

## REPLY TO FRED CROWE'S NOTE ON 'THE HISTORY THAT IS WRITTEN'

PATRICK BROWN

I am grateful to Fred Crowe for the opportunity to discuss in more detail the complex history of Lonergan's treatment of history. In his note, Crowe patiently and carefully builds a case against a suggestion I made in my article on Lonergan's historical manuscripts from the 1930s. My suggestion concerned the relationship between 'the history that happens' (historical fact or process) and 'the history that is written' (historical investigation or historiography). I am thankful, as well, for the editor's invitation to develop my initial suggestion by way of reply. By formulating more explicitly and expansively the grounds on which I disagree with Crowe, I hope with his help to identify an important element in Lonergan's thinking on history and to advance the state of the question concerning it.

### **I. Introduction**

On its face, our disagreement appears to be about footnotes. Crowe takes issue with a footnote in my article calling into question two editorial footnotes authored by him. But really it is a disagreement regarding, in Crowe's words, "the trend of Lonergan's thinking on history." Since the meaning and nature of that trend is too important to be relegated to footnotes, it is entirely appropriate to hone and focus the disagreement in a more extended way. Although so large a topic cannot be definitively settled in a few pages, this exchange may at least give rise to further, relevant questions on the topic.

As I understand it, our disagreement concerns (a) the

nature of the distinction between ‘the history that happens’ and ‘the history that is written,’ (b) the role that distinction plays in Lonergan’s thought about history, and (c) the use to which that distinction can be put in periodizing Lonergan’s thought on history.<sup>1</sup> As one’s view of the latter two will depend largely on one’s view of the first, I will try to sketch a view that differs from Crowe’s and that takes into account a series of texts from the *Insight* and pre-*Insight* period.

My discussion needs to be prefaced by three important qualifications. First, Fred Crowe has a much deeper familiarity with Lonergan’s thought than I have, and the breadth of his knowledge of Lonergan is something I can only aspire to. Yet on the particular point under discussion I believe that he is mistaken – or, perhaps a more plausible alternative, that I have mistakenly interpreted his position.

Second, I find I cannot adequately answer Fred’s remarks without going beyond the limits he sets for his note. For Crowe treats ‘the history that happens’ and ‘the history that is written’ as topics that may be developed separately, and so he confines himself in his response largely to the latter and, indeed, to the latter in Lonergan’s thinking after *Insight*. For my part, I believe the two are related as historical process and historical investigation; they seem to me to be as correlative as subject and object in generalized empirical method.<sup>2</sup> I must therefore treat both topics, although I will attempt to do so as briefly as possible. In addition, Crowe limits his topic to Lonergan’s post-*Insight* thinking on the history that is written, while I will attempt to present relevant key texts from Lonergan’s writings

---

<sup>1</sup> Crowe begins with four clarifications. For the sake of clarity I should note that I wholly agree with Crowe’s first clarification, mostly agree with his second, dispute the third, and agree with the approach taken in the fourth, though not with its conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> See “Religious Knowledge,” *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick Crowe (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 129-145, at 141 (generalized empirical method “does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject’s operations without taking into account the corresponding objects.”) For an oblique but striking application of this idea to a philosophical account of empirical method that explicitly includes historical method, see “A Post-Hegelian Philosophy of Religion,” *A Third Collection*, 202-223, at 202-204.

prior to and including *Insight*.

Third, though with Crowe I believe that further research can help resolve the question at hand, and though in a later section of this reply I present various texts that at least call into question those presented by Crowe, still I am forced by the logic of my argument to move beyond a presentation of texts to a consideration of contexts. And that, unfortunately, requires a more lengthy and circuitous route than the concise and expeditious path taken by Crowe. Moreover, through the strategic use of Lonergan's late comments on his own early work, Crowe is able to make a strong argument that the disputed issue is a relatively closed and determined one. My task, in contrast, is to suggest as persuasively as I can that the two meanings of the English word "history," their implications, relations, and history in Lonergan's thought, are very much an open and complex question. Unfortunately, exploring that suggestion involves a more lengthy and detailed presentation than Crowe's precise and concise argument.

## II. Crowe's Position on the Distinction

In my article I expressed doubts about the assumptions underlying two editorial notes. The first, from the editor's introduction to Lonergan's "Analytic Concept of History" (1937-38), reads:

"Although the distinction is already clear to Lonergan, it is only the history that *happens* that concerns him at this early stage; he will never lose that concern, but it is the history that is written that is the focus of chapters 8 and 9 of *Method in Theology* ..." <sup>3</sup>

The second, a comment on "The Philosophy of History" (1960), reads:

"Lonergan does not treat these topics in the final lecture, 'History,' in *Topics in Education* (see pp. 241-50). That lecture begins and ends by referring to the history that happens, but the entire treatment is in terms of the history that is written. Further, Lonergan

---

<sup>3</sup> "Analytic Concept of History," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11/1 (1993), 31, n.11.

does not there mention the two meanings of ‘history.’”<sup>4</sup>

A third editorial note, also representative of the general theme, reads:

“The topic here is the history that happens, that is written about. It was only slowly that the counterpart of this, the history that is written (chapters 8 and 9 of *Method in Theology*), became thematic for Lonergan. This is strange, since the distinction is already clear in the student papers of File 713 ... more than twenty years before the thematic treatment of the two as a related pair occurs in ... *The Philosophy of History* (1960).”<sup>5</sup>

My doubts concern the treatment in these notes of ‘the history that happens’ and ‘the history that is written’ as a distinction verging on a separation or a dichotomy. As I will explain below, I believe the two to be intrinsically related, and I believe Lonergan understood this to be the case even in the period of his early historical manuscripts. Moreover, an explicit concern for ‘the history that is written’ appears in Lonergan’s writings in the 1930s and 1940s and continues up through *Insight*. In short, I think it inaccurate to say that ‘it was only slowly that the history that is written became thematic for Lonergan.’ In addition, I believe that using the distinction to periodize Lonergan’s thinking on history obscures more than it illuminates. As I hope to show in the next several sections, the development of Lonergan’s thinking on history is not so much a shift from one to the other meaning of ‘history’ as a series of shifts within each.

---

<sup>4</sup> “The Philosophy of History,” *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 54-79, at 79, n.43.

<sup>5</sup> *Understanding and Being*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli, Mark D. Morelli, Frederick E. Crowe, Robert M. Doran and Thomas V. Daly, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 423, note f.

### III. Some Potentially Relevant Variant Terminology

First, then, the shifts to which I just referred are obscured by the fact that Lonergan used a variety of different terms for the same idea. By recognizing the range of rubrics Lonergan uses for the same basic idea, one is better able to notice a larger variety of relevant contexts.

As Crowe notes, the distinction between the two meanings of “history” appears as early as “The Analytic Concept of History,” dated by Crowe to 1937-38.<sup>6</sup> The very same language appears as late as *Method* and “Christology Today.”<sup>7</sup> But like his mentor Aquinas, Lonergan does not cling rigidly to an artificially consistent vocabulary.<sup>8</sup> So one must not jump to the conclusion that Lonergan refers to the distinction only when he happens to use the language of ‘history that is written’ and ‘history that happens.’ For example, in “Analytic Concept” Lonergan explicitly uses “historiography” as a synonym for ‘the history that is written.’ (The root image, after all, is the same.) In fact, Lonergan uses the term “historiography” in “Analytic Concept,” *Insight*, *Method*, and in “The Ongoing Genesis of Methods” – in short, throughout every period in his career as a philosopher of history.<sup>9</sup>

Lonergan uses the basic distinction between ‘history the

---

<sup>6</sup> For the dating, see the “Editor’s Introduction” to “Analytic Concept of History,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11/1 (1993), 1-2. For the distinction, see *id.*, “Analytic Concept of History,” 9 (“Distinguish [a] history that is written, history books; call it historiography; [b] history that is written about.”)

<sup>7</sup> *Method in Theology*, 175; “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” in *A Third Collection*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> “In general, I do not operate out of a fixed vocabulary.” *Method* in Theology Institute at Boston College, 1970, trans. N.W. Graham (Lonergan Center, Boston College, 70.4.1), 476. See also *Caring about Meaning: Patterns in the Life of Bernard Lonergan* [interviews], Thomas More Institute Papers/82 (Montreal: Perry Printing Ltd., 1982), 6 (noting that Aquinas will propose two definitions of “actio,” and then a few pages later three, “and the three don’t correspond to the other two! Scotus will say in one crack: there are fifteen different meanings of *actio*. Scotus was a logician; Thomas was the intelligent man.”)

<sup>9</sup> “Analytic Concept,” 9; *Insight*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 588; *Method*, 194, 194 n.11; “Ongoing Genesis of Methods,” *Third Collection*, 146-65, at 158.

process' and 'history the investigation of the process' in a variety of different guises throughout his writings. For example, an important category for 'the history that is written' in *Insight* is "the historical sense."<sup>10</sup> Recognizable references to what he calls "the historical sense" occur as early as 1937-38.<sup>11</sup> Lonergan refers to "historical investigation" in both *Insight* and *Method*, and he refers to "historical process" in *Insight*, *Method*, and other writings.<sup>12</sup> He writes of "historical study" in 1939-40,<sup>13</sup> in 1942<sup>14</sup> and in 1959,<sup>15</sup> and he refers to

---

<sup>10</sup> *Insight*, 587; 762. The phrase "the historical sense" is also used in "Method in Catholic Theology" (1959), *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10/1 (1992), 3-23, at 16, where he refers to "the historical sense, namely, an awareness that concepts are functions of time, that they change and develop with every advance of understanding, that they become platitudinous and insignificant by passing through minds that do not understand, and that such changes take place in a determinate manner that can be the object of a science." This last phrase is, of course, crucial. I take it to refer to Lonergan's explanatory hermeneutics and its relevance for scientific history. Compare *Insight*, 762 ("historical interpretation may be based simply on a historical sense or may operate in the light of the universal viewpoint") with *Understanding and Being*, 384 (noting that "the problem of history as a science is an extremely complex problem," suggesting that "an approach to history in terms of truth" is possible, and adding that "it's that question that to some extent I'm dealing with in the section of chapter 17 on canons of hermeneutics").

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., the first page of "Analytic Concept," where Lonergan refers to "Christopher Dawson's historical essays" as examples of "synthetic understanding," to be contrasted with "analytic understanding." See also the reference in Lonergan's doctoral dissertation to the advantages of a method that stands to historical events as "the science of mathematics stands to quantitative phenomena," and the context there. *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 1 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2000), 162-63.

<sup>12</sup> *Insight*, 588 (referring to "historical inquiries," "historical interpretation," and "historical investigation"); *Method*, 177, 184 (referring to "historical investigation"); *Insight*, 762 ("the cumulative, historical process of development"); *Insight*, 252 (referring to "the course of human history" as subject to emergent probability); *Method*, 218 ("historical process"), *id.* ("historical reality"); "Reality, Myth, Symbol," in Alan M. Olsen, ed., *Myth, Symbol, and Reality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 31-37, at 36 ("historical process"). See also "Ongoing Genesis," 152 (referring to "the historical process itself").

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., *Grace and Freedom*, 156.

“historical research” in 1953.<sup>16</sup> In 1951 he writes of “explanatory histories of civilizations and cultures, of religion and dogmas,”<sup>17</sup> while in 1954 he writes of “higher level controls” in “scientific method in the historical sciences” that might provide a desired “component in historical method.”<sup>18</sup> In 1959 he writes of changes of meaning over time that “take place in a determinate manner that can be the object of a science.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in *Method* he writes of an ascent “towards the notion of scientific history,”<sup>20</sup> while in his last published article he referred to “the possibility of history being scientific”<sup>21</sup> – a possibility he had highlighted 40 years before in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation.<sup>22</sup>

My second point is simple enough. If one is to study the history of Lonergan’s treatment of history, one must attend to the whole range of variant terminology over the whole course of Lonergan’s writing. Once one does so, one notices frequent and consistent uses either before or around 1953 of “historical investigation,” “historical inquiry,” “historical interpretation,” “the historical sense,” “historical method,” “historiography” – even the striking phrase, “the outlines of a heuristic scheme for historical investigations.”<sup>23</sup> And that suggests that ‘the history that is written’ may have been thematic for Lonergan prior to

---

<sup>14</sup> *For a New Political Economy*, ed. Philip McShane, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 21 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>15</sup> “Method in Catholic Theology” 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Insight*, 564.

<sup>17</sup> “The Role of a Catholic University in the Modern World” (1951), *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 4 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988), 108-113, at 113.

<sup>18</sup> “Theology and Understanding,” *Collection*, 114-132, at 129-30.

<sup>19</sup> “Method in Catholic Theology,” 16-17.

<sup>20</sup> *Method*, 182.

<sup>21</sup> “Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth” (1982), *A Third Collection*, 239-250, at 246.

<sup>22</sup> See especially, *Grace and Freedom*, at 156-58.

<sup>23</sup> *Insight*, 427. Lonergan claims that his sketch of a dialectic of method in metaphysics provides such a heuristic scheme for a more expansive historical investigation of philosophy. It is no stretch to say that the same phrase describes his sketch on method in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation. See *Grace and Freedom*, 155-192.

his transfer to Rome in 1953.

My third point follows from the first two. There is no particular magic in the terminology Lonergan often used to distinguish between the ‘history that happens’ and the ‘history that is written.’ In my view, it was simply a stock distinction, a practical expedient required by the fact that English has one word for both historical process and the intelligent investigation of that process.<sup>24</sup>

My fourth point is more complex but it may be stated simply. One should be wary of exaggerating the distinction. I take the distinction to be analogous to the standard English uses of the word “chemistry.” There is, after all, a “chemistry that happens” and a “chemistry that is written.” Stated otherwise, by “chemistry” one may mean either chemical processes or the scientific study of such processes. The two are distinct but related. The same, I suggest, is true of “history.” Context usually indicates which meaning is intended in ordinary language. In professional discourse, however, it may be necessary to indicate more carefully which use of the word “chemistry” or “history” one intends.

If my analogy holds, then there may be something problematic about Crowe’s assertion that it was only slowly that ‘the history that is written’ became thematic for Lonergan.<sup>25</sup> A serious chemist would not spend years investigating chemical processes without giving any thought to the experimental or scientific method involved in discovering chemical processes – certainly not a chemist who had a longstanding interest in methodology. Similarly, it seems doubtful that Lonergan could have approached his study of historical process without also seriously attending to historical investigation or historical method.<sup>26</sup> By the age of 22 (six years

---

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams provides an illuminating history of the two English senses of “history” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Society and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 1983), 146-48.

<sup>25</sup> *Understanding and Being*, 423, note f.

<sup>26</sup> The connection between the two seems to me inevitable, once one acknowledges that the history that happens is mediated by heuristics. On this, see a remark by Lonergan in 1962: “The history that is written about can be conceived vaguely as the total course of human events; or one can form a heuristic concept with regard to it, something to be known by the



before he began work on the earliest extant historical manuscript) he was already seriously interested in methodology.<sup>27</sup> For this reason, I find a dramatic shift in Lonergan's thinking on history from 'the history that happens' to 'the history that is written' *a priori* unlikely, and I find it doubly unlikely that the shift would happen after *Insight*, which is to say, some 20 years after Lonergan began to think seriously about history.<sup>28</sup>

I hope to show that it is *a posteriori* unlikely as well, through a brief presentation of the distinction in Lonergan's writings from the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. But in order to prepare for that brief examination, I would like first to explore why what I believe to be an unlikely view might seem at least initially very plausible.

#### IV. Interpretive Simplifications and Later Refinements

Lonergan scholarship contains an interesting field in which one may find a small but peculiar crop of ideas on Lonergan's development that later prove to be quite inaccurate. The ideas I have in mind possess two odd characteristics. First, they tend to grow out of various short-hand statements Lonergan himself made. Second, because they have parallels in Lonergan's own comments on his work, they tend over time to accrue almost a sense of self-evidence and inevitability.

---

total set of true historical statements. And in developing that heuristic notion, one forms one's general notion of history *and* of the methods of historical study." (Emphasis added). The comment was made in lecture 19 (July 20, 1962) of Lonergan's lectures at Regis College. I am quoting from the handwritten transcription of the lectures by John Brezovec, vol. II, p. 169. I do not think this statement in 1962 was a reflection of a new attitude. To the contrary, the same stance is present in *Insight*. For a clear indication of that, see the remarks Lonergan made in this regard in the Halifax lectures on *Insight, Understanding and Being*, 383-386.

<sup>27</sup> *Caring about Meaning*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Crowe is right to call this contention "strange" (*Understanding and Being*, at 423, note f) but wrong, I think, not to press the assumptions undergirding it. On the 20 year gap, Michael Shute dates the earliest historical manuscript, "The Philosophy of History," to 1933-34. *The Origins of Lonergan's Notion of the Dialectic of History: A Study of Lonergan's Early Writings on History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 179. *Insight* was finished in the fall of 1953. See Frederick Crowe, *Lonergan* (Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 71-73.

I am thinking, for example, of the notion that Lonergan discovered the value of feelings and images only after *Insight*, that the fourth level of consciousness was a product of the period between *Insight* and *Method*, that historical-mindedness in Lonergan's thinking arose through his confrontation with European thought (in particular, with the German Historical School) upon moving to Rome in 1953, and that "constitutive meaning" is a late-breaking idea which Lonergan borrowed from Dilthey. I suspect that Fr. Crowe and I agree the first two are mistaken.<sup>29</sup> I wish to make the argument here that the third is as well. In a future article I hope to examine the notion of "constitutive meaning" and to show that something like it appears in Lonergan's earliest writings on history.

These kinds of simplifications possess utility and even some truth, of course. Adequate interpretation is a matter of successive approximation, after all, and these simplifications provide initial ideal types for interpretation; they offer helpful heuristic indications for histories of Lonergan's thought; they allow preliminary classifications of the data on Lonergan's development. But I think one must remain wary of them for two reasons.

First, although initially helpful, these simplifications may ultimately serve to block further investigation by functioning as premature resting places for unwary interpreters. (This seems to have been the case for the first two I listed, and I suspect the same is true for the others.) If accepted widely enough, they may even end up taking on the status of accepted verities whose "very felicity," to steal a phrase from Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., "delay further analysis for fifty years."<sup>30</sup>

Second, the notions I listed happen to locate Lonergan on a timeline of before and after. They depend, that is, on an image of Lonergan's thought as a line that can be neatly divided into two segments. This can be a helpful heuristic

---

<sup>29</sup> As Crowe remarks in the editorial notes to "Theology and Understanding," "there is need of a study on the positive role of feeling even in the early Lonergan; otherwise, we seize on his negative remarks and then tend to make *Method* a complete about-turn ..." *Collection*, at 281, note 1.

<sup>30</sup> "Law in Science and Science in Law," 12 *Harvard Law Review* 443 (1899).

image, but it also can be an unfortunate and misleading one.<sup>31</sup> For Lonergan's development was rarely unilinear. It was more like a constantly expanding network of ideas, or, in his own words, "a spiral of viewpoints."<sup>32</sup> If so, if his own thinking was a dynamically developing network or spiral of viewpoints rather than a straight line, we might expect him to return to certain themes again and again, albeit from successively higher points of view.

I would contend that is just what happened in Lonergan's thinking about historical process and historical investigation. For, in my opinion, Lonergan conceived the two in tandem from the earliest historical manuscripts all the way through *Insight*. It is true that at each significant turn of his spiral of viewpoints on history he rethinks their nature and relation. But I do not think it is true that he moved from thinking mainly about historical process in the pre-*Insight* period to thinking mainly about historical writing or historical method in the post-

---

<sup>31</sup> Sometimes a before-and-after image works. For example, Lonergan's insights regarding functional specialization in February 1965 create a distinct dividing line in the history of his thought. But the before-and-after schema can be misleading as well. To cite one example, Lonergan reviewed a book by Gilson in which Gilson treats philosophies as 'a series of concrete historical experiments.' One might therefore be tempted to think Lonergan got this idea of 'the experiment of history' from Gilson. See *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 262, note h. The argument would go something like this: Lonergan's use of the phrase comes after his reading of Gilson; Lonergan attributes the phrase to Gilson in *Insight*; therefore Lonergan got the idea from Gilson. However natural an interpretation, it is an inaccurate one. Lonergan had already used the metaphor of the experiment of history in "Analytic Concept of History," 11. (By the dialectic of history "we do mean something like a series of experiments, a process of trial and error; yet not the formal experiment of the laboratory, for man is not so master of his fate; rather, an inverted experiment in which *objective reality molds the mind of man into conformity with itself...*") Lonergan seized on Gilson's use of the phrase, it seems to me, because it was coincident with his own idea. But my only suggestion here is limited: we should be careful of treating every new turn of phrase as ipso facto a new development.

<sup>32</sup> See *Insight*, 210 (writing of years "in which one's understanding gradually works round and up a spiral of viewpoints with each complementing its predecessor and only the last embracing the whole field to be mastered.")

*Insight* period.

My contention, however, appears on its face to contradict the solid block of Lonergan's own comments so skillfully assembled by Fr. Crowe. So if the reader will permit one last digression before we proceed to the texts pertaining to historical investigation from *Insight* and earlier writings, I would like briefly to address the nature and status of Lonergan's dicta.

## V. Dicta and Data

Crowe assembles an extensive array of Lonergan's comments on the development of his view of history. I grant that the array of Lonergan's orbiter dicta on the matter is quite impressive. For years I regarded it as quite conclusive. There is a hinge in the history of Lonergan's thinking about history; that hinge is located sometime after *Insight*; the hinge involves a shift in Lonergan's thinking from concentrating on the history that happens to concentrating on critical history, the history that is written; it is somehow connected to Lonergan's need to become acclimated to continental thinking after his move to Rome. Lonergan himself said so, or implied so, and that's that.

Given the clarity of Lonergan's pronouncements, why delve any deeper into the matter? Four reasons provide grounds for a deeper examination. (1) Taken as a whole, the dicta are ambiguous, (2) their accuracy is variable, since it depends on Lonergan's estimate of the intellectual developments and deficiencies of the audience to whom he was speaking, (3) the dicta are subject to Lonergan's important qualifications regarding the variable standard of adequate expression, and, finally, (4) they contradict the actual data on Lonergan's own development.

First, the dicta as a whole are ambiguous. It is quite true, as Crowe points out, that Lonergan once remarked, "While *Insight* had something to say on evolution and historical process, it did not tackle the problem of critical history."<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, it is also true that Lonergan once remarked, "*Insight* is very relevant to working out, from a critical philosophic basis, *just what critical history is*, just what

---

<sup>33</sup> "Reality, Myth, Symbol," 36.

objective interpretation is.”<sup>34</sup> It is quite true, as Crowe points out, that Lonergan began to delve more deeply into continental thinking and the German historical school after he moved to Rome. On the other hand, it is also true that when Lonergan was asked, “Did getting aware of the German development alter your own?,” he responded: “No, but it fits in with the various ways in which history entered into my thinking. I was doing history in writing *Gratia Operans*.”<sup>35</sup> And a little while later in the same interview: “The fact of history was evident all along, evident in what was called ‘positive theology,’ and all the good books were historical.”<sup>36</sup> It is quite true, as Crowe points out, that Lonergan often praised the whole movement of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. On the other hand, he also occasionally criticized the weakness of the *Geisteswissenschaften*,<sup>37</sup> including their potential involvement in relativism.<sup>38</sup> It is quite true that Lonergan repeatedly praises

---

<sup>34</sup> “An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.” (1971), in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 209-230, at 218 (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> *Caring about Meaning*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Method in Theology Institute at Boston College, 525-26 (“The weakness of the German *Geisteswissenschaften* ... there you are being involved in philosophy and you can very easily be involved in philosophic mistakes, so the scientific tendency is away from it.”); *Caring about Meaning* (“You see, the Germans created modern history. I suppose the best man thinking it through was Collingwood, but they created it and then lost it. In the second half of the nineteenth century they got involved in positivism...”).

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Lonergan’s 1962 Regis College lectures, July 20, 1962, the Brezovec transcription, vol. II, 181-83. The same lecture intimates the significance of *Insight* for historical writing. “And that upper blade of method is *the contribution of a critical philosophy to historical method*. What one knows through self-appropriation is relevant to understanding the people who are written about by the historian. It is relevant to understanding the historians who do the writing. It is relevant to understanding the critics of the historian. And all along the line it adds a normative element ...” *Id.*, 198 (emphasis added). This concern is not new in 1962; on the contrary, it reaches far back into Lonergan’s thought. Let me mention just two contexts. First, Lonergan was impressed by the problem of relativism in historical writing at the very least since his reading in the late 1930s of Raymond Klbanky’s 1936 *Festschrift* for Ernst Cassirer titled *Philosophy and History*. There are extracts from this book in

the project of ‘the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit.’ On the other hand, something like the same emphasis can be deduced from Lonergan’s insistence in *Insight* on “the retrospective expansion” of the universal viewpoint.<sup>39</sup> It is quite true, as Crowe points out, that when Lonergan referred to the “new challenge” from the *Geisteswissenschaften*, he wrote of his “long struggle” and its documentation in his Latin works without referring to *Insight*.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, in the very same paper he notes that “the third section of chapter seventeen on truth of interpretation has been given a more concrete expression in chapters seven to eleven of *Method*,”<sup>41</sup> an appraisal that includes not only *Method*’s chapter on interpretation but also its two chapters on ‘the history that is written.’

Second, the accuracy of Lonergan’s asides on his own work are open to question. He often remarked that he was uncomfortable making off-hand remarks, and that he preferred to have time to think out answers to questions that had been

---

Lonergan’s handwriting in the Lonergan archives. In addition, Lonergan mentions Huizinga’s essay in that volume from memory in the 1958 lectures on *Insight* when discussing the problem of relativism in historical writing (*Understanding and Being*, 385). (Note also, in this context, the presence in that *Festschrift* of an essay by Friedrich Gundolf significantly titled “Historiography: Introduction to an Unpublished Work: *German Historians from Herder to Burckhardt*,” *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. Raymond Klibansky & H.J. Patton (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), 277-282.) The second context is Lonergan’s extracts from Toynbee, written probably in 1940-42. The first part of the first part of volume I of Toynbee’s *Study of History* is titled “The Relativity of Historical Thought,” and Lonergan’s extract of it begins: “Current historical writing a by-product of Industrialism and Nationalism.”

<sup>39</sup> *Insight*, 609 (“First, there is the genetic sequence in which insights are gradually accumulated by man. Secondly, there are the dialectical alternatives...”); *Ibid.*, 588-89 (“the universal viewpoint ... has a retrospective expansion in the various genetic series of discoveries through which man could advance to his present knowledge. It has a dialectical expansion in the many formulations of discoveries due to the polymorphic consciousness of man...”) See also *Understanding and Being*, 383-85.

<sup>40</sup> “*Insight* Revisited,” *A Second Collection*, 263-78, at 277.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

submitted in advance.<sup>42</sup> In addition, as we know from *Insight*, the dicta are a function of the practical insight governing Lonergan's flow of expression on any given occasion.<sup>43</sup> That practical insight depends on a speaker or writer's estimate of the habitual intellectual development and deficiencies of the anticipated audience. His dicta therefore tend to have a quality of simplification that varies with the audience and occasion.

Third, the limitations of the anticipated audience may "restrict the adequacy with which even one's principal meaning is expressed."<sup>44</sup> As Lonergan notes, "If one has anything very significant to say, then probably one will not be able to express the whole of it except to a rather specialized audience."<sup>45</sup> This relates to what Lonergan termed "the variable standard of adequate expression."

"[H]uman expression is never complete expression. It keeps its eye on the central meaning; it expedites subordinate and peripheral meanings by lowering standards of adequacy to a sufficient approximation to the purpose at hand; and, quite clearly, it cannot add in a parenthesis this somewhat involved account of the variable standard of adequate expression."<sup>46</sup>

Rather than entering into the complexity of the variable standard of adequate expression, I simply want to note here that his dicta on his own development are at best approximate and related to the purpose at hand. To what extent his principal meaning comes through is an open question, as I tried to intimate in my first point.

Fourth, some of the dicta contradict the actual data on Lonergan's development. There may be many reasons for this. One is the fallibility of memory.<sup>47</sup> Another is the temptation to

---

<sup>42</sup> The theme occurs repeatedly in *Caring about Meaning*.

<sup>43</sup> *Insight*, 579 ("Clearly, this practical insight (F) differs notably from the insight (A) to be communicated.")

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 580.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 580.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 580.

<sup>47</sup> When asked a detail in 1981 about the lectures on the philosophy of education he gave in 1959, Lonergan responded: "You bring that up, you see, because you have read those lectures recently. I've forgotten all about

engage unconsciously in anachronism or creative reconstruction.<sup>48</sup> But perhaps the most important reason is that a thinker, even a brilliant thinker like Lonergan, does not necessarily grasp all the details and nuances of each stage of his or her own development.<sup>49</sup> In any event, the actual data from Lonergan's writings rather convincingly confirm a focal and thematic awareness of and interest in 'the history that is written' in the period prior and leading up to *Insight*.

## VI. The Data on 'History That Is Written' from *Insight* and Before

I touched on 'the history that is written' in Lonergan's historical manuscripts in my article. It is not necessary to repeat that here. I would only emphasize my conclusion that "historical analysis" in that period of his thinking serves as a heuristic structure for an exercise in historical writing that Lonergan calls "historical synthesis."<sup>50</sup> I would emphasize, in

---

them." *Caring about Meaning*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 ("Thinking about one's development can be rather creative!"); *Ibid.*, 198 (referring to a friend who was asked to write an autobiography, "He considered it and decided: if you start to write an autobiography, you begin to make up things: you interpret the past in terms of the present.")

<sup>49</sup> Lonergan's remark on Aquinas in *Method* may serve as a relevant context. "Thomas Aquinas effected a remarkable development in the theology of grace. He did so not at a single stroke but in a series of writings over a period of a dozen years or more. Now, while there is no doubt that Aquinas was quite conscious of what he was doing on each of the occasions on which he returned to the topic, still on none of the earlier occasions was he aware of what he would be doing on the later occasions, and there is just no evidence that after the last occasion he went back over all his writings on the matter, observed each of the long and complicated series of steps in which the development was effected, grasped their interrelations, saw just what moved him forward and, perhaps, what held him back in each of the steps." *Method*, 165.

<sup>50</sup> See Brown, "System and History in Lonergan's Early Historical and Economic Manuscripts," *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis* 1 (2001), 32-76, at 67-74. There are two levels to historical synthesis. The first is characterized by "Christopher Dawson's historical essays," "Analytic Concept," at 7; it involves what Lonergan will later call "the historical sense" or "historical scholarship," and its method is what Lonergan later calls "a sophisticated extension of commonsense understanding." *Method*, 230. The second level of synthesis involves "a movement from pure



addition, that ‘the history that happens’ and ‘the history that is written’ are already deeply and thematically intertwined in Lonergan’s idea of a third period of the history that happens in which the process of historical unfolding is guided in part by reflex thought (which “presupposes the discovery of canons of thought and the methods of investigation”<sup>51</sup>). The history-that-is-written using canons of thought and methods of investigation examines the history-that-happens in order to change the future occurrence of the history-that-happens. This is not as unusual as it sounds. After all, the dialectic of history is a fact, and its unfolding as a fact can be altered by the discovery of its nature or structure. That is why Lonergan gives the “‘class consciousness’ advocated by the communists [as] perhaps the clearest expression of the transition from reflex thought to reflex history.”<sup>52</sup> Or, to take another example from the same period, the discovery of the real nature of economic process can provide guidance by which the future economic process (and with it, segments of historical process) could be changed for the better.<sup>53</sup>

So one must not conclude that because the analytic concept of history “does not proceed from historical fact to theory,”<sup>54</sup> that it is therefore irrelevant to historical investigation or ‘the history that is written.’ On the contrary, it moves from its own “abstract terms to the categories of any historical event.”<sup>55</sup> The categories are *a priori*, but their application is not, any more than the application of “Newtonian astronomy” is *a priori*. As Lonergan notes of the kind of understanding that tells us what something is—for example,

---

analysis to historical synthesis.” *For a New Political Economy*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> “Analytic Concept,” 17; see also *id.*, 18-19.

<sup>52</sup> “Analytic Concept,” 18.

<sup>53</sup> In other words, just as contemporary economic process is a mess because humans are unaware of, and therefore maladapted to, the requirements of its basic structure, so historical process, guided by nothing more than spontaneous thought or spontaneous history, is a mess because humans are unaware of, and therefore maladapted to, the dialectical structure of history. See “Analytic Concept,” 18-19. My point is that historical process and historical investigation are not nearly so unconnected, even in the early Lonergan, as is often assumed.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

what history is—“in this knowledge we have a premise to further knowledge.”<sup>56</sup> That is why he is happy to note that “the history of the last four hundred years in Europe” exemplifies his theory.<sup>57</sup>

I am trying to bring out here the fact that “historical analysis” is a form of historical heuristic, and that the heuristic is extraordinarily relevant to historical writing. As Lonergan put the matter rather concisely around 1940, “*To write history one has to know what history is.*”<sup>58</sup> I do not know of a more thematic statement on ‘the history that is written,’ and it comes long before Lonergan’s return to Rome to teach.<sup>59</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> (Emphasis added.) The sentence comes from a typed page in the archives titled “Historical Analysis.” A fuller quotation is provided in my article, “System and History,” 74, n.135.

<sup>59</sup> Although evidence on Lonergan’s reading during the late 1930s and early 1940s is scant, it would seem sufficient to falsify the interpretative hypothesis that Lonergan was not interested in, or not focally aware of, ‘the history that is written’ during that period. To take but one example, in a brief book review published in a Montreal paper in 1941, Lonergan mentions a recent article on the teaching of history by a Professor Adair. See Bernard Lonergan, Review of M.M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny*, The Montreal Beacon, May 2, 1941, p. 3. That article is a survey, in its author’s words, of “the methods used in the study of history” in Canadian universities. E.R. Adair, “The Study of History at McGill University,” *Culture: Revue Trimestrielle, Sciences Religieuses et Sciences Profanes au Canada*, vol. II, no. 1 (March 1941), 51-62, 51. The article is an extended lament regarding the then-increasing dominance of American models of teaching and studying the history that is written—and of structuring graduate programs in history—over English and continental models.

It is also worth underscoring the implicit theme of historical praxis or historical maieutics in the same short book review. Our grasp of the history that happens, mediated to us by the history that is written, can dramatically affect our influence on the-future-history-that-will-happen. As Lonergan notes, Coady’s book “shows in the concrete what practical education is. It reveals how ignorant, how unimaginative, how narrow-minded, how short-sighted, how stupidly selfish is the human material with which the economic reformer has to deal.” *Id.* An adequate economic praxis is, for the early Lonergan, simply a piece—although an important piece—of adequate historical praxis. And both depend to a considerable extent on effective education. Yet while effective economic education must be diffused widely throughout a society, effective education regarding

that single page shows how much the project of *Insight* was tied up with Lonergan's pre-existing concern with history. "There is then a problem of historical analysis, and its solution can be had only in terms of some philosophy or super-philosophy that not merely embraces all truth but comprehends all error."<sup>60</sup>

To connect that theme with the cognitional theory worked out in *Insight*, and its extension into the universal viewpoint, would require a great deal of detailed and patient work. But my point is that besides historical process and historical investigation there is historical heuristics. My argument is that "historical analysis" was a heuristic structure for historical investigations.<sup>61</sup> And once one takes explicit account of historical heuristics, the dichotomy between 'the history that happens' and 'the history that is written' disappears, as does the notion that the dichotomy can be used to periodise Lonergan's thinking on history.

The history of Lonergan's use of the mathematics/physics analogy regarding historical method, and his image of "an upper blade" of method,<sup>62</sup> are but variations on the need for a

---

historical process and historical investigation seems more complexly the province of a creative minority. For a glimpse of the themes of economic and historical praxis in *Insight*, see *Insight* 262 ("culture ceases to be an independent factor that passes a detached yet effective judgement upon capital formation and technology, upon economy and polity.") and *Insight* 266 (cosmopolis "is a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical responsibilities.")

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> One might consider here a comment by the later Lonergan on "analysis." "Understand what analysis means. An analysis leads from what everyone knows to significant variables that are mutually dependent – preferably dynamically dependent – on one another. In that way, you have your primitive terms and the source of a basis for developing a science as an analytic structure. Since your basis is analytic, whenever you apply it to anything, you'll have the analysis of that thing." *Caring about Meaning*, 226.

<sup>62</sup> For a helpful later treatment of this topic, see *Method in Theology* Institute at Boston College, 467. ("[A]ll method is an interaction of two blades. It is a scissors movement. You have data on which you are working and the heuristic structure within which you are operating on the data. Your categories are challenged by the data, they become more and more refined and differentiated, from interaction with the data. Physics is not just

methodical heuristic structure for historical investigations, for 'the history that is written.' That is why I think one must recognize a focal concern with 'the history that is written' not only in the historical manuscripts but also in Lonergan's doctoral dissertation. There he writes of the advantages of a method that stands to historical events as "the science of mathematics stands to quantitative phenomena. .... it enables one who lives in a later age to understand those whose thought belongs to almost a different world, and it does so, not by the slow and incommunicable apprehension that comes to the specialist after years of study [read: "the historical sense"], but logically through ideas that are defined, arguments that can be tested, and conclusions that need only be verified. Thus the finer fruits of historical study are taken out of the realm of personal opinion and made part of the common heritage of science."<sup>63</sup> Lonergan's writings from the 1940s continue the trend, but surely one may justifiably conclude that the many references in Lonergan's early writings to historical method and to the struggle against positivism<sup>64</sup> and relativism show a

---

mathematics and it is not just experimenting; it is an interaction of the two: a selection of mathematical functions in the light of the data and deductions from the functions as specified by the data, to give you the basis for further experimentation. It is a constant process of interaction between the two.")

<sup>63</sup> *Grace and Freedom*, 162-63.

<sup>64</sup> Lonergan's early campaigns against positivism in interpretation and in 'the history that is written' continued round the spiral of his viewpoints to culminate in the two chapters in *Method* on 'the history that is written.' "The reason for writing chapters, and the setting up specific chapters on each one of these things, is the fact that at the end of the nineteenth century the positivists did capture critical history and give their interpretations to it." "An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.," *A Second Collection*, 209-30, at 218.

But if that is so, chapters 8 and 9 of *Method* are in radical continuity with Lonergan's efforts in the 1930s and 1940s and in *Insight*. Late in life, Lonergan characterized the positivist take-over of the German Historical School this way: "For them, the first thing to do is to assemble the facts. They didn't know that you have to have the interpretation before you can get to any facts. The data are just data and no more than data, something here and now that you can see..." *Caring about Meaning*, 26. As this passage suggests, and as I briefly discuss below, much of what Lonergan has to say about scientific hermeneutics and historical study in *Insight* is a systematic demolition of positivism.

developed and thematic interest in ‘the history that is written.’

But in many ways the clearest evidence for the existence of a focal and thematic interest in ‘the history that is written’ may be found in *Insight*. Here a few key passages will suffice. Take, for instance, this passage from chapter VII:

There is needed, then, a critique of history before there can be any intelligent direction of history. There is needed an exploration of the movements, the changes, the epochs of a civilization’s genesis, development, and vicissitudes. The opinions and attitudes of the present have to be traced to their origins, and the origins have to be criticized in light of dialectic.<sup>65</sup>

Or consider the passage in which Lonergan describes the business of cosmopolis: It is “to prevent the formation of the screening memories by which an ascent to power hides its nastiness; it is its business to prevent the falsification of history with which the new group overstates its case.”<sup>66</sup> Or the passage where cosmopolis is described as “a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical responsibilities.”<sup>67</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that ‘the history that is written’ has an important role to play in reversing the longer cycle of decline.

Similarly, in chapter XVII of *Insight* Lonergan makes the following explicit assertions regarding ‘the history that is written’:

No doubt, there there can be no history without data, without documents, without monuments that have survived destruction and decay. But even if one supposes the data to be complete ... still there remains

---

<sup>65</sup> *Insight*, 265. Note again the interaction between the two kinds of ‘history.’ There is needed a critique of the history that happens before it can be intelligently directed. (Notice the continuity of emphasis between this passage and “Analytic Concept.” See supra, n. 51-53.) But the critique involves the history that is written. Without an adequate ‘history that is written,’ there cannot be needed change in ‘the history that happens.’ And notice, too, that adequate written history requires dialectic.

<sup>66</sup> *Insight*, 265.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

to be determined some approximation to the insights and judgments, the beliefs and decisions that made those words and deeds, those feelings and sentiments, the activities of a more or less intelligent and reasonable being.<sup>68</sup>

In the same context:

As the data assembled by historical research accumulate, insights are revised continuously in accord with the concrete process of learning. But besides the revisions forced by further data, there are also the revisions due to the advent of new investigators, for history is written not only by each new culture but also by each stage of progress and decline in each culture. Nor is there any escape from such relativism as long as men cling to the descriptive viewpoint. Common sense succeeds in understanding things as related to us only because it is experimental; it deals with things with which it is familiar; its insights are guides in concrete activity; its mistakes promptly come to light in their unpleasant effects. But if one would step beyond the narrow confines in which the procedures of common sense are successful, one has to drop the descriptive viewpoint and adopt a viewpoint that unashamedly is explanatory.<sup>69</sup>

And again, continuing the theme of explanatory historical writing:

Interpretation of the past is recovery of the viewpoint of the past; and that recovery, as opposed to mere subjective projections, can be reached only by grasping exactly what a viewpoint is, how viewpoints develop, what dialectical laws govern their historical unfolding.<sup>70</sup>

The mention of “mere subjective projections,” of course, is an

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

allusion to the canon of parsimony in *Insight's* sketch for a methodical hermeneutics and its extension into history.<sup>71</sup> That extension is central to Lonergan's treatment of historical writing in *Insight*. For "historical interpretation may be based simply on a historical sense or may operate in the light of the universal viewpoint."<sup>72</sup> In short, in *Insight* Lonergan contrasts the historical sense, which not only is open to all the variations of biases and polymorphism but also is incapable of analyzing itself or criticizing itself, with scientific interpretation.<sup>73</sup>

The solution he offers is the heuristic structure he calls the universal viewpoint. Lest there be any doubt that Lonergan regards an explanatory hermeneutics based on the universal viewpoint to be relevant to critical history, consider how Lonergan immediately characterizes it. The universal viewpoint is potential; "it can list its own contents only through the stimulus of documents and *historical inquiries*; it can select alternatives and differentiate its generalities only by appealing to the accepted norms of *historical investigation*."<sup>74</sup> Lonergan goes on to remark, "There are the external sources of *historical interpretation* and, in the main, they consist in spatially ordered marks ... But there are also sources of interpretation immanent in *the historiographer himself* ... in his ability to work backwards from contemporary to earlier accumulations of insights in human development..."<sup>75</sup> Clearly, Lonergan is not here speaking of 'the history that happens.' To the contrary, rather conspicuously, he believes he has discovered some form of historical investigation that goes beyond the vagaries of unguided historical scholarship and goes beyond the relativism

---

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 612 (the canon of parsimony "excludes from consideration the unverifiable"). See also Lonergan's notes for his lectures on *Insight* at St. Mary's in Morgana California (1961), 112 ("Projection – violation of parsimony.") It is worth tracking the references to 'the cinema of what was done and the soundtrack of what was said' through their various contexts in chapter XVII. *Insight*, 564, 604, 612. See especially *Insight*, 604 ("the ideal of the cinema and sound-track is the ideal not of *historical science* but of historical fiction" [emphasis added]).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 762.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 587 ("just as our common sense is open to individual, group, and general bias, so also is the historical sense.")

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 587 (emphases added).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 588 (emphases added).

with which such scholarship is otherwise afflicted. Its distinguishing feature is that it is both empirical and dialectical<sup>76</sup> – in a word, it is critical history. It is, after all, only on the basis of an adequate cognitional theory that historical scholarship can become truly critical. Contributions can be made without an adequate and explicit cognitional theory: one need only cite here the later Lonergan's praise for Carl Lotus Becker.<sup>77</sup> But those contributions can be remedied in light of the canon of successive approximations and its first principle of criticism.

As for Lonergan's innocence of critical history or the German Historical School until his move to Rome, I find two otherwise unobtrusive references in *Insight* revealing. The first is Lonergan's reference to the detective story in Collingwood's *Idea of History* – a story, by the way, that Collingwood uses to illustrate scientific, critical history.<sup>78</sup> In that volume, which Lonergan read (or at least read from) prior to the completion of *Insight*, there is a wealth of material on German historiography.<sup>79</sup> The second is Lonergan's reference to Ernst Cassirer's *The Problem of Knowledge*.<sup>80</sup> Part III of that work contains 110 pages of material on German historiography. Of course, there is no doubt Lonergan worked through a series of authors and went into much more depth from the mid-fifties

---

<sup>76</sup> See the discussion of “the retrospective expansion” of the universal viewpoint together with its “dialectical expansion,” in *Insight*, 588-89.

<sup>77</sup> *Method*, 204 (“It cannot be claimed that Becker was a successful cognitional theorist: there cannot be assembled from his writings an exact and coherent theory of the genesis of historical knowledge.”) May I point out that Lonergan's praise and use of Becker in *Method* is itself an example of the first principle of criticism. *Insight*, 611 (“For though a contributor fails to present his results in terms of the protean notion of being, a critic can proceed from that notion to a determination of the contributor's particular viewpoint, he can indicate how that particularism probably would not invalidate the contributor's work and, on the other hand, he can suggest to others working in the contributor's special field the points on which his work may need revision.”)

<sup>78</sup> *Insight*, 733. See R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 266-282.

<sup>79</sup> *The Idea of History*, 86-133, 165-182.

<sup>80</sup> *Insight*, 504. See *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History Since Hegel*, trans. William Woglom & Charles Hendel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).



through the late-sixties. My point is only that Lonergan was interested in ‘the history that is written’ long before he went to Rome, and his interest in critical history was extraordinarily developed before he began a new wave of readings in the mid-fifties.

That point is reinforced by the extremely interesting and valuable response Lonergan gave to a question regarding historical knowledge during the Halifax lectures of 1958.<sup>81</sup> There he explicitly links “an approach to history in terms of truth” to the section in chapter 17 of *Insight* on scientific interpretation;<sup>82</sup> he alludes to his metaphor in *Insight* for a division of labor between upper-blade interpreters on the one hand and scholars on the other,<sup>83</sup> and he expresses the hope that “if you could get an elaborate theory of the method of history, you could create something of a similar situation in history.”<sup>84</sup>

Much more might be said of the period from Lonergan’s early historical manuscripts through *Insight*. But at least it seems well established that Lonergan’s quest for “the upper blade for an empirical method”<sup>85</sup> for interpretation in *Insight* is relevant also to his long-term quest for an upper blade for an empirical method for historical investigation. I think it also clear that the ‘history that is written’ was focal and thematic throughout that period. I think the evidence conclusive that the importance of ‘the history that is written’ had *not* ‘slowly dawned’ on Lonergan, and certainly it did not dawn on him only after *Insight*. Finally, let me say I agree with Crowe when he suggests that Lonergan’s own original contributions to critical history seem as penetrating as anything he learned from the German Historical School or the tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften* after his return to Rome in 1953. And

---

<sup>81</sup> *Understanding and Being* 383-86.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, at 385.

<sup>83</sup> Compare *Understanding and Being*, 385 with *Insight*, 603-04.

<sup>84</sup> *Understanding and Being*, 385-86. This remarkable response by Lonergan stands in notable continuity with *Insight*. But it is also continuous in important ways with the manuscript on “Hermeneutics” from July 1962. See the unpublished version edited by Charles Hefling at p. 18 for Lonergan’s use of the important phrase, “the upper-blade historian.”

<sup>85</sup> *Insight*, 609.

we agree, too, on the central importance of “Lonergan’s underlying passion throughout his life, continually breaking out in penetrating remarks and applications,” regarding a theory of historical process on the level of the times. I would only add that such a theory requires an historical method on the level of the times, and I believe Lonergan glimpsed that fact beginning in the 1930s.

### Conclusion

There may well be a turning point in Lonergan’s thought on history after 1953-54. But if so, I do not think it is a shift from concentrating on ‘the history that happens’ to concentrating on ‘the history that is written,’ for he had been concentrating on both all along. Nor is this surprising. As Fred Crowe notes, the two are closely interwoven. Historical writing is about the history that happens, and our access to the history that happens is mediated by the history that is written. After all, the history that happens is not first ‘out there now’ or ‘already back there then’ somewhere on a timeline and then later written up.

The relevant variable, it seems to me, is not a relative concentration on one or the other of the two correlative ‘histories.’ Rather, I believe, the relevant consideration is the degree of methodological sophistication of the heuristic structure that inevitably guides *any* historical investigation. Even simple historical narrative or chronicle conveys some view of what happened in written form and operates in light of some implicit heuristic structure.<sup>86</sup> Short of fiction, one cannot help but combine both the history that happens and the history that is written (or spoken).

---

<sup>86</sup> Lonergan’s eloquent and penetrating remark of 1939 or 1940 remains true: “[E]ven historians have intelligence and perform acts of understanding; performing them, they necessarily approach questions from a given point of view; and with equal necessity the limitations of that point of view predetermine the conclusions they reach. From this difficulty positivism offers no escape, for as long as men have intelligence, the problem remains ... It remains that history can follow a middle course, neither projecting into the past the categories of the present nor pretending that historical inquiry is conducted without a use of human intelligence.” *Grace and Freedom*, 156.

Herodotus and Hegel, Sima Qian<sup>87</sup> and Seignobos, all attempted to investigate some slice of historical process in light of some implicit or explicit heuristic structure, and all left written traces of that attempt. But the methodological component in Hegel and Seignobos is more advanced than the ancient Greek and ancient Chinese historians. Similarly, Lonergan's concern for method, and for heuristic structures guiding historical investigation, is the key component in his thinking about historical process and historical investigation. And that component was quite advanced even in his writings on history in the 1930s and 1940s, to say nothing of his achievements in *Insight*.

Lonergan liked to quote an American historian's remark that if Carl Becker's 1926 address on historical facts had been published at the time, instead of after his death, it would have caused a revolution in historiography equivalent to the revolution in physics caused by quantum theory.<sup>88</sup> But what of the young Lonergan's writings on history? Can the same be said of them? His early struggles against positivism are at least the equal of Becker's. And what of the heuristic structures for historical investigation that Lonergan labored to construct in *Insight* and later in *Method*? If taken seriously, or even noticed, would they not also produce a revolution in historiography like quantum theory's revolution in physics? Lonergan, at least,

---

<sup>87</sup> Sima Qian (145 - c. 86 B.C.) is the first great historiographer of ancient China; his *Records of the Historians* "is a comprehensive history that covers over two thousand years and deals with the entire world as the Han historian knew it." Steven Shankman & Stephen Durrant, *The Siren and the Sage: Knowledge and Wisdom in Ancient Greece and China* (New York: Cassell, 2000), 101.

<sup>88</sup> See *Dialogues in Celebration*, 292. The statement Lonergan refers to in the interview was made by the historian Harry Elmer Barnes. See Barnes' *A History of Historical Writing* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 268 (noting that if "What Are Historical Facts?" were ever published, it would "probably come to have the same place in historical science that the theory of indeterminacy occupies in contemporary physical science." Barnes' statement is quoted in Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *Carl Becker: A Biographical Study in American Intellectual History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1961), 201. Wilkins' book in turn, is cited by Lonergan in *Method*, 204, n. 23.

thought so.<sup>89</sup> But Lonergan may have suffered the unlucky fate of someone who was simply too far ahead of his time.<sup>90</sup>

Patrick Brown teaches in the Seattle University School of Law. He can be reached at [brownp@seattleu.edu](mailto:brownp@seattleu.edu).

Comments on this article can be addressed to [jmda@mun.ca](mailto:jmda@mun.ca).

---

<sup>89</sup> See *Insight*, 603, lines 33-37, 604, lines 1-14.

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps there is a poignancy in Lonergan's remark in 1981, "If you are too far ahead of your time, you may be one of those heroes who is never heard of!" *Caring about Meaning*, 30.