

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATION

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This volume represents a shift into a new, higher gear for the journal. Our original idea was to provide a forum for taking seriously the view of macrodynamic analysis that is Lonergan's fundamental achievement: the initial definition of a collaborative division of labour in theology. The restriction of that division of labour to theology has been lifted in various ways in the past thirty years. The artificiality of it was noted by Karl Rahner in 1970: "Lonergan's theological methodology seems to me so general that it applies equally to all sciences, and so is not a method of theology as such but a general method of science illustrated by examples from theology."<sup>1</sup> Lonergan himself indicated this broader reach when he wrote of a functional specialized 'integrated studies' in which "the possibility of each integration is a method that runs parallel to the method in theology" (*Method* 364). Terrance Quinn's article, "Reflections on Progress in Mathematics," in volume three of this journal is a good example of how this parallel method can begin outside of theology.<sup>2</sup> From the onset we had in mind this broader conception of method and the first three volumes of the journal reflected this, if somewhat eccentrically. A strategy of deliberate diversity prevailed: "Let

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, "Kritische Bemerkungen zu B.J.F.Lonergan's Aufsatz: 'Functional Specialties in Theology'," *Gregorianum* 51 (1970): 537. ["Die theologische Methodologie Lonergan's scheint mir so generisch zu sein, dass sie eigentlich auf jede Wissenschaft passt, also keine Methodologie der Theologie als solcher ist, sondern nur eine allgemeinste Methodologie von Wissenschaft überhaupt, mit Biespielen aus der Theologie illustriert."]

<sup>2</sup> *JMDA* 3, 97-116.

a thousand blossoms bloom!” What held things together was *the desire and commitment* of each contributor to jump into hodic waters. In the first two issues, articles on mathematics, economics, philosophy of history, business ethics and physics all bumped together in a happy jumble. The venture was not really collaborative in any functionally controlled way, but we were at least in the water and playing around. For the third issue a first attempt at coordinated effort was made. Under the umbrella of a *Festschrift* issue a call was made to respond to a single article by Philip McShane on implementing functional specialization. The volume was large; three times the expected number of articles appeared. Some beautiful flowers bloomed but, largely, responses avoided the core question about implementation.

This result was not unexpected. Lonergan provides only the slightest hint of how this broader task of integrated studies might move forward (*Method* 355-368). In his chapter on Communications he notes the applicability of generalized empirical method “to any sphere of human living” (365); he tells us that the first three specialties “can be applied to any sphere of scholarly human studies” (364); and that “corresponding to doctrines, systematics, and communications in theological method, integrated studies would distinguish policy making, planning, and the execution of the plans” (365). Not much help. Yet (and there must be some irony in this) developing such an integrated view was Lonergan’s central intellectual preoccupation.

This volume then represents a first youthful start towards a broadened integrated perspective. The failure to realize an efficient procedure for coordinating efforts across fields and subjects is evident in the mess of our contemporary academic failure. Good work gets routinely wasted; blind alleys and dead ideologies persist in bewildering array; and the academy is increasing irrelevant to contemporary living. Yet more than ever the world requires the theoretic and scholarly pauses that are the university’s true gift to the world. Our communal eye is on the creation of a creative collaborative process that injects fresh air into a stale enterprise. The task is risky in the sense that the division of labour as outlined by Lonergan is not

spelled out in any of its functional detail. The only occasion in *Method in Theology* where Lonergan gives an indication of how a specific specialty is actually structured is in the chapter on dialectic (249-250). By contrast, in his discussion of interpretation he points to the efficiency of functional specialties in “the possibility of separate treatment of issues that otherwise become enormously complex” (153) but beyond the actual division of labour itself there is little direction about how to go about doing this. There is nothing like those marvellous two pages on the structure of dialectic for guiding functional interpretation. Essentially, Lonergan pointed out the field of play but left it to those of us who follow to figure out how to play.

As editor my task was to come up with a fruitful strategy, a way of getting the ball rolling. A number of things suggested themselves. First, potential contributors were certain to emerge from across the spectrum of traditional fields and subjects. We could not begin by restricting ourselves to one science or one genus of inquiry. Because functional specialties span all zones of inquiry, the obvious strategy was to pick a specialty. Second, we ought to start with one of the first four specialties: it makes sense to begin first with determining ‘where we’re at’ and that is the job of the first four specialties. Functional research, being the first of the specialties, might seem an obvious choice. However, research is so specific in its material component that it presented difficulties locating a suitable directive for contributors. And Lonergan had very little to say about functional research; the Research chapter in *Method in Theology* is just over two pages (149-151). The next specialty, functional interpretation, held more promise. Issues around ‘Interpretation’ are widely debated across fields and subjects. In the arts and social sciences the ‘problems of interpretation’ are legion. However, as is clear from the debate about ‘observers’ and ‘observables,’ interpretation is an issue even in the hardest of sciences, physics. Moreover, in *Insight* Lonergan had quite a bit to say about interpretation. Chapter XVII, if re-read in the light of functional specialization, provides a base for developing an account of the structure of functional

interpretation missing in *Method*.<sup>3</sup>

My request to potential authors was to tackle their respective topics in a way that would hold to the restriction of a single aim to interpret some section of an author's work, but with that aim located as best they could in the process towards passing on the result to the community of historians, and of course, on from there in the cyclic process of functional specialization. The immediate context of the effort was to be "The Sketch" of chapter 17 of *Insight*, which provided a 'convenient' or fitting focal point.<sup>4</sup> Although Lonergan's discussion there is not functional-differentiated, the possible structure for functional interpretation is more richly indicated in *Insight* than in *Method in Theology*. (It is fruitful to fantasize here about how *Method in Theology* would have turned out if Lonergan had had the same energy level available to him in writing *Method* as he had in writing *Insight*). What were we in search of then? First, a better understanding of this obscure text; secondly, some glimpse of how its challenge might be transposed into the more differentiated context of functional specialization. In order to do this it seemed to me that the efforts at interpretation should be presented in three parts: a first part giving what I call "A Personal Context"; a second part aiming at giving the "Content" of the interpretation in the form of a "hypothetical expression"; a third part presenting the "Context." The benefit of the first part is that it is a move towards the expression of the categories being used, something that would be increasingly evident as the functional collaboration moves forward. One might regard this part, indeed, as a side-venture into part of the dialectic process described on page 250 of *Method in Theology*: a taking of position with regard to what is personally thought to be progress and its grounds. As the results emerge, there is a sense in which we were all very much in the dark with regard to the task. None claimed to have much light on "pure formulation", "context", "content", etc. But the effort, and the collaboration

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<sup>3</sup> McShane's Cantower effort, "Functional Interpretation," Cantower XXXVII ([www.philipmshane.ca](http://www.philipmshane.ca)), was especially helpful here.

<sup>4</sup> The context was to be enlarged by the contributors as they thought fit.

it involved, moves us to some better grasp of the *functional challenge*. What I add here, by way of introductory comments, is the fruit of that collaborative effort.

Collaborators in this issue come from an interesting range of traditionally identified 'fields' of study. Loosely, we have contributors from Mathematics, (Quinn), Theology (O'Leary), Philosophy of Science (McShane), Linguistics/Language Studies (Benton), Economics (McCallion), and Philosophy of History (Drage). Identifying each participant in this way does not however accurately account for what they are doing. The material focus of Quinn's article, for example, occurs at the intersection of physics and mathematics; O'Leary's work brings together theology and business ethics; Benton's work is really philosophy of language. Beyond this, because our context assumes generalized empirical method as a starting point, each writer cannot rest with the object of his or her study independently of the subject. My request to consider 'personal context' make this explicitly impossible. In this I would recall a second meaning for 'field' Lonergan develops in his 1957 Boston lectures on logic and existentialism, that is, 'field' as 'horizon' (*CWL* 18, 306). Thus, each writer was called to make explicit his or her own position or poise regarding their work. This task is part of doing functional interpretation well: "understand the object, the words, the author, oneself" (*Method* 157). It raised uncomfortably the question of conversions: where do we stand with respect to the core differentiations of consciousness? Quinn, Benton, Drage and McShane, for instance, all point to an element of aesthetic conversion controlling their work, something I readily identify with as well. O'Leary, Drage and Quinn state explicitly what I believe is implicit in the other writers, that there is a structure of 'care,' a moral conversion controlling their investigation. Quinn, McShane and McCallion are at home in theory; everyone else located this as a zone of struggle. O'Leary, Drage and McShane are comfortably and explicitly religious; Quinn is quieter and more circumspect, but there is acknowledgment of a friendly divine co-traveler. And so on. Facing up fully to our basic poise is a further task attended to in dialectic, but even with interpretation we need to acknowledge our horizon-field.

On what basis do we really select what work is to be done?

Despite the range of comfort zones and competencies, the common task of interpretation cycling forward opens up links between efforts in divergent fields (in both senses of the word). McCallion's work, which takes a seemingly obscure fragment of Lonergan's economics, might seem far from O'Leary's concern with social justice. Yet both McCallion and O'Leary 'pick up' significant threads of meaning relevant to improving the probability of global economic well-being in the next centuries. They are trying to 'stick to' interpretation but are thinking ahead to the contribution these threads as interpreted can make to (future) functional historians. O'Leary uncovers a significant flaw in Friedman's understanding of the function of business (to only make a profit) and in doing so she points to the practical need for good economic theory. McCallion, on the other hand, moving more comfortably in economic theory, recovers a neglected gem in Lonergan's formulation of 'outlay' that is, ultimately, of great relevance to O'Leary's care about how we conduct ourselves in business. Drage recovers in McShane's developing view on axially, a view of general history that would locate and sublimate the efforts of both O'Leary and McCallion. Each writer moves in 'character' towards the recovery of historical significant meaning, for "insofar as its [meaning] is communicative it induces in the hearer some share in the cognitive, constitutive, or effective meaning of the speaker" (*Method* 356). And with that they seed the possibility of transformed meaning. The reader will no doubt find other connections. Overall, in reading through the contributions of this volume, I was struck by how luminously the character of each contributor shone through in their efforts to make a little progress in understanding a couple of pages of Lonergan on interpretation.

Which brings me to the "Sketch" pages. The "sketch" provided the interpretive guideline running through this volume, and the reader may enjoy the way each contributor has worked with its challenge in their various 'fields.' Each contributor has had something to contribute to an interpretation of these demanding and pivotal two pages of *Insight*. McShane's work is the most developed and controlled in this

regard, but each contributor has something significant to add. Out of this emerged some surprising and original contributions to understanding both Lonergan on interpretation and on functional interpretation. I will highlight a few points that struck me.

Since first reading *Insight* twenty-four years ago, I have struggled with notion of the universal viewpoint, which Lonergan identifies as “a potential totality of genetically and dialectically ordered viewpoints” (CWL 3, 587). Here in all its glory is the sought after integrated viewpoint.

And Lonergan is seemingly off-hand about it: “it is *simply* a heuristic structure that contains virtually the various ranges of possible alternatives of interpretations; it can list its own contents only through the stimulus of documents and historical inquiries; it can select between alternatives and differentiate its generalities only by appealing to the accepted norms of historical investigations” (CWL 3, 588). Simple? Or does he mean ‘simple’ as Aquinas does when he affirms in the *Summa Theologica* that God is simple (Ia, Q3)? I assumed the universal viewpoint was beyond my reach. What emerged from this exercise, however, is an appreciation of what *operatively* the universal viewpoint is. It is simply the *working assumption* of the scientist: questions for intelligence intend understanding? Yes, they do! What is the ultimate reach, the aim, of scientific understanding? Complete explanation! The working scientist tries to observe the canon of complete explanation. He or she goes with the best current understanding of the scientific reach. The working interpreter shares in this attitude. Just as “the science of mathematics provides the physicist with a sharply defined field of sequences and relations and thereby enables him to anticipate the general nature of any physical theory,” Lonergan’s “Sketch” provided a method for anticipating “a potential totality of genetically and dialectically ordered viewpoints” (CWL 3, 602). It is not the *per se* achievement of that total range. So while a complete viewpoint may be beyond my current achievement, it is not beyond my reach. McShane’s article, “Lonergan’s Meaning of ‘Complete’ in the Fifth Canon of Scientific Method,” provides a wealth of direction for understanding the function of the

universal viewpoint in functional interpretation as well as making fair progress in indicating how functional interpretation would be structured. The influence of this article on the work of the other collaborators is significant.

The most original and striking development to emerge in this volume is Benton's transposition of McShane's notion of 'tracking', which he counts as one of the metaphysical words.<sup>5</sup> To date McShane has identified six metaphysical words, designated W0 to W5.<sup>6</sup> Tracking is W5. It differentiates seven lanes or tracks of hodic specialization H1-H8 – think 'track and field'- determined by the level of development towards the universal viewpoint. The outside track, for example, is the lane of those working from the best contemporary horizon; the inside track is the lane for entrance level interpretation, and so forth. A diagram should help (see opposite).

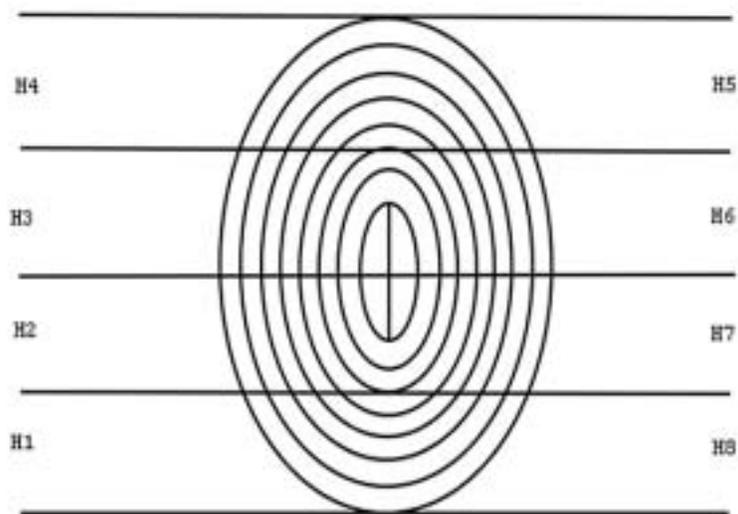
H1-H8 represent the eight specialties; the oval tracks run through each. Benton takes the notion and shows how it works in Functional Interpretation. I would urge everyone to read his article. I found it especially helpful locating my own work and developing strategies for communicating results. One of the great frustrations of writing about Lonergan's work is the diversity of the audience; tracking provides a brilliant structure for sorting this out.

There is much more to be found in this volume. But I leave it to readers to explore at their leisure. I would however point readers to a problem that both O'Leary and Quinn raise: How do we interpret a view considered erroneous or handle an oversight in interpretation in a manner that is functionally efficient yet still restricted to interpretation?

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<sup>5</sup> In making this assessment I take nothing away from the other contributors. Quinn's work on relative theory is impressive; Drage's work on axiomaticity was closest to my own work in philosophy of history and a wonderfully insightful read. McCallion makes a significant contribution to understanding Lonergan's macroeconomics dynamics, and O'Leary, with her interpretation of Friedman, cuts to the heart of the deficiency of mainstream economics.

<sup>6</sup> See "Infesting History with Hodology," *Cantower 24*  
<[www.philipmshane.ca](http://www.philipmshane.ca)>



This is clearly an important question for the future refinement of the specialty when treating *functionally* doctrinal deviations whether they occur in chemistry or religious studies.

Besides the articles on functional interpretation, this issue includes a response by Eileen DeNeeve on Tom McCallion's article "The Basic Price-Spread Ratio" which appeared in volume 2.<sup>7</sup> The occurrence of this exchange between DeNeeve and McCallion suggests to me that functional dialectic is a good topic for the next issue. I would locate "The Structure of Dialectic" as the key section for consideration. Those interested in taking part in this venture should get in touch with the editor. To get started I would recommend a reading of McShane's Cantower XXXIX on "Functional Dialectics."<sup>8</sup>

I believe this issue of our Journal represents a significant turning point in the history of functional specialization. It took Lonergan over thirty years from the time he identified the problem of implementation in 1934 until its solution in 1965. In 1969 he revealed his discovery. It has been more than thirty years since then and functional specialization has not become

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<sup>7</sup> *JMDA* 2 61-80.

<sup>8</sup> <[www.philipmcshane.ca](http://www.philipmcshane.ca)>. Related to also this see *Sofdaware* 1 to 8 <[www.philipmcshane.ca/sofdaware.html](http://www.philipmcshane.ca/sofdaware.html)>

effectively operative even in Lonergan studies, let alone theology or in the academy at large. While this effort is but a small pebble tossed in a large sea, one can hope that its ripple effect might start a new wave. I am pleased to be involved in this first attempt to 'try it on' and hope that others will 'track' our progress as we move in the next issue to consider functional dialectic.