Response to Glenn Hughes, "Ulterior Significance in the Art of Bob Dylan"

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Glenn (Chip) Hughes has given us a wonderful exploration of Bob Dylan's musical artistry, as well as a nuanced intimation of the evocative power of Dylan's use of verbal, visual, and auditory images. Informed as his article is by his own poetic prowess, Chip is able to bring out nuances in Dylan's lyrical creativity and musical originality, and to relate them to elements in Lonergan's account of art in a way that illuminates both Lonergan's meaning and Dylan's art. So Chip's paper is in some ways an exercise in honing his own considerable "skill of appreciation" and in inviting us to do the same, and in other ways his article may be viewed as a series of concrete illustrations of what the profound significance of "ulterior significance" in art really is.

There is very little to disagree with in Chip's article, and much to admire. So I will devote this response largely to relating Chip's basic themes more explicitly and more extensively to Lonergan's account of art and aesthetics as well as to some other areas of Lonergan's thought—areas that one might not initially think of in relation to his philosophy of art. By casting a wider net, I hope to enlarge the context of Chip's reflections and to name and register, at least, some important further relevant questions evoked in me by his article (even where, so to speak, my questions are hidden in declarative sentences). This means that mine is a very modest effort: I am not interpreting Lonergan on art so much as struggling to advance my own questions on that topic in a more fruitful and precise way in light of Chip's highly suggestive paper.

The paper begins with a hint of the relation between art and what Lonergan calls constitutive meaning; its epigraph recites the famous saying, "Let me write a nation's songs, and I care not who writes her

¹ "Works of art then supply the materials for exercises in one's skill of appreciation." Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, vol. 10 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert Doran and Frederick Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 222 (hereafter, *CWL* 10).

laws."² Human lives, human groups, human institutions, and human history are all made out of human meanings, and those meanings are by and large carried by images charged with feelings, tacitly orienting us one way or another to some scale of values. When "the times they are achanging," the changes are evoked, registered, and implemented in fundamentally symbolic ways—via resonant images rippling outward through the medium of constitutive meaning. As Lonergan says, "The state can be changed by rewriting its constitution. More subtly but no less effectively it can be changed by reinterpreting its constitution or, again, by working on men's minds and hearts to change the objects that command their respect, hold their allegiance, fire their loyalty."⁴ What commands our respect, holds our allegiance, fires our loyalty is, of course, mediated symbolically and artistically. For better or for worse, human groups are formed by "turning to their own ends the vast resources of human imagination and emotion, sentiment and confidence, familiarity and loyalty." A nation's songs express and help constitute "the living memory" of a people. They form and shape popular tradition, provide "an aesthetic apprehension of the group's origin and story," and so help constitute the meanings and values by which we constitute ourselves. They form a current within the historical flow of those "vast resources," and it is not accidental that Lonergan in Topics in Education

² Chip traces that formulation in English to Sir Andrew Fletchter in the early 18th century. See Hughes, "Ulterior Significance in the Art of Bob Dylan," above at p. 18, n.1 (hereafter, "Ulterior Significance"). As Fletcher's comments intimate, the provenance of that basic notion, at least in the West, is much earlier, very probably various passages in Plato. See, e.g., Plato, *The Laws*, trans. A.E. Taylor, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 1370-71, Stephanus number 799-800 ("rhythms and music generally are a reproduction expressing the moods of better and worse men ... Why, the plan is to consecrate all our dances and all our tunes. ... Our songs have become canons ..." [spoken by the Athenian Stranger]).

³ "The Times They Are A-Changin," from the album by the same name (1964). The lyrics to this and other Dylan songs may be found at http://www.bobdylan.com/#/songs.

⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 78.

⁵ Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1957), 223, now available as *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3 (Toronto: University Press of Toronto, 1992), 248 (hereafter, *CWL* 3). For convenience, my citations will refer first to the pagination of the earlier edition, then to the pagination of the *Collected Works* edition.

⁶ CWL 10, at 230.

⁷ On songs as contributing to and expressing "the living memory" of a people, see *CWL* 10, at 231 and footnote 12 below.

proposed "to seek an apprehension of concrete living in its concrete potentialities" through an examination of art and history.

There is, then, a very profound and important sense in which "it is on the artistic, symbolic level that we live," and this is true not only personally but also collectively. One need only think of the pervasiveness and primordiality of the dramatic pattern of experience and its public, social, and cultural expressions. If it is true that (1) social turmoil creates psychologically adverse situations; that (2) "the cumulative effect of successive adverse situations" results in the development of scotosis; and that (3) "when adverse situations become the rule for most members of a society then the society can survive only by providing a regular public equivalent for the dream;"11 then perhaps it is not too surprising that the turbulence of the 1960s and what Hegel called "the cunning of reason" should somehow conspire to give rise to a Bob Dylan. Dylan, after all, contributed to something like the "public equivalent for the dream" in American culture in the form of radically re-written popular musical culture. Prospero's assertion that "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on" is true on many levels. 13

⁸ CWL 10, at 208.

⁹ CWL 10, at 221.

¹⁰ Insight, 198; CWL 3, at 222.

¹¹ Insight, 198; CWL 3, at 222.

¹² Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Colonial Press, 1900), 33; see also ibid. for Hegel's description of world-historical humans. ("But at the same time they were thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time—what was ripe for development. This was the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know this nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expend their energy in promoting it.") Although Chip does not go so far as to proclaim Dylan a worldhistorical figure, he does hint that Dylan was peculiarly aware of what was ripe for development through his own insight into the requirements of the time. And there is in Chip's treatment of Dylan an intimation of the link between cultural and artistic choices and the unforeseen consequences of those choices, between drama and destiny—in this case, the drama and destiny swirling in the cultural, political, and social turbulence of the 1960s. CWL 10, at 231 ("As fiction or poetry, as narrative, is the expression, the creation, the formulation of the living memory of the people, which is the link that makes the people into a group, so poetry as drama is the image of destiny. ... Destiny is the linking of successive situations. There is something in the succession of human choices that is outside the range of human choices.")

¹³ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene i, lines 156-157. For a darker context—the use of art and drama in the Nazi era for propaganda purposes—see Bill Kisner and Neil Kleinman, *The Dream That Was No More a Dream: The Search for Aesthetic Reality in Germany, 1890-1945* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). See also below, footnote 42. It is interesting, as an aside, that many Dylan songs have the word "dream" in the title. E.g., "Bob Dylan's

And so in his reflections on the centrality of the symbol in human living, Chip spends a fair amount of time passionately and patiently proclaiming, with Vico, the priority of poetry. To do so, as Lonergan says, is "to proclaim that the human spirit expresses itself in symbols before it knows, if ever it knows, what its symbols literally mean. It is to open the way to setting aside the classical definition of man as rational animal and, instead, defining man with the cultural phenomenologists as a symbolic animal or with the personalists as incarnate spirit." And as incarnate spirits, we embody and express compact artistic meanings before we know, if we ever know, precisely what those meanings fully mean.

So much, then, for the first two themes Chip takes to be central to Lonergan's account of art and central also to Dylan's performance of art: the power of symbols and symbolic meaning in the concrete patterns known as artworks, ¹⁵ and symbolic meaning as the essential medium of art. ¹⁶ One of Chip's main contentions is that Dylan—in the words Debussy eventually said of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*—"enlarged the boundaries of the permissible in the empire of sound." ¹⁷ I have no reason to doubt that, and the evidence Chip marshals of Dylan's virtuosity and novelty—whether in his 'high modernist' mode or later—does indeed seem to qualify him as a kind of "Picasso of song" in Leonard Cohen's phrase. ¹⁸ Whether by pioneering a kind of "nude descending a staircase", ¹⁹ technique in musical narrative, or by trailing clouds of overdetermination in the realm of lyrics, Dylan's break from the ready-made world in his songs paved the way for fresh and deeper rhythms of apprehension, feeling, and perceptiveness. ²⁰

But I want to pick up briefly on Chip's third theme, the notion and role of "ulterior significance" in the work of art. It is one of the most interesting and yet obscure components in Lonergan's analysis of art, and it ties directly into aesthetic experience and artistic creation as

Dream," "Had a Dream About You Baby," "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," "Series of Dreams," "This Dream of You," and others.

¹⁴ "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collection*, vol. 4 of the *Collected Works* of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 241-42.

¹⁵ See Hughes, "Ulterior Significance" above, at 25-34.

¹⁶ See "Ulterior Significance," 21, 25-26.

¹⁷ Neil Wenborn, *Stravinsky* (London: Omnibus Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁸ "Ulterior Significance," 19.

¹⁹ I am referring to the famous painting by Marcel Duchamp. See http://www.marcelduchamp.net/Nude Descending a Staircase.php

²⁰ "When they [adults] listen to music, gaze upon a tree or landscape, are stopped by beauty of any kind, they are freeing their sensitivity from the routines imposed by development and allowing it to follow fresher and deeper rhythms of apprehension and feeling." *Method*, 29.

distinctive integrations of the organic, psychic, and intellectual levels of human being.

I have just alluded to Lonergan's account of human development in *Insight*, ²¹ and I want to pause for a moment on some of the implications of that account for what Chip calls the "musicality" of Dylan's lyrics and which he identifies as "central to the communication of felt meaning in poetry." For to take seriously Lonergan's depiction of the human being as "incarnate spirit" is to take seriously his assertion that "organic, psychic, and intellectual development are not three independent processes" but are instead "interlocked with the intellectual providing a higher integration of the psychic and the psychic providing a higher integration of the organic." What, after all, is a song?²⁴

Take, for example, the reality of rhythm and cadence in music and poetry. Wordsworth's reflection on the embodied nature of musicality at the very beginning of the *Prelude* expresses this beautifully. He describes the influence, literally, of being born within earshot of the river Derwent, and of growing up in the continual ambience of a river's song, on his own sense of embodied rhythm:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams?²⁵

That influence formed some part of Wordsworth's total sensibility, and it did not somehow float in mid-air or mid-mind. It was, instead, concretely and dynamically embodied in Wordsworth's own organic, psychic, and intellectual schemes of recurrence. And so "in the concrete physical, chemical, vital reality of human living, then, there also is meaning." This dynamic interlocking of the developing organic,

²¹ Insight, 469-479; CWL 3, at 494-504.

²² "Ulterior Significance," 26.

²³ Insight, 469-470; CWL 3, at 494.

²⁴ For an extremely interesting, enlightening, and challenging series of reflections in this context, see Philip McShane's *Field-Nocturnes* series, approximately 300 pages focusing on an adequate reading of the long paragraph of *Insight*, 464; *CWL* 3, at 489. See especially *Field-Nocturnes* 8 ("Self-appropriating Hearing"), 9 ("The Hearing Organism"), 10 ("Noise Infolding"), and 20 ("Aggreformism"), available at: http://www.philipmcshane.ca/fieldnocturnes.html.

²⁵ "The Two-Part Prelude" (1799), in William Wordsworth, *The Essential Wordsworth: Selected by Seamus Heaney* (New York: Galahad Books, 1988), 87.

²⁶ *Method*, 211. Although it is often overlooked in Lonergan scholarship, this dynamic interlocking of our physical, chemical, and vital levels is, of

psychic, and intellectual levels in us is relevant both to the centrality of the symbol in human living and to the "ulterior significance" in works of art. 28

What Lonergan means by "ulterior significance" is not initially obvious. In part that is because what is symbolized in art is itself obscure. Art "is an expression of the human subject outside the limits of

course, to be expected if one is tuned to Lonergan's heuristic perspective on human being. See above, footnote 24. For meta-diagrams and heuristics relating to this interlocking, see Philip McShane, Prehumous 2, "Metagrams and Metaphysics," http://www.philipmcshane.ca/prehumous-02.pdf. The dynamic interlocking is at present being explored relentlessly in the neurosciences. For an intimation of this exploration in the context of art and poetry, see A. Smith et al., "Rhyme and Reason: The Neural Correlates of Reading Poetry and Prose," *The Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, vol. 81, no. 10 (Oct. 2010), 9 (summarizing a study using functional MRIs to compare overlapping, distinct, and contrasting areas of the brain activated by the reading of prose and poetry, including different kinds of poetry, such as sonnets, and noting the impact of reading poetry on "regions associated with the 'default' or autobiographical memory networks (in particular bilateral inferior parietal regions [area 40] and bilateral precuneus [area 7]).")

²⁷ CWL 10, at 221-222.

²⁸ This interlocking of three developing levels of our being is highly complex, as anyone who has struggled through Chapter XV of *Insight* can attest. And it becomes even more complex in light of "the cumulative, historical process of development in a multiplicity and succession of individuals" (Insight, 741; CWL 3, at 762), in light of "the higher conjugate forms of faith, hope, and charity" (ibid.), and in light of "the ulterior finality of man." *Insight*, 633; CWL 3, at 656. As incarnate spirits, our conscious experience and performance is the product of the laws and realized schemes proper to each level as sublated by higher levels. *Insight*, 469; *CWL* 3, at 494. But it is important (and very difficult) not to glibly glide by the enormous challenge represented by Lonergan's account of genetic method and its relation to the reality of art as an entity emergent within the intentional order. See above, footnote 24. See also "Exegesis and Dogma," in Philosophical and Theological Papers: 1958-1964, vol. 6 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert Croken, Frederick Crowe, and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 144 ("Besides being governed by the laws of the mind, thought and speech are governed also by the laws of the psyche. ... What according to the law of the mind is affirming is feeling intensely for the psyche.") I suspect that one has to conceive "the laws of the mind" and "the laws of the psyche" in their relation to art within the complex heuristics of Chapters XV and XVII of *Insight*, including "the law of integration" (*Insight*, 471-472; CWL 3, at 496-97), "the law of limitation and transcendence" (Insight, 472-474; CWL 3, at 497-499), "the law of genuineness" (Insight, 475-479: CWL 3, at 499-503), "the principle of correspondence" (*Insight*, 451-452, 471-472; CWL 3, at 477, 496), "the principle of finality" (Insight, 452; CWL 3, at 477-478), and "the principle of development" (Insight, 452-53, 625; CWL 3, at 478-479, 647-648).

adequate intellectual formulation or appraisal. ... Pre-scientific and prephilosophic, it may strain for truth and value without defining them. Post-biological, it may reflect the psychological depths, yet by that very fact it will go beyond them."²⁹ It is an expression of "the deep-set wonder in which all questions have their source and ground," showing forth "that wonder in its elemental sweep."³⁰ It is a release from all the different ways in which we manage to instrumentalize experience, ways which "remove us from the primal mode of being that is proper to man."³¹

But in part "ulterior significance" may be obscure because it relates to the complex ways the levels in us relate to one another and to the pure desire to know. Ultimately, art is an expression of "the tension that is inherent in the finality of all proportionate being" and that "becomes in man a conscious tension." One of its functions is to provide conscious representation and integration for the "demands" of our being "for fuller living" and "fuller realization." It may be, therefore, that "ulterior significance" in art verges on an intimation of "ultimate significance," and this seems to be somehow related to the fact that for Lonergan (to modify the first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) we are by nature oriented into mystery.

Every human being "by the dynamic structure of his being is oriented into" mystery.³⁴ And so art is in some way related to "the sphere of the ulterior unknown, of the unexplored and strange, of the undefined surplus of significance and momentousness,"³⁵ in contrast to the sphere of everyday life, the "domesticated, familiar, common"³⁶ world of everyday work and talk. And as "mystery is a permanent need of man's sensitivity and intersubjectivity,"³⁷ what is needed for psychic and existential integrality "is a qualitative change in me, a shift in the center of my existing from the concerns manifested in the *bavardage quotidien* towards the participated yet never in this life completely established eternity that is tasted in aesthetic apprehension, in the inner utterance of

²⁹ *Insight*, 185; *CWL* 3, at 208.

³⁰ *Insight*, 185; *CWL* 3, at 208.

³¹ CWL 10, at 221.

³² Insight, 473; CWL 3, at 497.

³³ *Insight*, 472; *CWL* 3, at 497 ("the nonconscious neural basis can send up its signals that express a starved affectivity or other demands for fuller living"). See also *Insight*, 457; *CWL* 3, at 482 ("But the unconscious neural basis is an upwardly but indeterminately directed dynamism seeking fuller realization, first, on the proximate sensitive level and, secondly, beyond its limitations on higher **artistic**, dramatic, philosophic, cultural, and religious levels." [emphasis added])

³⁴ *Insight*, 532-33; *CWL* 3, at 556.

³⁵ Insight, 532; CWL 3, at 556.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Insight*, 724; *CWL* 3, at 745.

truth, in the partial success of moral struggle."³⁸ That deep need for "a shift in the center of my existing" is somehow both fostered and met in aesthetic apprehension and artistic creation, in apprehending in some compact way "the undefined surplus of significance and momentousness"³⁹ shimmering within any serious work of art. Perhaps it is a criterion of great art that it contributes to this shift in the center of gravity, or in the center of levity, of my very existing.

I take Chip to be saying that Dylan is a kind of virtuoso of "ulterior significance," an ulterior significance that as aesthetic experience "is not formulated but lived," but as artistic creativity is lived and also expressed in the work of art. And while Lonergan and Chip are concerned precisely to formulate it within the larger perspective of a philosophy of art, I take Chip to be saying that Dylan lives it, and lives out of its surplus, and all his art is an exploration of the possibilities of concrete living given in the native human orientation to mystery.

One last note. Chip is not stinting in his praise of Dylan. But for all his praise, he didn't go so far as to call Dylan a priest of nature. In a startling passage, however, Lonergan does. "Man is nature's priest, and nature is God's silent communing with man. The artistic moment simply breaks away from ordinary living and is, as it were, an opening, a moment of new potentiality." (The phrase "nature's priest" is unattributed in *Topics*, but it is from Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," explicitly quoted by Lonergan in the section on "the sense of the unknown" in *Insight*. Man as nature's priest is not merely a metaphor. "All creation rightly

³⁸ Lonergan, in a review of Jules Chaix-Ruy, *Les Dimensions de l'être et du temps*, in *Gregorianum*, vol. 36 (1955), reprinted in *Shorter Papers*, vol. 20 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert Croken, Robert Doran, and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 209-210, at 209. The concerns of the world of "everyday chatter" from which we need to shift are a subdivision within "the ready-made world" (*CWL* 10, at 90; 213, n.12; 216-217; 222-225), the liberation from which is one of the functions of aesthetic experience and artistic creation.

³⁹ *Insight*, 532; *CWL* 3, at 556.

⁴⁰ CWL 10, at 222.

⁴¹ CWL 10, at 225.

⁴² Insight, 532; CWL 3, at 556 ("so that, as for Wordsworth in his youth, the earth and every common sight take on the glory and the freshness of a dream.") That phrase is an elided version of the second through fifth lines of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," The Essential Wordsworth, 139. The phrase, "nature's priest," is from section V of the same poem. "The Youth, who daily farther from the east / Must travel, still is Nature's Priest, / And by the vision splendid / Is on his way attended; / At length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day." The Essential Wordsworth, 142.

gives You praise"⁴³ includes the creation that is a work of art. And Lonergan is quite explicit about the fact that human consciousness has within it the potential to be in affective harmony with the emergently probable order of the created universe, in harmony, that is, "with that order's dynamic joy and zeal."⁴⁴ At any rate, this opening and this new potentiality latent in the artistic moment are related to the role Lonergan assigns to what he calls "the sensitive operator." "Just as on the intellectual level the operator is wonder, the pure desire to know, so on the sensitive level there is a corresponding operator. With it are associated feelings of awe, fascination, the uncanny. It is an openness to the world, to adventure, to greatness, to goodness, to majesty."⁴⁵

There is, then, a profound ethical and religious dimension to aesthetics. In aesthetic experience and artistic creativity, "the subject is transformed. He has been liberated from being a replaceable part adjusted to a ready-made world ... He has become just himself: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom." That originating freedom, fed and formed by aesthetic experience and artistic creation as expressions and developments of our native "openness to the world, to adventure, to greatness, to goodness, to majesty," is also the freedom by which we make ourselves who we are to be. And so perhaps one may speak of the ulterior significance of the work of art that is the incarnate meaning of any human person. In the resonant words of Phil McShane, "If we were adequately listening to one another's incarnate quested speaking, we would be in a state of habitual genuflection."

Perhaps that fact illuminates the most extraordinary thing about the fundamental meaning of art for Lonergan. In a remarkable passage, he makes this assertion about "the fundamental meaning of art": "Just as the pure desire to know heads on to the beatific vision, so too the break from

⁴³ Eucharistic Prayer III, in the *Roman Missal*. For the text, see http://usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-priest-prayer3.shtml. See also Psalm 103 and Psalm 148.

⁴⁴ *Insight*, 700; *CWL* 3, at 722. Phil McShane has called attention to this phrase in the context of Lonergan's view of energy. "Self-appropriating the Inner Parts," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, n.s. 1 (2010), 55-66, at 59, n. 11.

⁴⁵ *CWL* 10, at 214. Compare *Insight*, 532-533; *CWL* 3, at 555-556, and see especially *Insight*, 532; *CWL* 3, at 556 ("such feelings, emotions, sentiments become integrated in the flow of psychic events inasmuch as they are preceded by distinctive sensible presentations or imaginative representations and inasmuch as they issue forth in exclamations and bodily movements, in rites and ceremonies, in **song** and speech." [emphasis added]) Note also the reference to "Insight: the dual operator" in Lonergan's notes to the lecture on art in *CWL* 10. *CWL* 10, at 222, footnote 32.

⁴⁶ Method, 63. Compare the almost verbatim passage in CWL 10, at 217.

⁴⁷ Philip McShane, *Wealth of Self, Wealth of Nations* (New York: Exposition Press, 1975), 105.

the ready-made world heads on to God."⁴⁸ The liberation of human sensitivity and human wonder from the confining narrowness of mere practicality, mere utility, mere routine, mere inertial habit, frees the human desire to know to be more fully itself, that is, "a natural desire to see God."⁴⁹ It may be, as Dylan asserts, that "there are no truths outside the gates of Eden."⁵⁰ But the most amazing truth about art is that we are all of us, in some unfathomable way, already within the gates, tasting a participated eternity in every aesthetic apprehension.

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⁴⁸ CWL 10, at 224-25.

 $^{^{\}rm 49}$ See Lonergan, "The Natural Desire to See God," in $\it CWL$ 4, $\it Collection,$ 81-91.

⁵⁰ Bob Dylan, "Gates of Eden," on the "Bringing All Back Home" album (1965). For the lyrics, see http://www.bobdylan.com/#/songs/gates-of-eden. I suspect that Chip would interpret this artistic utterance as a compact affirmation of what Eric Voegelin calls the *metaxy*, the in-between nature of human existence.