

Functional Specialization and the Future of the Love of Wisdom

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The text presently to be subjected to dialectical analysis is chapter 5 of *Method in Theology*, in which Lonergan outlines a revolutionary proposal for the methodical reorganization of theology by way of functional specialization. My intention is to reflect upon functional specialization in relation to philosophy—and philosophy in the primal and literal sense, as a “love of wisdom.”

While chapter 5 will be the *object* of analysis, one of the aims of this exercise is to explicitly advert in some way to the *subject* doing the analysis. Dialectic is not a view from nowhere. It is always performed by a particular subject, operating from within a horizon, and situated in some manner with respect to tri-fold conversion. In the spirit of appeasing our imperative for autobiographically-situated reflection, I share (with some reluctance) the following recollection.

It was the fall of 1984, and I was a freshman, newly arrived at Boston College. The previous year I had made a difficult decision to study philosophy, rather than business. I had big questions and feared my life narrowing. I had further decided to double-major in psychology—to ensure I wasn’t being too narrow by majoring only in philosophy. At the moment I am recalling, I was standing at the top of the wide central staircase on one of the upper floors of O’Neill Library, a massive building of angular granite. Despite its appearance of having always been a formidable part of the landscape, O’Neill Library had had its grand opening earlier in 1984, and it was not much newer to the campus than I was. On this particular afternoon, the building was fairly empty and quiet, and the smell of new carpet lingered in the air. As I gazed on seemingly endless rows of blue metal bookshelves, a heavy and perplexing anxiety suddenly came over me. I don’t know how much of this I was able to verbalize at the time—and I would like to avoid superimposing too much interpretation now—but the core of this anxiety was that I was astounded by the countless number of books, pages, words; by the endless rows and rows, by the sheer mass of knowledge confronting me. Of course I had seen books before. Our family home had a few shelves, and my school and town libraries had more. Those shelves had always felt comfortable, friendly, domesticated. But this—this many books, all at once—was overwhelming. Stalin’s quip that “quantity has a quality all its own”

puts it well. Although not the heat of battle, a dangerous precipice, or a violent storm, this was nevertheless some sort of encounter with the sublime. Inwardly, there was a matching dread. I sensed my own hopeless inadequacy in relation to what was before me—and most intensely with regard to time. “I will be here for only a few years. How on earth will I possibly read all these? Even an entire lifetime...” Of course it was absurd to feel that I had any obligation to take it all in, to know everything. I don’t remember if I told myself as much, but somehow I averted my eyes, distracted myself, and the experience ended as abruptly as it had begun.

I realize this recollection probably seems odd and peculiar—hence my reluctance to share it.¹ But as experience in general evokes inquiry, I feel this experience in particular opens out into a host of questions potentially relevant to a deeper appreciation of Lonergan’s proposal for functional specialization. In retrospect (and in light of categories subsequently encountered through study of philosophers like Lonergan, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard) this experience offers a kind of insight into the burden of knowledge and the disease of not knowing. This insight was not in relation to some particular question but rather to an image that compactly symbolized for me the ideal of a totality of knowledge.² It was an experience of a type of human finitude that is not usually thematized. While the particulars may have been idiosyncratic to the odd person I happen to be, the underlying predicament is universal. To be human is to be oriented by an unrestricted desire to know. My experience rendered this claim of Lonergan’s not merely plausible but palpable. In this experience however, the *desire* to know seemed occluded by what felt like an imperious *obligation* to know. My anxiety stemmed mainly from the fact that I knew this obligation was impossible to meet. The totality of knowledge lies beyond the grasp on any individual human mind. The love

¹ There is little precedent for autobiographical positioning in a philosophical context dominated by the logical control of meaning. If there is to be phenomenological grounding however, description of *someone’s* experience is always necessary. My approach could be justified, I believe, not only in light of Lonergan’s imperative for self-appropriation generally but also by drawing upon Heidegger’s account of *Befindlichkeit* (which affirms the potential for preconceptual disclosure in states of embodied moodedness) and Kierkegaard’s extensive reflections on the relation of anxiety to finitude (especially in *Concept of Anxiety* and *Sickness Unto Death*).

² In Heideggerian terms, the import of the experience would be characterized not as “ontic” but rather as “ontological.”

of wisdom (at least this side of the beatific vision) must remain an unrequited love.

How did I subsequently navigate this finitude? Like everyone, I learned to discriminate. In my reading and coursework, I came to value some subjects and thinkers and professors and books and questions as more relevant and worthy of my time than others. Despite the normality and sanity of this approach, it was incommensurate with the fullness of desire. The vast majority of the potentially knowable must actually be neglected. At some level this bothered me, although for the most part this was almost entirely suppressed. What could be done about it? Like many, I became an eclectic gold miner. I sought out what I thought best and resigned myself to setting aside everything else. (Picture a miner, clutching his tiny bags of gold and gems, large mounds of discarded dirt in the background, a vast mountain range beyond, extending out to the horizon.) In graduate school and beyond I faced the same dilemma we all face. On the one hand it is “difficult for scholars to keep abreast with the whole movement in their field”; yet with “dividing and subdividing” of the field the specialist risks becoming—and probably becomes—“one who knows more and more about less and less.”³ Despite my earliest striving for breadth and aversion to specialization, the pressures of scholarship and the necessity of discrimination placed me at risk of becoming “the man with the blind-spot... [who] is fond of concluding that his specialty is to be pursued because of its excellence and the other[s] are to be derided.”⁴

Central to my experience was a symbolic apprehension of the possibility (or perhaps the impossibility) of wisdom. I would like to suggest that the anxiety, as well as the tensions and compromises I subsequently faced, are not idiosyncratic, but might be taken as elucidating the challenges we all face in the unfolding of ourselves as unrestrictedly desiring to know. The reader is invited to reflect upon this. Was there ever someone or something that symbolically made present to your consciousness the possibility of wisdom? Do you recall a felt reaction in response to that image, person, or occasion? Perhaps you recall your first reading of *Insight*, when the claim was made that we have an *unrestricted* desire to know. Did you just nod approvingly, or do you recall any resistance? Were you perhaps inclined to dismiss that particular claim as stemming from an excessive intellectualism on Lonergan’s

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972; reprinted., Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979), 125; CWL 14, 122.

⁴ Lonergan, *Method*, 137; CWL 14, 131.

part? Were you tempted to interpret the adjective “unrestricted” as hyperbolic or merely polemical?

If there does exist an unrestricted desire to know—especially if this also takes on an obligatory aspect—this imposes a heavy burden. Is that burden ultimately to be borne by the individual? Or might it be the case that the ideal of the wise sage or the genius (despite having been the highest exemplars of human potential in the past) are now outdated models of noetic striving? Might it be possible for sagacity itself be operationalized and placed on a communal basis? Going forward, how might the burden of knowledge become the shared burden (or perhaps the self-transcending joy) of the human species as a whole, in its ongoing noetic development? An effective communalization of the burden of knowledge would indeed present an attractive alternative to the anxiety of the individual in the endless library, to eclecticism and the gold-miner mentality, to isolation stemming from ever-narrowing specialization, and to the mutual incomprehensions resulting from self-inflicted academic scotomas.

There is a problem however, that any communalization of knowledge must solve. A book, however true its contents, does not have a mind, and is not itself conscious of anything. Nor is a library conscious, however large. Nor a supercomputer, or even the internet.⁵ Only individual knowers have minds. Consequently, any communalization of knowledge must somehow work out the relation of the parts to the whole, i.e., the relation of conscious and intentional individual human knowers to the noetic community. Furthermore, the noetic community as a whole would not have much value unless it too somehow functioned in the manner of a mind, even though it lacks consciousness and so cannot itself be a mind. Noetic community must somehow facilitate a heightened efficiency of individual thinking and communication. Hence the reorganization of existing knowledge, and of

⁵ Strong artificial intelligence (as of today) remains a fantasy. If computers were eventually to attain consciousness however, a cogent argument could be made that they too would benefit from self-organization in the manner of functional specialization. As currently computers are networked for increased memory access and greater computational power, if computers were eventually to gain capacity for intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, the networked capability of that new functionality would clearly exceed the non-networked capability of isolated individual AI units. But functional specialization is basically a proposal for networking the capacities of human consciousness. In light of this networking analogy, functional specialization for humans should not be controversial, should be a ‘no-brainer.’ If it would clearly be good for them, why not for us?

ongoing knowing, will involve a challenge of method. Is there a method that would allow individuals to tap into, and ‘make sense’ of, the multi-millennial, multi-cultural total accumulation of meaning? How is that accumulation itself to be unified? The history of human meaning is not all gold, but it’s not all dirt either. How could the entire field of meaning be sifted, so that nothing of value would be lost? And how are finite individuals to participate in this integral noetic community? How are you, or I, or anyone—likely not sages or geniuses—to take what we need, make whatever contributions we are collaboratively capable of making, and all in a way that is (if not always joyful) at least minimally efficient and not overwhelming?

The Jesuit metaphysician Norris Clarke was correct, I believe, when he wrote: “With no integrating vision of reality and human life as a whole ... we tend to become fragmented people, with our lives ‘in pieces’... ‘perpetually condemned to fragmentary perspectives.’”⁶ This essay has adverted to the practical and existential limitations individuals face with respect to their unrestricted desire to know. In light of finitude, the philosophical desire for an intellectual apprehension of the whole is extremely fragile. Metaphysical frustration is palpable in Heidegger’s relentless harkening back to being. The vast majority—not merely of people generally (i.e., common sense knowers), but even of philosophers—have resigned themselves to pursuit of specialized knowledge. Postmodernity is characterized by disparagement and an almost total suppression of the metaphysical urge. Where there is frustration, resentment often follows. Might it be the case that Kant is widely respected not merely for logical but also for opaque psychological reasons? Might the collapse of metaphysics be a remote condition for what seems an alarming increase of anti-intellectualism (and recently even anti-factualism) in Western societies?

The most promising possibility for a higher integration of knowledge and the emergence of integral noetic community is found, I believe, in Lonergan’s proposal for functional specialization. Functional specialization is a methodological solution to problems recurrent in the practice of theology. The state of affairs is roughly as follows: Field specialization divides what is to be known on the basis of distinctions in data. Subject specialization divides the results of what comes to be known. There is little understanding of how field and subject specializations are unified. While both field and subject specialization have their customary procedures, there is little explicit reflection upon how these are grounded in transcendental method.

⁶ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomist Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 3.

Additionally, problems of cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics not infrequently interfere with both approaches. Intellectual, moral, and religious conversions are concretely present or absent in particular practitioners, but conversion either remains unobjectified, or is perhaps focused upon as yet another specialized concern. Conversion is not explicitly capitalized upon as methodologically pivotal. Consequently, dialectical analysis (which would critically differentiate the positional from the counterpositional) remains an *ad hoc* affair. Individual inquirers seeking to tap into theological wisdom, as well as individual scholars seeking to make contributions, must somehow interface with this disordered conglomeration. Lonergan was concerned with how burdensome and inefficient such interactions had become. His proposal for functional specialization introduces a new way of doing things. By mapping “the *process* from *data* to *results*” functional specialization brings methodological order to an otherwise unsystematized manifold of data, results, and operations.⁷ Functional specialization is an integration both of the ongoing dynamic process of knowing, and of that which comes to be known.

Although Lonergan’s concern was primarily with method in theology, because functional specialization is an application of transcendental method, functional specialization eventually could be developed for other disciplines as well—so long as these involve a history of interpretation and a need to communicate doctrines that will shape ongoing belief and practice. Especially in light of a potential expansion of functional specialization to a range of disciplines beyond theology, I would like to propose that functional specialization offers an integration of human knowledge that is no less ambitious than prior systemizations attempted by Aristotle and Hegel. Lonergan himself suggested this comparison, but also offered a compelling reason why functional specialization might be more promising. While Aristotle and Hegel had attempted to systematize *knowledge*, functional specialization does so precisely by systemizing the *operations* that constitute the dynamic activity of *knowing*. While the Aristotelian and Hegelian systemizations were dominated by the logical control of meaning, the transcendental method informing functional specialization is grounded in an appropriation of cognitional interiority which is “not limited to strictly logical operations.”⁸ Lonergan adverted to the success of modern scientific method and attributes this partly to its capacity to integrate both logical and non-logical operations. As functional specialization will retain this approach,

⁷ Lonergan, *Method*, 125; CWL 14, 121. Emphasis mine.

⁸ Lonergan, *Method*, 6; CWL 14, 10.

Lonerger suggests its potential for progress would be similarly propitious. Logical operations tend to consolidate what has already been achieved. Non-logical operations keep achievement open to ongoing advances. The combining of the two results in an open, dynamic process yielding cumulative and progressive results. This contrasts sharply not only with the static fixity that resulted from Aristotle's concentration on the necessary and the immutable, but also with the artificial dynamism of the Hegelian dialectic which (despite its intention to capture historical development) actually remained enclosed within a complete conceptualist system.⁹

It is now time to address explicitly **the first objectification** of this dialectical exercise, "when each investigator proceeds to distinguish between positions, which are compatible with intellectual, moral, and religious conversion and, on the other hand, counter-positions which are incompatible..."¹⁰ Does this investigator make the judgment that Lonergan's proposal for functional specialization is positional? A qualification is necessary here. To claim that I believe Lonergan's proposal for functional specialization is positional would be true, but merely stating this would falsify by way of understatement. Chapter 5 of *Method* is not simply categorial content that happens to be positional. It is an application of transcendental method and an explication of what is required for attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly doing theology. As such, chapter 5 constitutes an objectification of positionality itself, of the operational exigencies of intellectual and moral conversion.

The positionality of chapter 5 (and by extension of the whole of *Method*) might be appreciated more clearly however by replying to a hypothetical extramural objection. In a postmodern context it is quite possible that any random philosopher or theologian freshly introduced to Lonergan's proposal for a new theological method might think or state something along the following lines: Who is Lonergan to presume that he has found *the one method* for theology? Who is this presumptuous upstart to think he can redirect the efforts of a theological community that has developed its procedures over two millennia? Is this drive toward method a last gasp of modernism, a late-coming Cartesian foundationalism? Is it a resurgence of the systematizing hubris that Kierkegaard rightly sought to expose (and lay to rest) in Hegelianism? Might this be a manifestation of the will to power, a striving for hegemonic control of the metanarrative, the suppression of a diversity of alternative approaches?

⁹ Lonergan, *Method*, 6; CWL 14, 10.

¹⁰ Lonergan, *Method*, 250; CWL 14, 235.

An adequate response to such objections, unfortunately, will require more than any verbal or written reply. Functional specialization is an implementation of transcendental method. As such, it presupposes self-appropriation, or at least an understanding of what self-appropriation is and an appreciation for why it is important. So I would like to emphasize that chapter 5 of *Method* cannot stand on its own. There is an umbilical cord stretching from chapter 5 to its mother, which is chapter 1. That opening chapter 'provides' an indispensable account of method, of cognitional operations, of the normative patterning of operations in transcendental method, and of the functional significance of transcendental method.

...the first chapter on method sets forth what [its readers] can *discover in themselves* as the dynamic structure of their own cognitional and moral being. *In so far as they find that*, they also will find something that is not open to radical revision. For that dynamic structure is the condition of the possibility of any revision. Moreover, subsequent chapters are in the main prolongations of the first. They presuppose it.¹¹

But even a careful reading of chapter 1 is not likely to settle the issue, for that chapter, however incisive, offers merely a terse sketch of self-appropriation.¹² It does not induce self-appropriation itself. Direct discourse alone cannot accomplish this. Lonergan warns that "an exceptional amount of exertion and activity on the part of the reader" will be required.¹³ Facility with respect to the logical control of meaning and a willingness to familiarize with new terminology will not be sufficient. Self-appropriation requires evocation of the relevant operations in one's own consciousness and a discovery, in one's own experience, of the dynamic relationships by which these operations are connected. "Otherwise [the reader] will find... the whole book about as illuminating as a blind man finds a lecture on color."¹⁴

¹¹ Lonergan, *Method*, xii; CWL 14, 4. Emphasis mine.

¹² In an important footnote Lonergan writes: "I have presented this pattern of operations at length in the book, *Insight*.... But the matter is so crucial for the present enterprise that some summary must be included here. Please observe that I am offering only a summary, that the summary can do no more than present a general idea, that the process of self-appropriation occurs only slowly, and, usually, only through a struggle with some such book as *Insight*." *Method in Theology*, 7, n. 2; CWL 14, 11, n. 4.

¹³ Lonergan, *Method*, 7; CWL 14, 11.

¹⁴ Lonergan, *Method*, 7; CWL 14, 11.

The objections above inquire into the authority of Lonergan to reorganize theological method and tend to construe any possible answer as vulnerable to a hermeneutic of suspicion. My response (which cannot be fathomed in the absence of self-appropriation on the part of that person to whom I am responding) must be that the authority of Lonergan is not the authority of Lonergan but rather of that which is personally verifiable in the structure of conscious intentionality itself. Verification is to occur within the theologian's own data of consciousness. This is not philosophy playing the role of a handmaiden.

Transcendental method is not the intrusion into theology of alien matter from an alien source. Its function is to advert to the fact that theologies are produced by theologians, that theologians have minds and use them, that their doing so should not be ignored or passed over but explicitly acknowledged in itself and in its implications.¹⁵

A hermeneutic of suspicion that fails to grasp the relevance of transcendental method is bound to also misconstrue the project of functional specialization.¹⁶ It might nevertheless be appreciated that what motivated Lonergan was in part his realization that "theology has suffered gravely from the middle ages to the present day" from the "one-sided totalitarian ambitions" of scholars who privilege their own specializations while neglecting, deriding, or suppressing the (otherwise potentially complementary) specializations of others.¹⁷ Far from manifesting the will to power, striving for some categorial metanarrative, or hobbling intellectual diversity, Lonergan suggests that a methodological differentiation of functional specialties is needed precisely because "only a well-reasoned total view can guard against" the continuation of this dysfunctional "totalitarian" trend going forward.¹⁸

I turn now to address **the second objectification** of this dialectical exercise, to inquire: What would result from development of the position

¹⁵ Lonergan, *Method*, 24-5; CWL 14, 26.

¹⁶ The point to be grasped is this: Functional specialization is an implementation of transcendental method, the normative force of which is rooted in "the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness which assembles its own constituent parts and unites them in a rounded whole in a manner we cannot set aside without, as it were, amputating our own moral personality, our own reasonableness, our own intelligence, our own sensitivity." Lonergan, *Method*, 18; CWL 14, 21.

¹⁷ Lonergan, *Method*, 137; CWL 14, 131.

¹⁸ Lonergan, *Method*, 137; CWL 14, 131.

adumbrated in *Method* chapter 5, i.e., from a successful and widespread future implementation of functional specialization—not merely in theology but also in other disciplines as well? While the ramifications would be broad and profound, I would like to highlight what this might mean in relation to the *relevance* and *aspirations* of philosophy.

The relation between philosophy and functional specialization is one of reciprocal dependence. Insofar as functional specialization comes to be widely and effectively implemented, philosophy would become *internally relevant* to theology and other disciplines in a manner that is far from the case currently—especially given the captivity of the dominant school of philosophy to the logical control of meaning. Conversely, functional specialization's grounding in transcendental method can be expected to yield cumulative and progressive results and *a future integration of human knowledge* capable of satisfying the philosophic love of wisdom most optimally.

This mutual conditioning of philosophy and functional specialization can be explicated further. On the one hand, philosophy lies at the *root* of functional specialization. Functional specialization is a radical application of transcendental method. Transcendental method, in turn, is indispensably informed by self-appropriation. Insofar as self-appropriation is recognized as the core essential task of philosophy, it follows that functional specialization (and *eo ipso* all functionally-specialized disciplines of the future) would be vitalized by philosophy.¹⁹ Furthermore, in his introduction to the eightfold division (and especially with regard to the specializations of interpretation and history) Lonergan laments how these tasks are “replete with pitfalls and... complicated by the importation of unresolved philosophical problems in cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics.”²⁰ Transcendental method would exert a “critical function”²¹ capable of resolving disagreements about knowing, the relation of knowing to reality, and reality itself, i.e., capable of resolving “the basic philosophic problems of our time.”²² Theology and other disciplines transformed by functional specialization's future implementation of transcendental method

¹⁹ Lonergan clarifies however that theology is not reducible to philosophy: “Transcendental method is only a part of theological method. It supplies the basic anthropological component. It does not supply the specifically religious component.” Lonergan, *Method*, 25; CWL 14, 27.

²⁰ Lonergan, *Method*, 127; CWL 14, 123–24.

²¹ See Lonergan, *Method*, 20–1; CWL 14, 23.

²² Lonergan, *Method*, 128; CWL 14, 124.

would thereby become capable of sustained development to a degree that is not currently possible given the intractability of counterpositions.

On the other hand, the long-term *fruit* of functional specialization would be a communal fulfillment of philosophy's metaphysical aspirations. Widespread implementation of functional specialization would be facilitated by the emergence of an integral noetic community. The disordered deposit of human meaning accumulated from the past (symbolically captured by the *angst* of the endless library) would gradually be reintegrated through their recurrent collaborative normatively-patterned inquiry. The grounding of functionally specialized inquirers in self-appropriation and transcendental method would shift probabilities such that their ongoing intellectual achievements might be expected over time to become increasingly self-correcting, coherent, and accessible. This noetic commons would be cultivated by theologians (and collaborators across all disciplines) having "clear and distinct ideas about what precisely they are doing."²³ While it is true that the metaphysics initially supplied by transcendental method offers merely "an integration of heuristic structures, and not... categorial speculation," the ongoing practice of functional specialization, across disciplines, over time, would nevertheless bear fruit in cumulative and progressive categorial results.²⁴ As "the wheel of method ... rolls along,"²⁵ a higher integration of human knowledge would become accessible (with minimal *angst*) to any and all individuals in pursuit of their desire to know.²⁶ Functional specialization, widely implemented, would constitute a penultimate actualization of the human potential for the love of wisdom.

Last, but not least, there remains a concern pertaining to the practical and ethical relevance of functional specialization. Thus far, I have been elucidating functional specialization as facilitating the desire to know, as meeting a metaphysical exigence for an intellectual apprehension of the whole. But what does any of this have to do with the severe and pressing

²³ Lonergan, *Method*, 137; CWL 14, 131.

²⁴ Lonergan, *Method*, 25; CWL 14, 27.

²⁵ Lonergan, *Method*, 5; CWL 14, 9.

²⁶ "Transcendental method offers a key to unified science.... Through the self-knowledge, the self-appropriation, the self-possession that results from making explicit the basic normative pattern of the recurrent and related operation of human cognitional process, it becomes possible to envisage a future in which all workers in all fields can find in transcendental method common norms, foundations, systematics, and common critical, dialectical, and heuristic procedures." Lonergan, *Method*, 24; CWL 14, 26.

problems of our world, and the alleviation of real human suffering? How is the inside of 'the library' connected to the outside? Is functional specialization merely a remodeling of academia's ivory tower?

This concern arises from an unresolved schism permeating the Western philosophical tradition. Heidegger, and Hegel before him, have been criticized for offering a metaphysics without an ethics. Hegel's ideological justification of the Prussian state, and Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, are likely not unrelated to this deficit, and in any case clearly betray lapses in fourth-level evaluative consciousness. As a corrective, Levinas has rejected metaphysical or epistemological foundationalism and advocated for ethics as first philosophy. But this reprioritization (alongside much contemporary ethics in general) nevertheless still faces the difficulty of normatively grounding ethics in a post-metaphysical context. This problem of the relation of metaphysics to ethics, while exacerbated and transformed by Kant, is not distinctively modern. Aristotle had distinguished the *bios theoretikos* from *phronesis*. While Aristotle recognized the value of both theoretical and practical wisdom in the context of the good life, his emphasis on a separation between their objects (as necessary and contingent respectively) discouraged development of an account of the complementarity of these two types of wisdom and of the relevance of theory to practice. Consequently, theoretical and practical wisdom have tended to float down through the history of philosophy as independent subjects, with particular philosophers concerned with one, frequently at the cost of neglecting the other. This was perhaps excusable, given the constraints of individual finitude to which we have adverted. Functional specialization, however, now offers the possibility of mending this schism, of integrating the longstanding Aristotelian division between theoretical and practical wisdom, of overcoming the separation of ethical practice from integral knowledge.²⁷

Functional specialization is not one-sidedly speculative in its ambitions. Especially in light of the general bias of common sense and the longer cycle of decline, widespread implementation of functional specialization would provide the intellectual framework sorely needed for an exercise of

²⁷ Aristotle's separation of theory from practice can be traced to his cosmological assumption that celestial and terrestrial mechanics must have separate explanations. Newton's theory of universal gravitation eventually unified celestial and terrestrial mechanics. Lonergan's functional specialization, finally, mends the longstanding schism between theory and practice.

“collective practicality and coresponsibility.”²⁸ The unification of the first and second “phases” of functional specialization not merely acknowledges but also systematizes the relevance of theory to practice. A functionally specialized discipline “divides into a mediating phase, that encounters the past, and a mediated phase, that confronts the future.”²⁹ Its first phase encounters and critically appropriates the achievements of the past. Its second phase takes a normative foundational stand toward the future and culminates in communications needed to address the problems of the day.³⁰ In virtue of its second phase, functional specialization’s integration of human knowing becomes something more than an intellectual apprehension of a dead past. Functional specialization not merely appropriates tradition but also facilitates creative innovation. The abstract disconnection of past from future, of metaphysics from ethic, of theory from practice, is overcome by functional specialization, insofar as its “second phase descends from the unity of a grounding horizon towards the almost endlessly varied sensibilities, mentalities, interests, and tastes of [humanity].”³¹ The intellectual life becomes “essentially open,” not merely with respect to the dynamics of ongoing intellectual development but also with respect to meeting the practical and ethical challenges of human living in an increasingly complex global context.³² Functional specialization’s operationalization of two distinct phases allows the intellectual life to breathe—to not merely inhale the past, but also to exhale lifegiving words, education, and policies—out into a world whose future has thereby become more hopeful.

Third Objectification

Bruce Anderson makes a compelling case for functional specialization as a way of promoting progress in legal studies. Anderson reports that current legal theory is “marked by competing and contradictory perspectives,”³³ that legal scholars hold views that are “all over the map,”³⁴ and that legal

²⁸ Lonergan, *Method*, xi; CWL 14, 3. In some manner functional specialization constitutes Lonergan’s mature response to the call for cosmopolis initially proposed in *Insight*.

²⁹ Lonergan, *Method*, 144; CWL 14, 137.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Method*, 133; CWL 14, 128.

³¹ Lonergan, *Method*, 142; CWL 14, 135.

³² Lonergan, *Method*, 141; CWL 14, 134.

³³ Anderson, 28.

³⁴ Anderson, 27.

scholarship is “fragmented, haphazard, political, and conflictual.”³⁵ Fulfillment of Bruce’s hope “that someday legal scholars will perform eight distinct specializations in a collaborative fashion” would strike at the root of the problem.³⁶

It is evident that Bruce has given a good deal of thought to the disorientation that has arisen from the absence of functional specialization in legal theory. He prudently confines himself to the first phase (research, interpretation, history, and dialectic) rather than attempting to address functional specialization in its entirety. For each specialty, Bruce clarified the need for specialization, indicated central tasks, and outlined how each might work. Importantly, he also explicitly clarified tasks each specialty should *not* attempt, because these could be handled more effectively elsewhere. (Why such methodological focusing should be met with resistance is puzzling. Rare is the theoretical physicist who insists on running the telescopes herself, or who would protest that not doing the work of the experimentalist would somehow constitute a violation of academic freedom.)

Bruce acknowledged various scholars and texts to indicate work already being done in research, interpretation, and history. Because such efforts are not explicitly conducted in an overarching methodological context however, it is not unusual even for seemingly specialized efforts to overreach and spill over into other specialties. As the interconnectedness of specialization is not understood either, work in one area remains isolated from other areas, where it could potentially make a contribution. (It is like a bizarre relay race, in which the majority of runners simply forget to hand off the baton to the next runner.)

I especially appreciate how Anderson’s account clarified the indispensability of dialectic for adjudicating disagreements and conflicts arising out of research, interpretation, and history. In my own paper, I emphasized the need to recognize that functional specialization must be grounded in transcendental method. Anderson shows how this is especially important for dialecticians, who “would have to know... how we question, understand, judge, and decide.... They would have to correctly understand the operations of the 13+ cognitional activities and how they are related.”³⁷

At many universities (my own included) it is not unusual for undergraduate students interested in pursuing law careers to be encouraged to major in philosophy. The sell is that philosophy provides solid

³⁵ Anderson, 26.

³⁶ Anderson, 29.

³⁷ Anderson, 35.

background in logic and argumentation. Indeed it does. But if that's all that it does, it really isn't philosophy. What about those 13+ cognitive activities? Bruce correctly suggests that generalized empirical method is the key that unlocks a wide range of otherwise intractable issues in legal theory and practice. This is well worth cultivating, and the projects Anderson mentioned seem promising.

Finally, a comment upon: "sadly I do not foresee much progress in the next fifty years." As noted, some scholars are already engaged in specialized work. But the higher integration of a functionally specialized methodology, its imperatives, its benefits, remains hidden, as-yet-unactualized. Also noted is resistance to calls for anything that seems like a major methodological overhaul. Yet this need not be grounds for giving up hope. More proximate probabilities can be shifted. Fred Crowe, I believe, suggested that, as a start, it would be helpful for scholars simply to become explicitly aware of what specialty they are working in. Bruce has shown it is possible to identify the specialties of other scholars (as well as their precise areas of overreach). The next step might be to engage with other scholars in ways that communicate an appreciation for what they are *already* doing—but in terms that explicitly elucidate their contributions as being *precisely to some specific functional specialty*. Beyond that, suggestions could be made that point to *efficiencies* that could be gained by reliance upon the work of other scholars in the preceding specialty. In this way the relation of just two specialties might be clarified. Also, the *usefulness* of colleagues' projects could be highlighted by making explicit how these might be of particular value to scholars working in the next specialty up the chain. This would also clarify the relation obtaining between just two neighboring specialties. At some level scholars know they are *overburdened*; clarification of ways that scholars are attempting to do too much might actually be welcomed. Insofar as scholars outside the natural sciences typically feel a certain *isolation* the possibility of collaboration might also be welcomed. My point is that even if there is currently little appetite for a wholesale methodological overhaul of legal studies, there are still strategic communications that could be attempted which might lead to a partial appreciation for specialization. Make a chain of eight links, but two links at a time. Once enough of these short links are in place, there will emerge better conditions for appreciating Lonergan's more remote dream of a deliberate and systematic methodological revolution.

Ivo Coelho: From his various presentations elsewhere, I was already aware that Ivo Coelho was someone who has been taking functional specialization seriously for many years. I found his account helpful on many fronts:

Functional specialization can be understood as a communal operationalizing of the notion of universal viewpoint proposed in *Insight*. Ivo makes the interesting suggestion that functional specialization can clarify substantive differences between academic institutions and their various missions. Functional specialization can be understood as supervening upon, and bringing unity to, a manifold of subdisciplines that existed previously, but merely in the manner of a coincidental aggregate. Hence, functional specialization constitutes both a disruption of academia as it currently exists and a higher integration in the evolution of human knowing.

Ivo clarified that because functional specialization has the capacity to sort out dialectical differences, theological method can be open to all (despite horizontal differences), can resist the urge to authoritarian top-down control, and can relieve scholars of the pressure they typically feel to include everything (e.g., interpretation, criticism, and demonstration of relevance) in their projects. Ivo nicely clarified both the internal activity of dialectic, foundations, and doctrines, as well as the links between these.

Especially important, I think, were Ivo's reflections upon how dialectic eventually must tend toward dialogue. Because dialectical issues are rooted in the subject, the problem of the subject cannot be disregarded indefinitely. Subjects can begin to encounter one another as subjects through dialogue, but genuine dialogue does not occur under just any conditions. Friendship (or at least a perceive possibility of friendship) is strangely important. Ivo also emphasized the need for an atmosphere that is "irenic and serene." He suggests a setting qualitatively similar to a retreat house or ashram might be most auspicious for fostering dialogue, for disclosing *das Ungedachte*, for the dawning—at the limit—of Dostoyevsky's imperative: "I must change my life." Acknowledging these conditions opens up the possibility of critically reflecting upon the respective institutional settings in which we work and study. To what extent are the probabilities for genuine dialogue diminished in universities that (in many cases) are increasingly corporatized and dominated by a managerial ethos, that are insufficiently critical of technologies that displace personal interactions, that perversely insist upon quantitative modes of assessment, that view the humanities as a 'sacrifice zone' for meeting budgetary imperatives, etc.?

Although my dissertation was on Lonergan and Kierkegaard, I was unaware until now of Fred Crowe's suggestion of "letting Kierkegaard haunt one's theology."³⁸ What might it mean to be haunted by Kierkegaard? I would suggest it is to be haunted by the self—which is to say, the problem of

³⁸ Coelho, 53.

one's own self. For Kierkegaard the self is never already itself, but always only the way to becoming itself. The self must relate itself to itself. This calls for attention, for self-orientation, ultimately for a relation to an Other beyond the self. We can turn away from all this, become absorbed in what is "already out there," in matters that seem of greater world-historical importance. In doing so however, we become disoriented by the incompleteness of a merely aesthetic or ethical identity, and we fail to become ourselves. Kierkegaard is quite relevant to dialectic and foundations, and especially to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of moral and religious conversion.

Interestingly, the problem of the Self is also the fundamental theme in Indian philosophy as well—which posits a startling *identity* of the self (*Atman*) with Brahman. Shankara, and the Advaita Vedanta tradition more widely, make a variety of claims (uttered from the horizon of this ultimate identity) that are seemingly absurd *relative* to the horizon of common sense. Not to say that Jesus of Nazareth's self-understanding of being one with the Father was well understood and appreciated either! In light of these difficulties, I imagine Ivo Coelho's development of Indian Christian Theology would be fertile ground (as well as an extreme test case) for the application of functional specialization.

James Duffy reflects upon his wide-ranging involvement in the fields of philosophy, theology, and interdisciplinary studies, with an attentiveness to his personal experience as a student, professor, and scholar that seems almost defiant relative to prevailing objectivistic expectations. Duffy's deep concern for global issues is matched by an equally deep recognition of the need to foster the integrity of genuine theory and genuine minding. Like many of us he is troubled by the "arrogance of omniscient of common sense,"³⁹ the "crisis not of faith but of culture,"⁴⁰ and the problem of the "longer cycle of decline." The solution of cosmopolis will call for global interdisciplinary functionally-specialized collaboration.

In his diagnostic of the current state of academia, Duffy laments a "fragmentation of teaching and learning" — with which we could all perhaps sympathize more readily, if only it did not seem so normal.⁴¹ Perhaps we have not fully recognized the extent to which we have grown acclimated to fragmentation. In my own contribution, I shared what I thought was a peculiar experience of a nascent apprehension of the possibility of integral

³⁹ Duffy, 66, citing CWL 17, 370.

⁴⁰ Duffy, 63, citing CWL 4, 244.

⁴¹ Duffy, 60.

knowing. In light of this I was struck by a passage James cited: "Theoretical understanding, then, seeks to solve problems, to erect syntheses, to embrace the universe in a single view."⁴² In a footnote Duffy asks: "Is this line somehow a foundational statement, an orientation of all healthy human inquiry and living?" Yes, I'm fairly sure it is. Yet my "haunting by Kierkegaard" rushes in to add the proviso that our life is something more than the *bios theoretikos* and that our theories are always incomplete, always only "on the way," always subject to revision.⁴³

Another theme is Duffy's questioning of the "effectiveness" of academic scholarship, papal encyclicals, curricula, courses, pedagogies, etc. I think many would agree that there are real and deep problems on these fronts. But perhaps this is an area for further development. Would it be possible to specify what precisely is meant by "effectiveness" or "ineffectiveness" — such that this critique might actually stand a chance of becoming meaningful to the scholars and institutions that are currently deemed ineffective? Ironically, if such communication is not attempted, the critique of ineffectiveness is thereby itself rendered ineffective. "Who is my audience?"⁴⁴ How can effective scholarship (as well as the dialectical grounds for criticism of ineffective scholarship) be clarified, operationalized, and convincingly communicated?

My own half-baked notion regarding this is as follows: If functional specialization does in fact lead to cumulative and progressive results (as Lonergan claims) then *simply going ahead and attempting functional specialization* in some limited field (e.g., theology in the African context, housing policy, legal theory, environmental ethics, etc.) should lead to better results that have a higher probability of impressing those who are sincere in their own strivings to know. It's of little use to criticize or argue with those who are not sincere. You know you're on the right track when people seek you out to ask: "What's your method?" We are not quite there yet.

In terms of prognostics, James seems no more optimistic than other contributors who have dared to peer forward. "Progress in doing dialectic, which is at the heart of discerning authenticity and inauthenticity, will be slow and messy..."⁴⁵ There does seem to be a tacit moment of optimism, however. James opened with the observation that "academic disciplines are

⁴² Duffy, 64, citing CWL 3, 442.

⁴³ Ivo Coelho mentions Fred Crowe's suggestion of "letting Kierkegaard haunt one's theology." Coelho, 53.

⁴⁴ Duffy, 67.

⁴⁵ Duffy, 66.

largely developments of the late 19th and early 20th century..."⁴⁶ I have never really taken time to consider this fact. To the extent we neglect attention to history however, things as they are tend to appear as things that must be. So for many, academia as it currently exists must seem a quasi-necessary state of affairs. We are born into an academic world and flow along with it, for the most part unquestioningly. To apprehend academia as historically-constituted however, is to realize that its seemingly immovable obstacles are in fact merely contingent. They can be otherwise; and there is some hope in that.

The future relevance of *Method in Theology* will not be limited to theology. **Sean McNelis** reflects upon his growing awareness of the need for functional collaboration in housing research and policy, and he explores how functional specialization might offer an integrative methodological approach to social research more broadly. Implementation will not occur simultaneously across all areas of social research, but rather might begin to take hold only by small initial steps initiated by people like Sean in niche fields like housing. Successful collaborations on any scale could serve as models for wider methodological progress elsewhere.

In *Insight* Lonergan argued that sustained human progress would require an overcoming of the biases of common sense, and a transformation of common sense by theory. Sean links progress to functional collaboration, and recognizes its potential to transform a particular field, "steeped in the world of common sense," where researchers are "at cross-purposes" and employing "unconnected methods."⁴⁷ Sean's notion of a "universal viewpoint for interpreting any housing system" is intriguing and worth pursuing.⁴⁸ His appreciation of housing as embedded in history and as involving cultural self-interpretation is certainly correct, and probably underappreciated.

Lonergan emphasized that the social sciences have historically been burdened and misdirected by an assumption that their rigor and respectability is to be attained by imitation of the successful natural sciences. While Sean focused mainly on ways social researchers will need to reassess their methods, clearly this must substantively include re-examination of

⁴⁶ Duffy, 56.

⁴⁷ McNelis, 79.

⁴⁸ McNelis, 82. Although not founded upon functional specialization, Christopher Alexander's *Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* seems to be striving for something like a universal viewpoint in the field of architecture.

prevalent but mistaken philosophical assumptions about what it fundamentally means to be human. Sean moves in this direction by pointing out that normative social science theory must always be a theory of value. He emphasized that functional specialization is a method uniquely equipped to mediate questions of value. Functional specialization's capacity to do so (mainly in virtue of dialectic and foundations) constitutes a bridge between research and policy. I suspect explicit elucidation of this bridge could be welcomed both by social researchers (who might be wondering how their efforts eventually will bear fruit in transforming objective situations) as well as by policymakers (who do appeal to various studies in justification of their policies, but who might suspect that the policies that get implemented at the end of the day depend more upon the opaque forces of money and power than upon the light of intelligence).

Finally, Sean adverts to the radical difficulty of introducing transcendental method to others. Among his colleagues he found that although criticism of research results and even methods was tolerated, "they were confounded when I raised questions about what we were doing.... This seemed I was getting at them and that was just too much."⁴⁹ I think all of us who have attempted to introduce Lonergan's unique approach to others can relate to this—sadly even within departments of philosophy. The turn to the subject-as-subject is something many seem to want to avoid. Western civilization at present seems perversely biased toward extroversion and self-evasion. As self-appropriation is the indispensable basis of functional specialization, this raises serious concerns about how transformation of fields through direct attempts at functional collaboration will be possible. Perhaps implementation of functional collaboration will require as its remote condition a radically different kind of education.

The opening sentence of the Introduction to *Method in Theology* clarifies what Lonergan intends to mean by theology: "a theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix."⁵⁰ Understood in this way, theology, for Lonergan, is inherently *not* an enterprise that can abstractly prescind from the dynamics of history and the variability of culture. **Cyril Orji** is a theologian seeking to make contributions to theology in a distinctively African cultural context. He discusses his aversion to an ahistorical dogmatic theology driven by the classicist assumption that there exists only one set of true propositions

⁴⁹ McNelis, 84.

⁵⁰ Lonergan, *Method*, xi; CWL 14, 3.

universally and eternally applicable to any and all cultural contexts. He criticizes an unexamined tendency in some papal encyclicals to tacitly identify Christian culture with the dominant western culture. He points out that the deductivist Denzinger approach to theology (in which church documents are merely to be proclaimed, explained, and defended) has been crushing to the creativity and initiative of the theologian, who is thereby left with “no contributions of his own to make.”⁵¹ A theologian is something more than a parrot. It is his or her task to ask questions, and especially questions that situate theological doctrines in the concrete contexts in which they must either find a mindful home or (failing that) be cast aside as irrelevant. Cyril likens the notion that theological propositions can be put forth for acceptance without question to a failure to enter into the world as mediated by meaning. Doctrinal truth must not be regarded as “already out there real now,” but rather must be mediated by further relevant questions sensitive to the cultural context. Hence Cyril welcomes Lonergan’s displacement of dogmatic theology by functionally-specialized, historically-minded doctrinal theology, as this opens up the “delightful” possibility of making fruitful contributions in a particular context, and puts an end to the ignoring of cultural differences. Like many of the other contributors, Cyril recognizes the indispensability of dialectic. Dialectic can strike at the root of counterpositional thinking—whether cognitional-theoretic, epistemological, or metaphysical—but it does not regard all differences as illegitimate. Its acknowledgment of legitimate genetic, historical, and cultural differences can become “an occasion for reflection and self-scrutiny, which in turn can lead to a new or deeper understanding.”⁵² I think we all can sympathize however, with Cyril’s sense that attempting to change those who hold classicist assumptions feels “like moving Mount Kilimanjaro.”⁵³

While there is much in **Terrance Quinn**’s contribution that I struggled to interpret, what stood out for me was Quinn’s emphasis on genuine understanding as a necessary condition for meeting the problem of history. Cultural decline, global poverty, social justice, economic crises, and so forth, cannot be resolved by activism alone, but will ultimately require functionally-specialized understanding. Quinn’s reflection on his own life-long striving for a radical kind of self-education serves as a basis for his critical reflection upon what standardly passes for understanding in academia.

⁵¹ Orji, 105, citing CWL 14, 307.

⁵² Orji, 107.

⁵³ Orji, 105.

Emphasizing the indispensability of explanatory understanding, Quinn cautions against several prevalent tendencies: There is a “self-screening” tendency, a neglect of the subject that discourages adverting to, or drawing upon, one’s own experience. To some extent this probably is driven by a mistaken notion of objectivity and a mistaken assumption that self-attention undermines objectivity. There is a conceptualism that assumes “concepts precede understanding, and that understanding is a matter of connecting concepts.”⁵⁴ “Systematic exclusion of attention to own’s own mind” guarantees oversight of insight, and perpetuates conceptualist assumptions and procedures.⁵⁵ There are “the ‘spinnings’ of linguistic competence,” in which merely nominal understanding and rhetorical facility displace—or worse, are passed off as—serious theory.⁵⁶ “Horizon gaps” separate many in the humanities from understanding what is going forward in the natural sciences, and this gap fosters conditions under which facile reductionisms can persist unchallenged. “Merely speculative modeling”—which does not arise inductively, and which floats free of supervening judgment and verification—renders much academic work (e.g., in economics) remote from, and largely irrelevant to, actual concrete situations.⁵⁷

Quinn’s own intellectual journey offers pointers for reversing these tendencies. Central is the imperative to self-appropriate. This requires, minimally, paying attention to the workings of one’s own mind. This is no simple matter, and Quinn rightly cautions against a notion of intellectual conversion as a one-off event, or something that one could obtain simply from an account of the levels of conscious intentionality. Self-appropriation is an ongoing process. It requires working through exercises—what James Duffy referred to as “exercises done in twofold attention.”⁵⁸ Quinn speaks of his “detours” into various fields of inquiry. The main concern in these detours was not with the objective pole, not with becoming an expert, but rather with cultivating self-attention. This kind of self-education requires considerable leisure—and indeed leisure for which one has little to show by way of results, objective findings, or publications. Deans are not impressed by this sort of development. The long-term solution, I suggest, is radical educational reform. The current dominance of subject-neglect and conceptualism must be replaced by the genuine intellectualism of self-

⁵⁴ Quinn, 114.

⁵⁵ Quinn, 113.

⁵⁶ Quinn, 113.

⁵⁷ Quinn, 113.

⁵⁸ Duffy, 64.

appropriation and facility in generalized empirical method. Functional specialization is an even more remote challenge. It presupposes transcendental method and will have difficulty getting off the ground in its absence.