that can arise with the establishment of property rights, goods that are essential to human living and to the emergence of democracies and complex economies. I suggest these goods would have trouble

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<sup>15</sup> The argument offered here is similar in structure to the argument for the foundations of rights offered by Alan Gewirth in *The Community of Rights*. See, in particular, pp. 13-20.

arising and flourishing without some sort of right to property as we have sought to understand it here. The *first* good has to do with living a human life. We live our lives by establishing sets of routines, developing sets of solutions to problems, making choices, meeting challenges, accomplishing objectives, and pursuing chosen goals. In all of these, we embark on our chosen life paths, not by launching single, idiosyncratic actions, but by establishing flexible but recurrent patterns of actions in defined locations, in cooperation with others who are doing the same. Like the rabbit, we work out our living by establishing recurrent schemes of actions in interaction with other relatively stable schemes that are defined and lived by others in our social ecology. To the extent that these schemes become the least bit personally or socially complex, they require a certain stability and property rights contribute towards assuring this stability. They do so by according us determinate authority over specific decision-making loci relevant to our life schemes and by establishing our responsibilities with respect to our impacts on the schemes of others.<sup>16</sup>

The *second* good that can come with private property has to do with personal learning and growth. The need for stability becomes significantly more acute when the schemes of life involve our growth and development. Learning is an onerous task that requires considerable practice and considerable focus over long periods of time. It requires that both mentor and learner limit their attention to the learning field and it requires some ability to keep the learning field free from intrusion from other sources. Sustained learning paths are essential to the development of persons and creating the environment for such paths requires sustained control over the elements and environments of learning at each stage in the process. Property rights help to assure this stability by assigning control over the learning environment to those overseeing the learning process

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<sup>16</sup> Property rights can assure this control in different ways. For example, leasing or owning a car specify different forms of responsibility for the various aspects of this control. Yet both assure a similar outcome, the stability of the person's access to the car in relation to the routines of his or her life.

and by establishing the social obligations that go along with this control.

A *third* good associated with property rights is related to the possible emergence of democratic forms of society. There is a significant increase in complexity, diversity and richness in human living that can arise when each individual person participates in society, not simply as a passive receiver of the elements of social and political life, but as a contributor to their making. Assuring this participation is what democracies seek to achieve. The good that results from this participation is both personal and fully social. But it makes demands upon the extent to which each individual is accorded some control over the materials and contexts for the experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding that informs this participation. This control is realized, in some measure, through property rights.

Finally, securing our life routines, learning and growth, and democratic participation typically follow tried and true methods. But insight can also give rise to new discoveries that yield benefits for all and this suggests a *fourth* good that can be achieved with property rights, a good that is integral to the emergence of complex economies, the good of innovation. It is one thing to draw upon extant knowledge and skills in our life routines, our development and our democratic participation, it is another thing to build upon this public knowledge by developing new responses to problems, new ways of alleviating human misery, new possibilities for human growth and achievement. Innovation requires insight and insights can only be gotten by persons who are close enough to the problems and the data and who have enough control over the elements in the experiential field to order them in accordance with the demands of the discovery process. More than this, getting insights takes time, and during this time persons must be fed, clothed, housed, and provided with the tools and materials necessary for their task. This means long term investment. None of this can happen without the sets of social agreements whereby innovators are given control over the experiential learning environment and are entrusted with the sustained resources for the processes of innovation. All of this is done by according property rights. Similarly, property rights

establish the various forms in which the fruits of innovation are returned to the publics to whom they belong.<sup>17</sup>

Needless to say, there is a lot more that must be said. These explorations have established some direction to the inquiry, but they have left hosts of questions unanswered. What can it mean (if anything) to speak about a “natural right” to property?<sup>18</sup> How should property rights be awarded and adjudicated? Does it make sense to distinguish between public and private *spheres* of economy and society? What about the accountability of trans-national corporations? How are property rights linked to democracy? What about the ethics of capital formation in an industrial economy? And, in relation to all of these, there arise the questions and challenges that will be issued from the perspective of alternative theories and approaches. All these questions, and many more, need to be answered before we come to clear insights and judgements on private property. These explorations offer only beginnings.

What they do offer, however, is a method of inquiry and tools of inquiry that can arise from insights into how we understand and that can set the inquiry process on a new and potentially fruitful track. *Property*, when approached from this line of inquiry, becomes not an object to be touched, grasped, or felt. Rather, it might better be explored as a *situation* of interaction among diverse schemes of recurrence in an ecology of social relations that offers some locus for intelligent ordering by persons. Similarly, a *right* is not a commodity belonging to us but an insight into an opportunity for personal

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<sup>17</sup> Bernard Lonergan’s texts on economics present an analysis of the relations between the basic (consumer) and surplus (producer) circuits of an economy that calls for a recognition that economic surpluses or profits yield the public “goods” of accelerating the economy and contributing to the standard of living of all. To yield these “goods,” profits need to be handled differently at different stages in the cycles of an economy. He speaks of these “goods” as a “social dividend” and seems to suggest that a discussion of property rights would need to recognize both the diverse functions of profits at different economic stages and the essentially public character of this dividend. See *CWL 21* and *CWL 15*. In particular, see Fred Lawrence, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *CWL 15*, lxiii-lxvi.

<sup>18</sup> Lonergan presents a brief analysis of “natural right” in relation to the dynamic structure and immanent norms of human consciousness in “Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,” in *3 Coll*, 169-183.

and social *goods* essential to human living that can be achieved through this intelligent ordering and a collective judgement on a set of obligations associated with this ordering—obligations that, in the limit, are rooted in the very structure of human self-transcendence itself.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Lonergan's method focuses our attention on how we understand. Yet, insights into understanding yield novel and interesting tools for thinking about the things of our lives. They confront us with the challenge to be attentive, to push beyond mere appearances, to think concretely, to watch carefully the way things actually happen in concrete living, to seek out the strange and novel in ordinary experience and to resist allowing commonsense ideas to delimit the focus or field of our explorations. Theory requires moving beyond mere appearance to exploring ranges of relations among things that, at first glance, may seem to have nothing to do with each other.

I hope I have been able to illustrate something of this method, something of this journey along the road from common sense to theory. The illustration offered here is only a first step along this road. But, hopefully, it offers something of a glimpse of novel resources that may prove helpful in meeting some of the ethical challenges we have encountered in our efforts to think responsibly about private property. It is only a beginning, but if we have learned anything from Phil McShane, it is to celebrate beginnings.

Ken Melchin is a professor of ethics at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, and the author of *Living With Other People* and *History, Ethics and Emergent Probability*.

Comments on this article can be sent to  
jmnda@mun.ca.

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<sup>19</sup>See, e.g., Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness."