

## Aesthetics, Art, Liberty, and the Ultimate

Alexandra Gillis

I remember in my early twenties wondering why music could make me laugh and cry. My grandmother played the piano very beautifully, and from an early age I was drawn to music. I used to lie on the living room floor and listen to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and Khachaturian's *Masquerade Suite*. These seemed to speak to me in a deep way, similar to the way the beauty and intimacy of nature did, with a sort of sacred stillness at my core. So when I was asked about writing something for this issue on art, I spontaneously began with a question about this dimension of the aesthetic and art: does aesthetic and artistic experience evoke the ultimate in everyone, or only in those who are already in that horizon? My beginning with this particular question, several months ago, was with a work that I have always intended to dwell on carefully: Bernard Lonergan's chapter 9 on Art in his *Topics in Education*. In these 1959 lectures on education,<sup>1</sup> Lonergan spoke about the importance of art in our age:

What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable again is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Liberty, the freedom of consciousness ... the sense of wonder that these words evoke in me is where I would like to begin my essay. Perhaps, instead of an 'essay,' I should call it my brief unfinished story of what I have so far found to be helpful in pursuing my questions; the deeper I embrace these questions of aesthetic and artistic meaning, the more they grow.

In the previous volume of the journal, William Zanardi wrote about Lonergan's view of a new political economy and the education of liberty required for that massive

---

<sup>1</sup> Given August 3-14, 1959 and published as Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 10, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993)(hereafter referred to as *Topics*, *CWL* 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Topics*, *CWL* 10, p. 232.

shift in societal organization to become a reality.<sup>3</sup> Here, I hope to stir curiosity about the education of liberty from an aesthetic, artistic, and an ultimate point of view. A continuation of the opening quotation reads,

Normally, we think of freedom as freedom of the will, as something that happens within consciousness. But the freedom of the will is a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness, and that flow is not determined either by environment, external objects, or by the neurobiological demands of the subject. It has its own free component.<sup>4</sup>

When I read that long second sentence, I stopped. What could it really mean that will is a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness? Is it true? How is it true? To find out, I have spent three months trying to move at a snail's pace so that I can dwell empirically in the truth of these words. Could I re-cognize my own freedom of consciousness? What is the *flow* of consciousness of which Lonergan speaks? And how can we re-create our own liberty?

I found that the idea of liberty began to haunt me—what is this quality, capacity of mine, of ours, that we so glibly speak about? The haunting led me to read, accidentally, three earlier chapters in the same book, on the meaning of good. As I muddled along in my thoughts and questions about the good, I wondered just what this had to do with liberty, with art, with the aesthetic, with the ultimate, and yet it all seemed to be holding together in some dark, vague way. Eventually an idea emerged that I found helpful.

In *Insight*, Lonergan introduces you to your own wonder. Instead of wonder, he uses the terms pure, detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know,<sup>5</sup> where each adjective and the desire itself have specific meanings to be found painstakingly and empirically in oneself. In this book, at this time in his life, Lonergan heavily emphasizes the intellectual aspect of the pure desire, the possession within us of a pure desire *to know* (to understand correctly), one that is unrestricted, ever reaching in our cyclic structured dynamism of question and answer for the known unknown beyond us. This desire, this reach of wonder in us, heads us toward and connects us intimately with infinite understanding, with the Divine One who is the infinite object of our endless human questioning. This pure desire to know, our wonder, is the root of our longing for ultimate and complete understanding, truth, goodness, love, purpose.<sup>6</sup>

But what struck me now in my context, my search, for liberty-aesthetic-artistic-ultimate meaning, was the notion that we are not solely intellectual beings. We are much more obviously practical beings with a constant drive and urge to get things done, to *do*,

---

<sup>3</sup> William J. Zanardi, "Functional Specialization and the Education of Liberty," *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* 5 (2010): 37-55.

<sup>4</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 232.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1957), now available as *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3 (Toronto: University Press of Toronto, 1992). See the index under *desire*. Hereafter referred to as *Insight*, CWL 3.

<sup>6</sup> I must assume the reader's familiarity with self-attention and self-appropriation here.

to *be*.<sup>7</sup> I, you, we, have an aspiration that matches the unrestricted desire to know; ideally, we are to be open to all things, to the concrete universe of being. Inside each of us, then, not only is a pure desire to know, wonder, but also what I might call a pure desire to *be*,<sup>8</sup> to live out in actuality the openness of pure desire. Evidence of this pure aspiration, or essential freedom, exists in our persistent questions revolving around our practical ultimate urge: Who am I? What do I want? Who am I to be? What am I to do with my life? What is my purpose?

When I stopped to ponder this notion, it occurred to me that the experience of falling in love perhaps reveals something of what I have tried to intimate. As with the questions posed above, the mood of our pure aspiration can be felt when we fall in love. Not only do we experience a deep sense of mystery about the beloved and a desire to truly understand and know all of him or her, but we also experience a deep wish, desire, to *be* with the beloved, and to be all we can be for the beloved. (Whether this lasts in relationships is another story and, in fact, is a story about the challenge of sustained love, daily seeing the other as mystery, as yet unknown). Shared being, even in the simplest of doings—walks, talks, movies, meals—then becomes filled with a sort of sacred dimension in which we are enlarged, opened, fascinated. We find ourselves open to greater willingness, and so the experience of falling in love mirrors in limited, finite fashion the unrestricted openness of pure desire and aspiration. It is this kind of mood of enlargement toward being that I thought was very important, something that I felt I wanted and needed to dwell on as I edged toward meanings of the aesthetic, art, liberty, the ultimate and the freedom of consciousness.

My thoughts about the enlargement toward being stirred further insight and finally gave meaning to another sentence about art that has haunted me for years. As I dwelled on the kinds of experiences that open us to *becoming* – to be bigger, better, fuller, richer persons, I began to better appreciate “the experiencing subject with [her] capacity for wonder, for awe, for fascination, with [her] openness to adventure, daring, greatness, goodness, majesty.”<sup>9</sup> I realized that in this bare capacity, we are such that we head naturally for greatness and goodness, daring and adventure, risk-taking and majesty. If we are to reach for what is yet beyond us in ability, talent, skill—in our very *being*—we must be daring, we must take risks, we must make ourselves vulnerable so that we can aim for majesty, goodness, greatness. In our everyday living, we ‘desire to be all we can be, to do the best we can do, to reach for the sky, to take on the world’; these common phrases express our inner capacity, our desire for being, for becoming, for ever making ourselves what we are yet to be.

But then I wondered, what does this have to do with my liberty? Each time I act, my decisions are my own. In my deliberating, I am oriented toward truth and goodness—toward the truly good; I am bound normatively to take into account the intelligent and reasonable grounds of my actions. But my reasoning does not necessitate my decision. When I deliberate about a possible course of action, I am driven to know if what I am

---

<sup>7</sup> This is a statement that primarily calls for empirical self-reflection, but there is help in *Insight*, chapter 6.2.5 on the dramatic pattern of experience.

<sup>8</sup> See *Insight*, CWL 3, chapter 18.3.1, the problem of liberation: essential freedom versus effective freedom.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 62. Hereafter referred to as *Method*.

proposing to do is reasonable, good (better or best), truly fitting for the circumstances. Ideally, I consider all I know of the situation in hand and if my proposed plan will (best) meet the needs of the situation. If my cherished bicycle has a flat tire, it is not likely that I will decide to abandon it on the side of the road. Yet regardless of the judgment I reach about such and such a course of action as being good, or best, I do not *have to* decide, to act. So my liberty in these instances is a liberty of will that allows me to decide and act as *I will*, within the context of true goodness. This is what we normally think of as freedom of the will, of “something that happens within consciousness.”<sup>10</sup>

More importantly, though (and here I approach that strange opening quotation of Lonergan’s about the freedom of the will being a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness), I have the possibility of a freedom of will that is more open, that corresponds to my innate wonder, my pure desire to know and be. Let me tackle this slowly; this is an idea that I still eke out. So, when I take my wonder, my pure desire, as the ground of my reach for being *and* becoming, I grasp a capacity in/of me whose nature is openness to God, to the Ultimate, to the Known Unknown and *to possibilities of being not even imagined*. My proper, or normative, orientation of consciousness is to mystery, the Unknown, the yet-to-be in its infinite fullness. So freedom of will is not just my freedom of decision-making, but a freedom of willing my own openness to God, to the fullness of being, not just in an intellectual sense, but actually, in my living and doing: in an openness to, an imagining (or creative fantasizing) about and a willing of what-might-be, embracing the Mystery of what-might-be as what we naturally lean toward in our deepest loneliness.

In a popular phrase, though, what does this look like in me? This is where aesthetic experience enters in, as well as that odd phrase, the flow of consciousness. Regularly in his talk and writing about art and aesthetic experience, Lonergan identifies what he calls a purely experiential pattern.<sup>11</sup> Again, each word in this phrase is carefully defined. I have spent of a lot of time wondering and thinking about this phrase. Some years ago, I did a Master’s thesis revolving around it, yet coming at it again now is fresh and new, exciting, uplifting. For a long time, I had thought of the purely experiential pattern as a pattern of my experiencing that was primarily a response, whether to nature or art of whatever kind. It was allowing experience to be liberated from the demands of intellectual, or practical, or technological, or political, or utilitarian, or philosophical ... activity. When I am in this pattern of experience, the patterns and rhythms of my sensibility are *not instrumentalized*, are not slave to these more usual daily activities, but are free to follow a “pattern that arises out of the subject.”<sup>12</sup>

This time around, however, that statement gave me pause. First I wondered, what kind of pattern of experience arises in me when I am not at my contemplative work of thinking-about-meaning, not writing, not at my practical work of teaching, not having to go to the post office or the grocery store or any of the daily errands or obligations I need to do. What sort of pattern of experience is, for me, *free*? When is my experience, my

---

<sup>10</sup> This phrase is taken from the opening quotation of the essay.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase appears both in *Topics*, *CWL* 10, chapter 9 on art and in *Method*, chapter 3.3 on art. In *Method*, he attributes his definition of art to Susanne Langer, but on analysis it is his own unified and uplifted view of Langer’s meaning. The seeds of the phrase can be found in *Insight*, chapter 6.2.3 on the aesthetic pattern of experience.

<sup>12</sup> *Topics*, *CWL* 10, p. 213.

sensibility, not instrumentalized? My immediate answer to these questions was easy: when I am free (time-wise), I always have and do gravitate to nature: a quiet field nearby where big trees line three sides, leaves rustling gently in wind, the ocean with its rhythmic waves, the mountain in its majesty and its high view of the world. What arises out of me at such times, what has always arisen, is a sacred silent stillness at my core. But what is most important here is not so much *what* arises (although that, too, is vitally important), but that it is *mine*, *my* expansive mood, *my* uplifted being, *my* sense of gifted hope.

What happened next enlarged my meaning (and so me) enormously. I was strolling around that nearby field one fine summer evening when five young African Canadian children, ages about six to fourteen, came to play soccer. One young boy took a shot on his older brother and scored, and danced spontaneously in delight as he sang out, “Did you see *that*?!” It was his spontaneous movement, the little song and dance of delight that struck me. I began to let my thoughts flow in this direction. These children were beautiful: loose, relaxed, laughing, excited, exuberant. They were *free*. Their flow of consciousness was free, exuberant. I suddenly realized that the aesthetic pattern of experience is not simply a *response to*, but something at the core *in me*, *in us*.

Gradually I began to soak up, in my molecules and being, the sense that liberty—as a control over the flow of consciousness—is very intimately connected to pure experiencing. Such experiencing arises out of the *self* (not imposed, not technological, not intellectual, etc.), is free, mine, and, most importantly, is *in correspondence with the operator at work in me*. “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.*”<sup>13</sup> What I appreciated and felt in those children was their liberation of being, their openness to the world, to adventure, to greatness and goodness. The majesty was in them, in their orientation to the fullness of being.

This insight allowed me to recognize that all the art forms, as Philip McShane<sup>14</sup> has long said, can be seen in children at play. There is an undeniable exuberance and free spontaneity in children: an urge to sing, wiggle, jump, climb, dance and make rhythmic movements, run, laugh, tell stories, use imagination, fantasize, recount. Playing house echoes architecture in fantasies of surroundings; playing doctor, nurse, family, heroes, and so on, shadow drama; playing with sounds and words and listening to children tell their stories of events are akin to poetry and narrative; drawing, colouring, painting already are heading for art; clay modelling, building sand castles, forming mud shapes all head for sculpture. The urge to be adventurous, to creatively explore possibilities of being, to be open to the unexpected, to seek greatness and majesty, is a deep desire within.

So I had moved from thinking of the aesthetic pattern of experience as *merely* a response to nature or art, to thinking of it now as an inner exuberance, its deepest root my

---

<sup>13</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 214 (italics mine). For reference to the corresponding operator on the sensitive level, see *Insight*, CWL 3, chapter 17.1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Philip J. McShane, D. Phil., Oxon, is Professor Emeritus of Mount St. Vincent University where he taught philosophy and religion. A web site where his various works can be accessed is: [www.philipmcschane.ca](http://www.philipmcschane.ca).

inner unrestricted desire. The freedom of consciousness I experience in my moments of sacred stillness has its root in my deep desire for being. That root of desire, it seems to me, is reciprocal: it is both from and for the divine, the Ultimate. When I respond to beauty, whether of ocean or trees or mountains or anything else in nature, I am responding to the artistry of God not simply as something sensed, and not simply as something that I see and feel; I am responding in my core to “the beauty, the splendor, the glory, the majesty, the ‘plus’ that is in things and that drops out when you say that the moon is just earth and the clouds are just water.”<sup>15</sup> There is a transformation of my world: these are not just pleasant sounds, sights, tones, etc., but a free flow of experience that responds to and participates in being, in becoming, in potentialities of the universe. “Art is an invitation to participate,” and nature is cosmic art, calling to something that is already within me, to the core-in-me-that-longs-for-it. Nature is the ever-present invitation to participate in the universe’s “dynamic joy and zeal.”<sup>16</sup> And in my pure experiencing of it, I have become “just [myself]: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom.”<sup>17</sup>

Now, I have been mainly dwelling on the aesthetic pattern of experience and not on art itself. But I realized that this inner core of unrestricted desire and its free flow is also ground of the urge to create, a striving to be, to do, that is free. Once again, it is openness to the world, to adventure, to greatness, to goodness,<sup>18</sup> to majesty. It struck me that art, as creatively and intellectually free, is an extension of the play of children, needing now to express and re-present the desire and exuberance of our inner reach for being. In this sense of re-presenting, art is *much* more fully developed ‘play,’ requiring the mastery of specialized techniques (think of reading music, playing an instrument, composing, for instance), as well as tranquil reflection on the very mood of the human reach it is meant to re-present. What the artist objectifies in concrete forms (music, painting, drama, poetry, sculpture, and so on) is this “purely experiential pattern,” or in other words, my, your, our free flow of consciousness in its open wonder and awe and in its reach for possibilities of being—in its desire and striving for adventure, daring, majesty, for realms of the possible. As both participatory *and* creative, then, it struck me that art is primarily an experience and invitation to an *actuated* orientation to openness, daring, adventure, to cherish the sacred wonder at our core: to liberty.

Maybe a practical illustration will bring life to what I am trying to communicate. Two days ago, a friend took me to see a small cob house, surrounded by gardens, built in the middle of the city and used as a tool shed for community gardeners. The little cob house is round, made of clay and various local earthen materials, has a jaunty sod roof and fun-loving window shapes enchantingly placed in unexpected spots. Walking into and around the cob house brought me back to the enchantment and mystery of childhood. My friend had spent two weeks living in a similar, though larger, cob house on a nearby island and told me how she felt *physically* different, able to breathe freely and to feel relaxed in a way that she had never experienced before (cob houses are not only ecologically sound but use all natural and breathable materials). The concrete fantasy and creative artistry of this landscape designer not only expressed his own wonder—and his

---

<sup>15</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> *Insight*, CWL 3, p. 722.

<sup>17</sup> *Method*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 214.

ability to re-create that mood of wonder, adventure and fascination—but invited my own and others' exuberant openness to these adventurous possibilities of being.

Each person's response to such artistic experiences will be different, though. One of the questions that emerged for me in my reflections on the aesthetic was about the broad judgment of value of art in this context (this enters into the far larger territory of the good). I was thinking of a judgment made either about an artistic experience as participant, or about a possible creative course of action as an artist. Is this work of art good? (On the part of an artist, this reflective question and its corresponding judgments of value also involve a vast technical knowledge of the particular art form—in fact, another essay would be required for each of the at least ten art forms to spell out the role of judgment of value in relation to technical artistic creation). It occurred to me that in this context of liberty, in order to judge a work of art, it has to be held up (weighed) against what we know of humanity. Why? Art seeks to present or express the reaching of humanity in its various moods and situations. When the context is this broad reach for being, the proper ground of humanity is the unrestricted desire to know and to be, our wonder and openness to being. In other words, it is my *knowledge* of the core of human reality (how encompassing it is or is not) that should form the basis of my judgment about a work of art.<sup>19</sup> The larger my horizon, the fuller will be my response.

This moved me into two further sets of concerns: the truncated times in which we live, and the notion of integral being. First, integral being, and here it is extremely helpful to have a heuristic of human being, such as McShane's W1.<sup>20</sup> When I participate in and evaluate art, it is not primarily an intellectual sort of experience. "Apprehensions of value occur in a further category of intentional response which greets either the ontic value of a person or the qualitative value of beauty, of understanding, of truth, of noble deeds, of virtuous acts, of great achievements."<sup>21</sup> My intentional response involves *all* of me, my whole person. It is of every physical part, every chemical molecular action, every organic function, all my molecules, nerves, muscles, blood flow and brain functioning. It is of *my whole being*, in my whole biography and in history. My response, your response, in the free flow of consciousness orientated to the fullness of being, is integral. What the heuristic notion does is help me hold the details of this integral-ness together.

My second concern is the truncated times in which we live. When I talk about having knowledge of the core of human being and reality, I am all too aware of the fact that very, very few people in the world have such self-understanding. As a human group in history, we are cut off from the core of us that is our longing for the Ultimate. What, for instance, happens to our childhood sense of mystery, fantasy, adventure, openness? It does not seem ludicrous to suggest there is something about modern living that kills off openness and wonder.<sup>22</sup> Fitting into an increasingly industrial and technological society

---

<sup>19</sup> *Method*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> This image is as follows:  $f(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; q_n)$ . See [www.philipmcshane.ca](http://www.philipmcshane.ca). *Cantower* 24 for what McShane calls metaphysical words, images that help us 'hold together' meaning. This word, or image, "points to the elements of any individual being." In our context, the focus is obviously on human being.

<sup>21</sup> *Method*, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> The word *modern* here refers to a modernity that takes in the Axial Period, which extends from roughly 5000 BC to the present, and into the future. See [www.philipmcshane.ca](http://www.philipmcshane.ca). *Fusionism*

reduces us to cogs in a machine.<sup>23</sup> What work I am able to choose (and consequently how I envision myself in the world, who I want to be), where I wish to travel, what opportunities for leisure are available to me: all are limited by economics and by our human institutions of government, finance, education, business, and culture created for ourselves out of our truncated perspective of who we are as human beings. Humanism now takes precedence in how people view their own humanity, and a trivialization of our inner unrestricted desire, mystery, awe, wonder, and openness follows. Instead of a freedom in the orientation of my flow of consciousness, there is a closing off of my pure unrestricted wonder and active seeking. “Every closing off, blocking, denial of the empirically, intelligently, rationally, freely, responsibly conscious subject is also a closing off, a blocking, of the dominance of the higher aspirations of the human spirit and the human heart.”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, openness to my higher aspiration within the fullness of being plays out, for example, in my openness to the mystery of my decisions in daily life within the constellation of decisions, circumstances, and events of others. These bring me in contact with the people I meet, the things I become interested in, the projects I take on, the possibilities that open up to me. In all of this, there is a working out of destiny, “there is something in the succession of human choices that is outside the range of human choice. ... there cannot be any individual decision that constitutes the situation and the way one situation heads into the next.”<sup>25</sup> This is what I call living in openness to Providence, to how God moves me, us, even though we are free.<sup>26</sup> Drama is an expression of how our destiny plays out, and of the mood of our questioning about it.<sup>27</sup>

So I find myself back at my opening quotation. As weeks turned into months exploring my questions about art and aesthetic experience, I began to feel myself shift into a conviction that art and the aesthetic are enormously significant as illuminating, expressing, presenting and inviting me, us, to be actuated in the proper orientation of our human being—wonder, fascination, awe, openness to the unknown, to mystery, to adventure, daring, greatness, goodness, majesty.

What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable again is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness.

---

8, as well as my own chapter 11, note 29 of *Thinking Woman* (Halifax, NS: Axial Publishing, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 45. Lonergan refers to Karl Jaspers’ conception of the world as a machine.

<sup>24</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 231.

<sup>26</sup> “The hearts of Kings are in the hands of God.” Proverbs 21:1.

<sup>27</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 232.

When my consciousness is free, I am liberated: I am not intellectual, not practical, not utilitarian, and most of all, not confined within a habitually shrunken view of myself as a human being. My rhythms of openness, awe, wonder are emergent, ecstatic. My proper orientation to the universe, to being, is free to emerge, even to dominate. If this sort of liberation was to emerge in society, think how it would affect all my – our – ways of being, intellectual, practical, political, economic. The thought is, or should be, staggering. The basis of liberation is the possibility of criticism:<sup>28</sup> the possibility of becoming more than I am, we are now ... larger, greater, more daring, more adventurous, more open to the Ultimate.

### Addendum

At the beginning of my story, personal account, essay—whatever you want to call it—I asked the question, how can we re-create our own liberty?<sup>29</sup> As I wind to a conclusion here, I begin to realize in a new way just *how* significant art and the aesthetic are in our concrete living. Lonergan spoke these words, but the words are merely a pointing. It is only through my own spiralling up and around the possible meaning of these words, in empirical meditative reflection, that, I have grown now to my own better meaning and appreciation of them. So I can write, somewhat haltingly, that if as a human group we are to re-create our own liberty, we need as a starting point a shared appreciation of the significance of aesthetic and artistic meaning, and of our liberty associated with it. Through aesthetic and artistic experience, each of us is re-connected in an essential way to that sacred central core of wonder-in-us and our normative openness to undreamed-of possibilities of being. I am reaching the conclusion that this truth must become a widespread shared meaning if we hope to re-create our own liberty. Yet *how* can we spread this understanding so that it becomes part of our daily living, especially when it presupposes a rarely developed achievement of empirical self-appropriation?<sup>30</sup>

The brief answer to that question is a global functional collaboration. Those who write for this journal are committed to finding ways to implement Lonergan's view of a future collaborative human science.<sup>31</sup> We are committed to the notion that the eight specialities of functional collaboration will someday operate as an efficient method of moving history, our concrete living, forward in ever-greater probabilities of progress. So as I reflected and worked toward this essay, I wondered what does it, or any of the articles in this volume, have to do with that collaborative effort?

A first answer to that question is, 'not much.' Compared to future imaginings of functional collaboration, what we are doing now is still mostly isolated, individual efforts trying to promote and encourage awareness and interest in self-appropriation and functional collaboration. Yet, I realized there is a possible contribution my article can make to the collaborative effort. It relates to the specialty, Foundations, as well as to the cyclic strategy of functional collaboration itself and the role of the eighth specialty,

---

<sup>28</sup> *Topics*, CWL 10, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> See above, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Insight*, CWL 3, 17.1.2.

<sup>31</sup> I am referring here to Lonergan's discovery of Functional Specialization; see *Method*. The scheme has eight specialties: Research, Interpretation, History, Dialectic, Foundations, Doctrines, Systematics, and Communications.

Communications. First, the specialty Foundations includes adult growth: the ongoing development in understanding (or self-understanding) that makes you a stranger to yourself of yesterday, or last week, or last month.<sup>32</sup> As Foundational specialists, each of us is a base, a Home-base, if you like:

If categories are to be derived, there is needed a base from which they are to be derived. The base ... is the attending, inquiring, reflecting, deliberating subject along with the operations that result from attending, inquiring, reflecting, deliberating, and with the structure within which the operations occur.<sup>33</sup>

Now, I gradually came to realize that one can overlook the *core* of the base—that is, of me and you. And the core of me, of us, is the unrestricted wonder and openness that we are invited to appreciate through art and aesthetic experience. At this stage of history, we attempt, however poorly, to make explicit—to ourselves and others—the base that we are: the acts and operations, the dynamic structure of our consciousness in its intricate patterns and relations, and the universe to which it opens us. But these formulations of ourselves need vitally to include *and emphasize* our sacred core of wonder and openness as the normative orientation of our being.

Second, in my foundational searching I have climbed slowly toward understanding the deep significance of artistic and aesthetic experience. Each question, each lift of insight, is an enlargement of the Homebase that I am, that we are, and that we are moving beyond. I realized that our foundational adult growth can, through silent words, be collaborative: by sharing my climb in this essay, I am sharing pointers that I hope will help others in their foundational climb toward understanding the aesthetic, art, liberty, and the ultimate. Foundationally, we are climbing toward a better shared understanding of our core being, centred in wonder. Beyond that, we are climbing toward a better shared understanding of the need to promote this truth of human being in its implications for our better living. Through the cycling of the eight specialties, we aim at expressing our understanding to ourselves and others in the cycle so that our expressions prompt further questions and further puzzles, and so that we very slowly and patiently climb our way toward better, clearer, more encompassing understanding and expressions with which to begin again, and again, and again ... *But*, the ultimate goal of that cyclic climbing is to enrich concrete living in its entirety, to lift the life on the sidewalks and streets.

Third, Communications in the future will need to find ways to spread a new shared understanding of the significance of aesthetic experience, art, and liberty so that our concrete living can be, ever so slowly, lifted up to the light. When I began working on this essay, I started by listing areas of Lonergan's works I thought would be helpful and wanted to dwell on: in *Insight*, chapter 6 on patterns of experience and especially the aesthetic pattern, chapter 17.1 on metaphysics, mystery, and myth, chapter 18, section 1.2 with its mysterious opening statement that *will is spiritual appetite*, chapter 15 on genetic development, and possibly chapters 19, 20 on God (which have not as yet been part of my exploration); in *Method in Theology*, chapter 3 on meaning and art, chapter 4 on

---

<sup>32</sup> See [www.philipmcschane.ca](http://www.philipmcschane.ca). *Fusionism* 8, note 26.

<sup>33</sup> *Method*, pp. 285-6.

religion, chapter 10 on dialectic, conversion, and horizons; in *Topics in Education*, chapter 9 on Art—and eventually I turned to chapters 2, 3 and 4, on the good, as well.

Now, as I come to an end of my present exploration, I would pick out chapter 17.1 of *Insight*—Metaphysics, Mystery, and Myth—as a guiding inspiration. What is missing from our concrete living is the adequate self-knowledge<sup>34</sup> that reveals me to myself in my core desire for being. As those in collaborative effort climb toward ever fuller self-knowledge, their hard-won meaning can gradually seep gently through Communications to lift the ethos on the sidewalks and streets so that each of us can walk with the other in mystery, as Rilke's solitudes: guarding, binding, and greeting one another.<sup>35</sup> What is terribly significant about artistic and aesthetic meaning is that it invites me and you and each person on the street to know our selves in our deepest core of wonder and openness. It is what speaks to our latent desire for the ultimate and, in so speaking, can help us shift from latent to explicit appreciation of that core desire in us.

Alexandra Gillis has been deeply involved in the work of Bernard Lonergan for twenty-three years. She has written *Thinking Woman* (2006) and is co-author, with John Benton and Philip McShane, of *Introducing Critical Thinking* (2005). She currently works as a secondary school teacher in Vancouver, BC.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Insight*, CWL 3, chapter 17.1.2.

<sup>35</sup> This was the poet Rainer Maria Rilke's notion of love, "that two solitudes protect and border and greet each other." Translations of the German wording vary. It appears in a letter from Rilke to a young poet, Franz Xaver Kappus, May 14, 1904. See Stephen Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 306-07.