

Chapter 2

What Is Functional Research?: The Struggle So Far

The first note that I received this morning, from one of our struggling members, was an appeal for broad help. The last note I received yesterday was an expression of broad bewilderment. The past two days have been mainly of the same character, but coming on various levels. You have available to you¹ one such expression of confusion, on the highest level, from Terry Quinn.

Now Terry's submission did not seem an expression of confusion, and it was not: rather, it articulated the problem of the confusions underlying the need for broad help, the nature of the broad bewilderment.

Terry has been at this stuff for some decades, and shortly I am going to reference a key piece of work he has done on the basic insights of calculus. Indeed, I suspect that each day, as he teaches university mathematics, he necessarily does a key piece of work. The university texts he is inflicted with in his area of teaching are just not written for human consumption.² He has to lift them into a novel zone against the flow of settled truncated subjectivity, in the texts, in his students, in the vast majority of his colleagues. Others of you may well be doing something similar in other areas of education.

But the question that ferments out of my recent correspondence regarding the simple functional research project is, how much of the pressure of settled truncation³ haunts our present efforts, our present *ethos*,

¹ <http://www.sgeme.org/BlogEngine/archive.aspx>

² The dominant ethos is pretty consistent in selecting the wrong end of the key issue: "The key issue is whether concepts result from understanding or understanding results from concepts" (*Method in Theology*, 336, note 1).

³ This pressure of settled truncation deserves a lengthy treatment. Indeed, one could well think of it, and its eventual treatment, in terms of the warped holiday that I consider below shortly after note 7. "The truncated subject not only does not know himself but also is unaware of his ignorance." See Lonergan, "The Subject" in *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 73. Think, now of your own situation, perhaps a student who has been taught badly to read *Method*, and test yourself on, say, the first paragraph of *Method* 2.4, on "Judgments of Value" (on indeed anywhere in the book!). What are you thinking of when you read, "judgments of value are simple or comparative"? Are you tuned in to your psychic skin in a post-Hegelian

our present–individual and group–*acquis*? I am back at Terry’s contribution and my response, both available on the website but not necessarily to be returned to here in order to travel with me.

The journey here is to be shockingly elementary, as opposed to what I initially intended this essay to be; this morning, at my usual odd pre-dawn start, I decided that I had best shift my view of the essay so as to tackle the broad confusion in a helpful way. I do hope the more advanced members do not find it boring.

My nudge to switch, to pause, reminded me of a morning when I was lecturing a large class in second year university engineering: over four hundred students, all male. I was moving along on the topic of the dynamics of a rotating drum in part of a larger unit, when the psychic nudge came to ask the group, “how many of you know what we are doing with this calculus?” Our work, our year’s work, if it was to be luminously applicable, depended on us having a grip on the fundamental theorems of differential and integral calculus. Did my lads know what they were doing?

So, we paused, already some weeks out in the course. We had moments of honesty that eventually surged into a general consensus regarding “broad bewilderment” and, yes, there “was an appeal for broad help.” My class had learned all the moves in the previous year, “did” problems, passed exams. But what exactly did $d/dx (x^n) = nx^{n-1}$ mean? Well ... it worked!

So we paused for two class days and tackled the two fundamental theorems of the calculus much as they are presented by Quinn in that “key piece of work” which I reference below.⁴

Why this parallel? Could it be that some of us, of you, “learned all the moves” in a year of Lonergan lectures or of reading a Lonergan text, yet did not find yourselves? Yes, this is a horrid, perhaps insulting, question to raise, but I hide here behind that old master Fred Crowe who made a like blunt point in 1964. Let’s pause with his plaint and complaint.

“To assimilate Lonergan calls for exercises in interiority. I think any who have spent long years getting hold of their own acts of insight, and still longer years in getting hold of the act of judgment (the stumbling block for so many of Lonergan’s readers),⁵ will understand well enough

realism? See note 5 below. Or have you been led by the Gnose of truncation to read it in a way that doesn’t even have you resonating with Aquinas’ *prima secundae*, qq.6-17? Worse still, have you been led by an erudite scholar to commonsense judgments of value that are comparative of Lonergan and X, where X is some sophisticated but truncated author?

⁴ Terrance Quinn, “The Calculus Campaign,” *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, vol. 2 (2002): 8-36.

(<http://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/jmda/index>)

⁵ I cannot enter into this huge topic here. I simply borrow footnote 7 of Chapter 7 and invite you to ingest the text there, the challenge of **bold-faced print**. Note 7 reads: Mark Morelli, “Lonergan’s Debt to Hegel and the Appropriation of Critical Realism,” *Meaning and History in Systematic*

my repugnance for exposing his doctrine in the context of the present essay. I think they will agree also that unless his readers are ready to undertake a parallel labor (not necessarily so prolonged inasmuch as they may be less tardy of intelligence) they have little chance of understanding what Lonergan is doing and talking about. This is rather bluntly said, but is there not room for a measure of bluntness at this stage? If we wish either to praise or blame, we must first understand. Lonergan's position is that the way to understand him is to carry out for ourselves the performance of appropriating conscious activity. He has said as much in *Insight*, he has repeated it for years in his lectures, and his claim has been ignored, sometimes as much by disciples as by opponents, both of whom turn more readily to the objective products of his thought than to their own operations. Those products command respect and deserve discussion (otherwise this collection of studies would lose much of its purpose) but they just are not the main issue."⁶

Now I have many possible directions in which I might lead us here in our pause. Eventually it seems to me that I should home in, in friendly fashion, on "the main issue" of our seminar. So I go back to one of my own introductory texts, where I have a chapter entitled "A Rolling Stone Gathers *Nomos*."⁷ What is the rolling stone in question? It is the relay race structure that I have mentioned already in our e-seminar. What is the *Nomos*? *Nomos* is the Greek for *measure*, *norm*. You might think of it in our context in terms of *acquis*,⁸ or in terms of **Standard Model** (from our parallel with physics). With my introductory class it took a simpler route, which you might find useful for yourself or your teaching.

I envisaged a dysfunctional family that had been going on an

Theology. Essay in Honor of Robert M. Doran, S.J., edited by John D. Dadosky (Marquette University Press, 2007), 420. On Lonergan's reading of Stewart's book on Plato's doctrine of ideas, see Morelli, *At the Threshold of the Halfway House. A Study of Bernard Lonergan's Encounter with John Alexander Stewart* (The Lonergan Institute, Boston College, 2007).

⁶ Frederick E. Crowe, "The Exigent Mind: Bernard Lonergan's Intellectualism," *Spirit as Inquiry. Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan S.J.*, edited by F.E. Crowe S.J., (Herder and Herder, 1964), 27.

⁷ Chapter Three of *A Brief History of Tongue. From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes*, Axial Publishing, 1998. There is an equivalent chapter with the same title in my *Economics for Everyone. Das Jus Capital* (Axial Publishing, 2000). The first mentioned chapter is an introduction to functional collaboration related to the present struggles in linguistics; the second, in *Economics for Everyone*, is obviously related to the needs of economics.

⁸ Best quote Lonergan's usage of this suggestive word, an earlier echo of my Standard Model: "And you can have teamwork insofar, first of all, as the fact of reciprocal dependence is understood and appreciated. Not only is that understanding required; one has to be familiar with what is call the *acquis*, what has been settled, what no one has any doubt of in the present time. You're doing a big thing when you can upset that, but you have to know where things stand at the present time, what has already been achieved, to be able to see what is new in its novelty as a consequence" *CWL* 22, 464 (a 1968 essay).

increasingly dysfunctional holiday each summer for twenty years. January comes, perhaps Robbie Burns Day, the 25th today! and some spark gets the group to pause, review the past vaguely and the holidays suffered through, and bubbles up, group-wise, in the idea of doing a better job of the next holiday. The spark homes in on **HOW**,⁹ and, **eureka**,¹⁰ the group decides to divide up the work. ‘What really happened, and what might happen, in holiday time?’ Etc., etc.

There is/was a spontaneity here—in the family behavior, in a beginners’ class—that I wish for in the seminar. The family divide up the work pretty spontaneously ... collecting old letters regarding the past, checking out schedules for trains for the future ... and, as the text illustrates, doing the other ‘stuff’ in between so that eventually they set out with the prospect of a decent holiday.

What the seminar asked for is ... quite simple. B needs to know what happened in the past summers; A wants to help B.¹¹ A goes hunting for letters, climate reports, reminiscences, location- conveniences’ maps. What I wanted in this seminar was our group to get into the fantasy of being A, in relation to the texts of Lonergan to be provided for B. In the example for the class, and indeed in my various essays to groups in musicology, economics, linguistics, etc. etc. the reach was for a glimpse of the whole cyclic process desperately needed in each of their fields. But in the seminar’s first exercise I just wanted people to have a performative glimpse of A’s task. The creativity that could emerge with doing the task is related to the question, how far do I have to ‘reach’? Think of, imagine, a setting off to fumble round against the background of their agreement about their dividing the work AND the background, too, of the common view of everyone’s need that fermented forth in and from their lives previous to this. From this—and you can do it for chemistry, botany,

⁹ Chapter 2 of the book referred to in note 7 above is titled “How-language: Works?” It was my first searching introduction to the large issue of a distant hope of human language lifting to a luminous HOW attitude, lifting our address of one another, and of ourselves, into a **Home of Wonder**. The full lift will lead to a massive incarnate deepening of Trinitarian theology.

¹⁰ We are back at the first page of *Insight’s* chapter 1. Might we envisage a different start to *Method*, with history bringing forth this eureka from its water-logged truncation? See chapter 1 of the site book, *Method in Theology: Refinements and Implementations*.

¹¹ You may just simply “follow along here” (heavens, there’s a question for a theory of interpretation!), but you can also push to sophisticate what I write, or to detect sophistications in my summary sentence, when you consider not a family but a larger problematic area. Here the question is what B is going to do and what is passed on to C, etc. Of course, B actually names a group; say twenty people each figuring out one of the summers. This nudges us to look back at A, and find that it too is a crowd; then you might reflect on C as a crowd, but more importantly here now reflect on how C has the task of, so to speak, stringing the 20 summers together. And so on and on: your and their efforts being an ongoing genesis of methodologists.

mountaineering, whatever—you get a decent parallel to my minimalism.

I'm not sure if it would be helpful to go on here: the going on will occur in *FuSe 5*. But Crowe's point is going to be helpful as a background there. Are we really in the same boat as some of the disciples of 1964? And even if some of us are, think positively and historically and so glimpse the deeper message of my minimalism.

Our global culture does not differentiate more than nominally between seeing, understanding and judging. What is fermenting in the crises of various large inquiries is the value of those distinctions: think, for instance—looking at the forward bent of divisions which emerges either in that dysfunctional family or, say, in national government—of the threesome, Policy, Planning, and Executive Reflection. Eventually the family or the national culture should rise to posing questions about the divisions. The questions will lead to the cultural discovery of the dynamics of the subject: experience moves to understanding and then on to judgment, and does so cyclically in a self-correcting process.

Suppose, then, I had on board in this seminar people who never heard of Lonergan: they could stumble and mess forward to see that, yes, A does one job, B the next, but they could eventually stumble forward to ask 'What is the root difference of the jobs?' So, they may move, each of them but together, from communal functional collaboration to the self-defining that gives meaning to the words *experience* and *understanding* in Lonergan. In broader terms, functional collaboration, even badly done, will bring the community of disciplines, technologies, arts and hobbies, to ... generalized empirical method. But we edge now towards Chapter 3, with its larger vision, its push for a better attempt at A's job. That nudge is to be given on January 28th.

Meanwhile some are struggling with the task of A that was envisaged: noticing something or other that B should take note of when thinking out the WHAT of each of the past 20 holidays.¹² I see no reason for anyone to rush this bit of **thinking out**. Some are happy with the idea that, O.K., I have found a few parallel texts: well, that is an A start. Some are puzzled on various 'higher levels': is that all there is to functional research? But all of us, at least, are puzzling within some **version** of that question. And now I must definitely call a halt, for there comes the big question of the

¹² Follow up note 11. B does not string together the holidays. Indeed, the advanced among you may note the looseness I allow myself here. Strictly B is digging out not the story of the holidays, but the plans, intended meanings that were brought to the holidays. The storytellers, C, have to wind these meanings, and the lapses from them, into an account of **what is going forward**. Again, the experts will notice the difference from von Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (See *Method in Theology* 185 and then recall "in the style of Burckhardt rather than Ranke" from page 250). The holiday problem fits right in with the **lean-forward** of all the functional specialties. More on this in *Fuse 5*, when I talk of **pragging**, and, of course, more in the third seminar.

rest of the seminar: WHAT **version**? And HOW does any **version** guide the discoveries and suggestions of functional research? There are surprises in store!