

## **Bernard Lonergan on Affirmation of the Existence of God**

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In three parts, this paper seeks 1) to provide a synopsis of Bernard Lonergan's proof for the existence of God as presented in chapter nineteen of *Insight*, 2) to explain how Lonergan later came to critique his approach in *Insight* 19 in light of subsequent philosophical developments, and 3) to assess the ongoing relevance of Lonergan's *Insight* 19 argument given that aforementioned critique.

The issues discussed in this paper are important for a variety of reasons. First, Lonergan's argument for the existence of God may in fact be a sound argument. Second, Lonergan prefaced his argument with the incredibly bold and enticing claim that while arguments for the existence of God are many, *all* such arguments are implicitly included in the general form of his own argument.<sup>1</sup> And third, however one may assess the preceding claim, the second and third parts of this paper will raise fundamental questions regarding the function and existential significance of any philosophical proof for the existence of God, and by doing so will contribute to contemporary discussions concerning the relevance of philosophical theology.

### **Part I: The Argument of *Insight* Chapter 19**

We might begin by contrasting Lonergan's approach to that of Aquinas. Both in the *Summa Theologica* and in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas first posed the question of the existence of God (i.e., *whether* God is) and only subsequently raised further questions concerning the nature of God (i.e., *what* God is). And while each of Aquinas's five ways demonstrated the existence of God merely by reference to some limited aspect of God's being (i.e., God as first mover, as first efficient cause, as necessary being, etc.), Aquinas concluded each demonstration with the logically problematic phrase, "and this everyone understands to be God" or "and this being we call God." That addendum to the conclusion effectively places the conclusion in a referential context more extensive than what can be

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 3, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1992), 695.

supported on the basis of the premises alone. Aquinas was clearly philosophizing within a theological context.

Loneragan's approach to the affirmation of God inverts the order of Aquinas's questions. Consistent with the cognitional theory explicated in *Verbum* and in *Insight*, Lonergan correlates the fundamental questions *quid sit?* and *an sit?* with questions for understanding and judgment respectively. As judgment presupposes understanding, Lonergan raised the question of the existence of God only subsequent to a painstaking development of a "notion of God." This notion of God is not grounded upon any direct understanding of the data of sense, nor upon any immediate intuition into the divine nature, nor upon any presupposition of theological belief, but rather upon "an extrapolation" from metaphysical positions established earlier in *Insight*, positions which are themselves grounded in performatively self-consistent epistemological and cognitional theoretic positions. As it is Lonergan's claim that metaphysical, epistemological, and cognitional theoretic positions are verifiable, the procedure in *Insight*, at least through chapter nineteen, purports to be strictly philosophical. That does not imply however that the *Insight* 19 proof is readily accessible to one who has not worked through the earlier chapters of *Insight*.<sup>2</sup> Lonergan acknowledged that his argument may appear "excessively laborious, complex, and difficult," even to those who have worked through the book. He explains that his "concern has been, not to select the easiest approach . . . not to offer the simplest proof" but rather to produce a philosophically sound argument by which we may rationally "advance from proportionate to transcendent being," i.e., from a knowledge of the real that is proportionate to human cognitional operations of experiencing, understanding, and judging to a rational affirmation of an absolutely transcendent reality which would not be disclosed even by an exhaustive development of classical, statistical, genetic, and dialectical methods.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The task of summarizing, while always a dangerous endeavor, is especially treacherous in the present case. Noting that *Insight* was written from a moving viewpoint, and that chapter nineteen lay near the end of this twenty-chapter book, we should not expect chapter nineteen to constitute a conceptually self-contained unit. In fact the adequate philosophical horizon for assessing the cogency of Lonergan's argument is not entirely supplied even by the whole of chapter nineteen of *Insight*, which itself runs over 50 tersely-written pages. The meaning of terms and relations presupposed in that chapter are drawn from positions established in earlier chapters. Chapter nineteen constitutes "an extrapolation" from metaphysical positions established in chapters fourteen through eighteen. Those prior metaphysical positions are grounded in epistemological positions worked out in chapters eleven through thirteen. And those epistemological positions, in turn, are grounded in the cognitional theory of the first ten chapters. While this may seem one tall and shaky stack of systematic philosophy, Lonergan's claim—and it is well worth taking the effort to assess it for oneself—is that the establishment of the foundational cognitional theoretic positions, their implications for a critical realist epistemology, and the metaphysical ramifications of this epistemology, are all personally verifiable. Insofar as that personal verification may remain forthcoming, the present synopsis of Lonergan's argument may appear less cogent than it would otherwise be.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 705.

## The Heuristic Notion of Being

Lonergan defers the question of whether God exists, to take up the prior question: What is God? Yet that prior question is to be answered only by posing the question: What is being? One who would speak philosophically of the nature of God cannot prescind from metaphysics. Indeed for Lonergan, the indispensability of metaphysics is both methodological and substantive, for he holds that “it is one and the same thing to understand what being is and to understand what God is.”<sup>4</sup>

Mindful however, of the Kantian critique of metaphysics, and congruent with the Heideggerian insistence that we are the beings who pose the question of being, Lonergan broke with the classicist assertion of the primacy of metaphysics by committing himself to what has been called the “anthropological turn.”<sup>5</sup> Adopting a methodological primacy of the subject, Lonergan advanced a metaphysics that was epistemologically grounded in a critical realism and aimed to be fully consistent with verifiable positions regarding objectivity and the natural spontaneities of human experiencing, understanding, and judging. Merely speculative assertions about being are precluded by a procedure that tightly correlates all metaphysical terms and relations to a normative pattern of cognitional operations. Lonergan argues that it is performatively inconsistent for us to speak about being as anything other than the objective of our “detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know.”<sup>6</sup> This desire Lonergan explicates at length in *Insight* as the distinctive characteristic of the human spirit and the normative principle of all intellectual development.

The desire to know is the ground of all human inquiry, and motivates all of our intelligent and rational operations. The desire to know is a desire to correctly understand what is actually the case, to know objectively, to know the real. Just as questioning implicitly anticipates intelligible and verifiable answers, so too our detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know is oriented toward being as its object, and is itself a nascent anticipation of being. It is only by inquiry and by the ensuing exercise of our cognitional operations that we gain limited knowledge of particular beings or domains of being. Being is not “already out there real now” to be grasped sensorially, experientially, or intuitively, but is always mediated by understanding and judgment.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 680.

<sup>5</sup> In 1972 Lonergan wrote that the authoring of *Insight* “enabled me to achieve in myself what since has been called *Die anthropologische Wende*. Without the explicit formulations that later were possible, metaphysics had ceased for me to be what Fr. Coreth named the *Gesamt- und Grundwissenschaft*. The empirical sciences were allowed to work out their basic terms and relations apart from any consideration of metaphysics. The basic inquiry was cognitional theory and, while I still spoke in terms of a faculty psychology, in reality I had moved out of its influence and was conducting an intentionality analysis.” Bernard Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 276-7.

<sup>6</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 665.

As the desire to know is normatively oriented to being, being is correlatively defined in a heuristic manner as “whatever is to be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably.”<sup>7</sup> A heuristic definition of being remains conceptually indeterminate. It specifies not what is known, but rather how what is unknown would come to be known (i.e., through intelligent acts of understanding and reasonable acts of judgment). It is for this reason that Lonergan terms the heuristic definition of being a “*notion* of being,” in distinction from a fully determinate “*idea* of being.” So we may pose the question of the meaning of being. We may reasonably affirm a heuristic *notion* of being. To the extent that we actually come to attain knowledge *eo ipso* we also come to know being, albeit partially and incompletely. But Lonergan acknowledges that the question „what is being?“ is not a question that we ever answer in an exhaustive and determinate fashion. Human achievement is always limited. Human acts of understanding, conceiving, and affirming being *de facto* remain incomplete. For us, there always remain further relevant questions. Even collectively we have not attained the “*idea* of being.” We are not God.

### The Idea of Being

As the heuristic notion of being is an anticipation of fulfillment however, it is possible to inquire in what that fulfillment would consist, i.e., to ask what a completely determinate “*idea* of being” would be. Yet the posing of this question does not become the occasion to depart from a merely heuristic procedure, or to transgress the bounds of human finitude. All we can assert here is that “knowledge of what being is cannot be had in anything less than an act of understanding everything about everything.”<sup>8</sup> Only an *unrestricted* act of understanding would understand the idea of being. Such an act, if it exists (and this remains an open question), “leaves nothing to be understood, no further questions to be asked.”<sup>9</sup> It “grasps everything about everything.”<sup>10</sup>

Lonergan next attempts to think out what an unrestricted act of understanding would entail. Congruent with Aristotle’s affirmation of a first mover as *noêsis noêseôs*, he argues that if there were an unrestricted act of understanding, that act would not lack an understanding of itself.<sup>11</sup> It would be intelligible, not merely in the manner that conceptual contents are intelligible, but also, and more significantly, in the manner that acts of understanding are intelligible. In the act of understanding there occurs a conscious identity of knower and known, and it is this act that is the “intelligible ground or root or

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 666.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 667.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 668.

<sup>11</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on Insight*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 5, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1990), 238.

key” without which there could be no conceptual contents.<sup>12</sup> It follows that the idea of being is not merely “the content of an unrestricted act of understanding” but is also identical with the unrestricted act itself.<sup>13</sup> The idea of being, then, is not merely *intelligible* but is also *intelligent*. It is the intelligence of the unrestricted act that is primary. Precisely because “the unrestricted act understands itself, it thereby also understands everything else.”<sup>14</sup> Although the unrestricted act is itself “one, immaterial, nontemporal, and nonspatial,” that which it understands “is many and includes the material, the temporal, and the spatial.”<sup>15</sup>

By raising the question of the meaning of being, and by attempting to work out an answer that would be fully consistent with the cognitional theoretic and epistemological positions established and appropriated in the earlier chapters of *Insight*, we are “led to the conclusion that the idea of being would be the content of an unrestricted act of understanding that primarily understood itself and consequently grasped every other intelligibility.”<sup>16</sup> This concept of an unrestricted act of understanding is laden with significant implications, and as these are worked out “it becomes manifest that it is one and the same thing to understand what being is and to understand what God is.”<sup>17</sup>

In a remarkable sequence of twenty-six brief arguments, Lonergan explicates how an unrestricted act of understanding can be shown to possess the divine attributes that classical theism has traditionally predicated of God.<sup>18</sup> Tersely summarized, an unrestricted act of understanding would understand itself; would be the primary truth; would be spiritual; would be without defect or lack or imperfection; would be the primary good; would perfectly understand and affirm and love itself; would be self-explanatory, unconditioned, necessary, one, simple, timeless, eternal; would be the source of all secondary intelligibility; would be an omnipotent efficient cause and an omniscient exemplary cause; would be free; would understand and affirm and will contingent beings; would be creator and conserver; would be the first agent of every event, development, and emergence; would be “the ultimate final cause of any universe, the ground of its value, and the ultimate objective of all finalistic striving;”<sup>19</sup> and not least, would be personal.

Such an enumeration of attributes may seem presumptuous. And indeed it is rather remarkable that beginning with the seemingly impersonal question „what is being?“ Lonergan is able to derive a litany of divine attributes, culminating in the affirmation of a personal God. Yet Lonergan’s position in *Insight* is not that we enjoy some unmediated experience or intellectual intuition

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<sup>12</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 670.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 667.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 671.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 680.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 680-92.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 687.

into the divine nature. Rather, his methodological claim is that he is merely making rational inferences grounded upon his own understanding of what it means to understand and upon the logical entailments of the concept of an unrestricted act of understanding.

When we grasp what God is, our grasp is not an unrestricted act of understanding but a restricted understanding that extrapolates from itself to an unrestricted act and by asking ever further questions arrives at a list of attributes of the unrestricted act. Accordingly, what is grasped is not the unrestricted act but the extrapolation that proceeds from the properties of a restricted act to the properties of the unrestricted act.<sup>20</sup>

As unparsimonious as Lonergan's notion of God may appear in the contexts of modern skepticism, Kantian critique, or postmodern suspicion, it is simply inaccurate to assume that because Lonergan is making substantive metaphysical assertions he must be therefore be engaged in some form of what Kant termed transcendental illusion. Lonergan is not usurping some illegitimate metaphysical viewpoint, but rather, like Aquinas, is methodologically proceeding both by way of negation and by analogical predication. Fully aware that all human acts of understanding *are* restricted in a variety of ways, Lonergan is proceeding by negation, for he is asking the question: What, in general, would it mean for an act of understanding *not* to be restricted? And, like Aquinas, Lonergan employs analogical predication, but the analog upon which he focuses happens to be the rather complex phenomenon of the act of understanding. "God is the unrestricted act of understanding, the eternal rapture glimpsed in every Archimedean cry of „Eureka.“<sup>21</sup>

### **Affirmation of the Existence of God**

It is also significant to note that one attribute not enumerated in Lonergan's notion of God is the perfection of existence. Existence is not included precisely because Lonergan rejects the ontological argument, in all of its forms.<sup>22</sup> As understanding and judgment are two distinct and sequentially related operations, and require the asking and answering of two fundamentally different types of questions, so too the question of the existence of God, which asks *whether* God is, can legitimately be raised only after explicating a notion of God, only after specifying in some manner, *what* God is. While the ontological argument conflates understanding and judgment, Lonergan's sequencing of questions distinguishes these two levels of intentionality and parallels the relation of operations within cognitional structure. As any particular understanding may or may not be relevant to what is actually the case, and so requires a further act of judgment which affirms the relevance of understanding only on the basis of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 693.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 706.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 692-95.

grasping a “virtually unconditioned,” i.e., of rationally apprehending that sufficient conditions have in fact been fulfilled, so too the notion of God merely specifies an understanding that is not self-verifying but requires a further act of rational affirmation. And so, it is only in section ten of chapter nineteen of *Insight*, a section entitled “The Affirmation of God,” that Lonergan explicitly raises the question for judgment: Is God more than merely an object of thought? Is God real? Is God an object of reasonable affirmation? Does God exist?<sup>23</sup>

Lonergan is fully cognizant of the Kantian critique of metaphysics. But contrary to Kant, Lonergan holds that it is by grasping the virtually unconditioned in judgment, and not by sense intuition (*Anschauung*), that we come to affirm the existence of the real. Hence he clarifies that “what has to be added to mere conception [i.e., to the notion of God] is, not an experience of God, but a grasp of the unconditioned.”<sup>24</sup> This grasp of the unconditioned is not a grasp of the *formally* unconditioned nature of God as an unrestricted act of understanding (for one would have to *be* God to grasp that), but rather merely “the *virtually* unconditioned that consists in inferring God’s existence from premises that are true. . . . The existence of God, then, is known as the conclusion to an argument.”<sup>25</sup>

Although the philosophical context in which Lonergan’s argument for the existence of God is situated is extensive, and although the appropriation of that context remains a considerable task, Lonergan’s main argument may be stated in simple syllogistic form: “If the real is completely intelligible, God exists. But the real is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists.”<sup>26</sup> The major and minor premises of the argument are each explicated in turn by two ancillary arguments.

The minor premise of the main argument rests on the following ancillary argument: Being is completely intelligible. The real is being. Therefore the real is completely intelligible.<sup>27</sup> Considering first the major premise, being is completely intelligible because being has been defined heuristically as the objective of the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. As that desire proceeds normatively only by intelligent inquiry and critical reflection, being is whatever is to be known by correct understanding. As that desire is unrestricted, being is whatever would be known if *every* intelligent question were answered correctly.

Considering the minor premise, the real is being because the meaning of the term „real“ is to be correlated to cognitional acts in precisely the same manner as the term „being.“ As by being is meant all that is to be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation, so too by the real is meant all that is both an object of thought and of rational affirmation. To assert that the real is anything other than being, i.e., anything other than what is known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation, is to assert a counterposition, i.e., to adopt an

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 692.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 695.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

epistemological stance that performatively contradicts itself in its very assertion.<sup>28</sup> From these two premises it follows that the real is completely intelligible, and this conclusion serves as the minor premise of the main argument.

The major premise of the main argument is the conclusion of a second ancillary argument: “If the real is completely intelligible, then complete intelligibility exists. If complete intelligibility exists, the idea of being exists. If the idea of being exists, then God exists. Therefore, if the real is completely intelligible, God exists.”<sup>29</sup>

If the real is completely intelligible, then complete intelligibility *exists*. Although this may seem a logically analytic statement, Lonergan seeks to clarify that complete intelligibility entails a referent which is not merely ideational, but is existential as well. Again he attempts to ground the meaning of this premise through reference to cognitional operation. “To affirm the complete intelligibility of the real is to affirm the complete intelligibility of all that is to be affirmed.”<sup>30</sup> But what is to be affirmed is not limited merely to that which is understood, for by acts of judgment we also affirm existence. Hence any affirmation of the complete intelligibility of the real would also necessarily include an affirmation of the actual existence of complete intelligibility.

The second premise, “if complete intelligibility *exists*, the idea of being *exists*” is established on the basis of an analysis of the limitations of three distinct types of intelligibility.

Material intelligibility is that which is formally constitutive of the objects studied by the natural sciences. But material intelligibility cannot be completely intelligible because verification of material intelligibility in scientific judgments depends upon grasping the sufficiency of evidence, and scientific evidence obtains not necessarily, but rather merely as a matter of fact. But to suppose the ultimacy of mere matters of fact is to gainsay the existence of complete intelligibility because mere matters of fact, as such, are not intelligible.

As our judgments rest on a grasp of the virtually unconditioned, so every proportionate being in its every aspect is a virtually unconditioned. As a matter of fact, it is, and so it is unconditioned. But it is unconditioned, not formally in the sense that it has no conditions whatever, but only virtually in the sense that its conditions happen to be fulfilled. To regard that happening as ultimate is to affirm a mere matter of fact without any explanation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 413, 523-24, 545-46; Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 245-6.

<sup>29</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 696.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 676.

Material intelligibility, in other words, is incomplete precisely insofar as it is contingent.<sup>32</sup>

Abstract intelligibility is that inherent “in concepts of unities, laws, ideal frequencies, genetic operators, dialectical tensions and conflicts.”<sup>33</sup> Concepts, however, are not self-subsistent entities, but rather are expressions of acts of understanding. It follows that all abstract intelligibility is incomplete because it can arise only in occurrences of acts of understanding. Abstract intelligibility “arises only in the self-expression of spiritual intelligibility,” i.e., of an intelligibility which is identical with an act of understanding.

Spiritual intelligibility, in turn, is incomplete *de facto* as long as there remain further intelligent questions to be asked. “It follows that the only possibility of complete intelligibility lies in a spiritual intelligibility that cannot inquire because it understands everything about everything. And such unrestricted understanding is the idea of being.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, if complete intelligibility exists, the idea of being exists.

Finally, if the idea of being exist, God exists. The idea of being, we recall, is the content of an unrestricted act of understanding. The idea of being includes a primary component which is identical with the unrestricted act itself. But in the discussion of the idea of being and its subsequent expansion into a notion of God, it has already been shown that the primary component of the idea of being “possess all the attributes of God.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, if the idea of being exists, God exists.

From this second ancillary argument as a whole follows the major premise of the main argument: If the real is completely intelligible, God exists. Combined with the minor of the main argument one may deduce the conclusion, God exists, by *modus ponens*.

## **Part II: The Later Lonergan’s Critique of *Insight 19***

In the fall of 1972, following the publication of *Method in Theology*, Lonergan was invited to give a series of lectures at Gonzaga University (later published as *Philosophy of God and Theology*) in which he explored the relation of philosophy of God to systematic theology. In those lectures Lonergan was sharply critical of the approach he had adopted in chapter nineteen of *Insight*. His critique is compactly articulated in the following passage:

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<sup>32</sup> “Material intelligibility necessarily is incomplete, for it is contingent in its existence and in its occurrences, in its genera and species, in its classical and statistical laws, in its genetic operators and the actual course of its emergent probability; moreover, it includes a merely empirical residue of individuality, noncountable infinities, particular places and times, and for systematic knowledge a non-systematic divergence.” *Ibid.*, 696-7. For a more detailed discussion of Lonergan’s causal argument from the contingency of proportionate being, see also *ibid.*, 674-680.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

The trouble with chapter nineteen in *Insight* was that it did not depart from the traditional line. It treated God's existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion. It made no effort to deal with the subject's religious horizon. It failed to acknowledge that the traditional viewpoint made sense only if one accepted first principles on the ground that they were intrinsically necessary and if one added the assumption that there is one right culture so that differences in subjectivity are irrelevant.<sup>36</sup>

While Lonergan never repudiated the logical soundness of his *Insight* 19 argument, he did acknowledge various ways that particular argument seemed incongruent with his new understanding of theological method, with his post-*Insight* philosophical developments, and even with the method of self-appropriation he had advanced within *Insight* itself. Although in *Insight* Lonergan attempted to make a clean break from the static and ahistorical world-view he would later come to critique under the rubric of "classicism," the scholastic manner he employed to introduce the religious dimension in that work leaves one with the impression that the break had been less than clean. Chapter nineteen's appeal to logic, its objectivist intent, and its inadequate appreciation of historicity, cultural pluralism, and the significance of differences in the existential and religious horizons of subjects all suggest that quasi-classicist assumptions permeate that chapter.

In light of Lonergan's post-*Insight* developments, this section of my paper will address "the trouble with chapter nineteen" by elucidating 1) the transition from logic to method; 2) the inadequacy of objectivism; 3) the incompleteness of *Insight's* intellectualist anthropology; and 4) the horizontal significance of religious experience.

### **Logic Resituated in the Context of Method**

As a methodologist who sought to illuminate the exigencies of theology in the modern context, Lonergan was emphatic that a dynamic theology, capable of ongoing development, must be guided by something more than the ideal of deductivist logic. Hence in several of his later writings he clarified the significance of a transition from logical to methodical controls of meaning by explicating "a contrast between a rigid logical ideal alone fit to house eternal truths in a permanent synthesis and, on the other hand, the concrete, ongoing, cumulative process guided by a method."<sup>37</sup>

Logic seeks to promote the clarity of terms, the coherence of propositions, the rigor of arguments. As salutary as these ends are, deductivist logic yields merely a static viewpoint, a conceptual consolidation of present achievement. Logic as such does not discover anything new, but merely clarifies what has already been settled. "Defined terms are abstract and abstractions are

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974),

<sup>37</sup> Lonergan, "Philosophy and Theology," in *Second Collection*, 202.

immobile. Presuppositions and implications, if rigorous, cannot shift.”<sup>38</sup> Conclusions are already implicit in premises.

The possibility of reflection upon the transition from logic to method was historically occasioned by the modern empirical sciences breaking from the “procrustean bed” of logically supervening Aristotelian metaphysical categories to establish autonomous methods of their own.<sup>39</sup> Modern scientific method certainly incorporates logical operations, but it does not rely upon such operations alone. Nor does modern science rely primarily upon any law, or any set of laws, that it has already discovered. Rather, that upon which modern science primarily relies is its own empirical method. Likewise, modern scholarship does not rely primarily upon established interpretations of meaning, but rather upon methods of scholarship that may demand, in the presence of new evidence, radical revision of any previously established interpretation.

Lonergan defines method generally as “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”<sup>40</sup> In differentiating method from logic it is significant to note that methods are concerned with *operations*, i.e., with the attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible acts of conscious and intentional subjects, whereas logic *per se* is concerned with conceptual contents, i.e., with the clear, coherent, rigorous expression of terms, propositions, and arguments. As questioning intends understanding, so too the operations constitutive of a method are related to one another such that one operation intelligently leads to the next. (In the empirical sciences, for example, formulating a hypothesis is followed by thinking out implications of that hypothesis, which in turn is followed by devising experiments to determine whether or not those implications actually obtain.) Internally related in such ways, the set of operations constitutive of a method forms a pattern. Methodical patterns of operations are normative, not because they offer “a set of recipes that can be observed by a blockhead yet lead infallibly to astounding discoveries” but rather because they specify discipline-specific exigencies of the transcendental precepts, i.e., what it means in any particular field to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.<sup>41</sup> Because methods are normative they render discoveries more probable and yield “results” i.e., understandings rationally verified on the basis of evidence. Because methods are ongoing, and methodical operations are “recurrent,” i.e., cyclically repeated as new data becomes available and/or new questions are raised, the results obtained by method will tend to be “cumulative and progressive.” In summary, while logic attempts to render current achievement clear, coherent, and rigorous, method sets the conditions for ongoing discovery, yet without impeding future progress by holding up any particular discovery as sacrosanct. Current achievement remains systematically open to the possibility of revision.

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<sup>38</sup> Lonergan, “The Future of Thomism” in *ibid.*, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Religious Knowledge,” in *A Third Collection: Papers By Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, (Mahwah, N.J., Paulist Press, 1985), 139.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 48.

The transition from logic to method by no means calls for the neglect of logic, but rather for logical operations to functionally complement other operations by becoming recurrent within a methodological context. “Human knowledge can be constantly advancing, and the function of logic is to hasten that advance by revealing clearly, coherently, and rigorously the deficiencies of current achievement.”<sup>42</sup> But it is method as a whole, and not simply logic *per se*, that raises new questions and effectively drives discovery. It is method that moves beyond the logically problematic system of today to the relatively more clear, coherent, rigorous system of tomorrow. Only as situated within the wider context of method does logic take on the dynamism of method itself, and find its proper significance. Re-situated in a methodological context, logic no longer serves the classicist ideal of establishing a stable conceptual system that purports to remain permanent for all time. That ideal, quite bluntly, is merely a “mistaken notion of system.”<sup>43</sup> It is a form of ahistoricism and, as such, merely generates illusion.

Like the mortician, the logician achieves a steady state only temporarily. The mortician prevents not the ultimate but only the immediate decomposition of the corpse. In similar fashion the logician brings about, not the clarity, the coherence, and the rigor that will last forever, but only the clarity, the coherence, and the rigor that will bring to light the inadequacy of current views and thereby give rise to the discovery of a more adequate position.<sup>44</sup>

### **“A New Type of Foundation:” From Objectivism to Conversion**

The horizons of logic and method also differ in their respective notions of objectivity. Insofar as logic is separated from its proper context in method, “objectivity is apt to be conceived as the fruit of immediate experience, of self-evident and necessary truths, and of rigorous inferences.”<sup>45</sup> As such, objectivity is regarded as something utterly impersonal, and “truth as so objective as to get along without minds.”<sup>46</sup> When logic comes to be situated within the context of method however, adequate intentionality analysis discloses precisely how “objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity, of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.”<sup>47</sup>

This difference regarding what constitutes objectivity generates two fundamentally different notions of the philosophy of God. The classicist horizon, in which theory is controlled merely by logic, “considers philosophy in general

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48-9.

<sup>46</sup> Lonergan, “The Subject,” in *Second Collection*, 71-2. See also Lonergan’s discussion of “The Neglected Subject” in his article “The Subject,” in *ibid.*, 69-73.

<sup>47</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 49.

and the philosophy of God in particular to be so objective that it is independent of the mind that thinks it” and so it finds little need for philosophy of God to concern itself with the philosophic subject.<sup>48</sup> But when method is primary, then it is recognized that objectivity cannot be attained except as the fruit of authentic subjectivity and that consequently an adequate philosophy of God cannot prescind from subjectivity.

In his article “Natural Knowledge of God,” Lonergan remarked that while Vatican I had asserted that it was *possible* for the natural light of human reason to demonstrate the existence of God, it had failed to enter adequately into a discussion of whether or not that possibility had actually ever been fulfilled, or ever would be. That failure to move beyond the level of abstract possibility and to raise the *quaestio facti* (which would have involved addressing the subjective conditions under which philosophy concretely occurs) renders problematic the relevance of that doctrine. In Lonergan’s words, that particular doctrine “springs from what seems to be an excessive objectivism, an objectivism that just leaves subjects out of account.”<sup>49</sup> We may note however, that Lonergan levels a quite similar criticism at his own philosophy of God in *Insight*. Chapter nineteen “treated God’s existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion. It made no effort to deal with the subject’s religious horizon.”<sup>50</sup>

Insofar as the classicist horizon dominated by logic is found inadequate, the limitations of objectivism also become apparent, and there can be recognized the need for another transition, paralleling the transition from logic to method, a transition from objectivism to conversion. If objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity, and authentic subjectivity is inherently dependent upon the presence or absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, then it follows that a concern for objectivity requires a concomitant concern for conversion.

If one considers logical proof to be basic, one wants an objectivity that is independent of the concrete existing subject. But while objectivity reaches what is independent of the concrete existing subject, objectivity itself is not reached by what is independent of the concrete existing subject. On the contrary, objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the fundamental forms of self-transcendence are intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. To attempt to ensure objectivity apart from self-transcendence only generates illusions.<sup>51</sup>

The transition from objectivism to conversion makes possible an entirely new foundation for philosophy and theology—a foundation resting not directly upon propositions but rather upon converted subjects who originate propositions.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>49</sup> Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *Second Collection*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 338.

A normative structure that was deductivist has become empirical. A conceptual apparatus that at times clung pathetically to the past is yielding place to historicist, personalist, phenomenological, and existential notions. I have urged that so great a transformation needs a renewed foundation, and that the needed renewal is the introduction of a new type of foundation. It is to consist not in objective statements, but in subjective reality. . . . Behind all statements is the stating subject. What is normative and foundational for subjects stating theology is to be found . .

. in reflection on conversion, where conversion is taken as an ongoing process, concrete and dynamic, personal, communal, and historical.<sup>52</sup>

Our discussion of the transitions Lonergan sought to clarify and advance, from logic to method, and from objectivism to conversion, highlight what Lonergan regarded as perhaps the central fault with the proof of chapter nineteen. Quite simply: “Proof is never the fundamental thing.”<sup>53</sup>

Proof in any serious meaning of the term presupposes the erection of a system, in which all terms and relations have an exact meaning, and all procedures from some propositions to others are rigorous. But the system itself, in turn, has its presuppositions. It presupposes a horizon, a world-view, a differentiation of consciousness that has unfolded under the conditions and circumstances of a particular culture and a particular historical development. Now this presupposition of horizon is not a logical presupposition from which conclusions are drawn. On the contrary, it is part of the subject’s equipment if he is to understand the meaning of the terms, to grasp the validity of the arguments, to value the goal of the investigation.<sup>54</sup>

Proofs, rational arguments, logical demonstrations always presuppose some historically-conditioned horizon in which they take on meaning and value. As the absence of a suitable horizon renders the proof, argument, or demonstration incomprehensible and/or pointless, there is an important sense in which the underlying horizon, and not the proof itself, must be acknowledged as what is foundational. “Proof always presupposes premises, and it presupposes premises accurately formulated within a horizon. [But] you can never prove a horizon.”<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, the philosopher who generally disregards existential and cultural horizons, or who takes some particular horizon for granted, is simply engaged in an act of absentmindedness. This is precisely the kind of abstract philosophizing that Søren Kierkegaard so effectively derided under the rubric of “speculative thinking.” To some extent Lonergan may have come to recognize a kind of Kierkegaardian irony in his *Insight* 19 proof. The main intent of his book

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<sup>52</sup>Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context,” in *Second Collection*, 67.

<sup>53</sup>Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 41.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 41.

*Insight* was for the reader to come to understand and affirm himself or herself as an originating source of normative cognitional operations. No less than the writings of Kierkegaard, *Insight* sought to foster self-knowledge precisely by illuminating foundational horizontal issues which had previously been ignored. The book masterfully lays forth the ramifications of a “generalized empirical method” that has the profoundest range of applicability. Yet Lonergan himself came to acknowledge that the proof of chapter nineteen seemed to cover over his foremost concern for the self-discovery of the subject, seemed to subvert the transition from logic to method, seemed so intent upon reaching an objective conclusion that it failed to duly emphasize the horizontal conditions necessary for any real assent to that conclusion. In short, *Insight* 19 seemed incongruent with the rest of the book.

### **The Incompleteness of *Insight’s* Intellectualist Anthropology**

We have been discussing Lonergan’s critique of the *Insight* 19 argument as rooted in subsequent developments which emphasized a transition from logic to method and clarified the inadequacy of objectivism. To these we now also add Lonergan’s recognition of the incompleteness of *Insight’s* intellectualist anthropology. Although *Insight* had thoroughly broken with the counterposition of conceptualism, the book as a whole can be fairly characterized as advancing an anthropology which remained somewhat intellectualist in scope. Relative to positions Lonergan developed during the 1960’s and consolidated in *Method in Theology*, *Insight* could be assessed in retrospect as not having adequately grasped the distinctive exigencies of the ethical and religious dimensions of human existence. *Insight* sought to advance the self-appropriation of the reader precisely as a cognitional subject. Its cognitional theory asks: What cognitional operations do I perform? Its epistemology asks: Why can I be said to be knowing when I perform these operations? Its metaphysics asks: What do I know when I perform these operations? Chapter eighteen does add an ethics to the metaphysics, but ethical normativity is worked out there in terms of a demand for consistency between knowing and doing. And chapter nineteen is explicated as an extrapolation of metaphysics, from proportionate to transcendent being.

Subsequent to *Insight*, Lonergan worked out a “fourth level” of conscious intentionality, constituted by operations of deliberating, evaluating, and deciding. Such operations are functionally related to properly cognitional operations, but are not reducible to these. This fuller elucidation of conscious intentionality disclosed the existential subject far more adequately than had been the case in *Insight*. It broadened the range for self-appropriation, a process in which “as we move from level to level, it is a fuller self of which we are aware.”<sup>56</sup> This fuller, properly existential self respects the integrity of its own cognitional operations, but also situates its cognitional activity within a wider ethical or ethico-religious context. By deliberation, evaluation, and decision, one

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<sup>56</sup>Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 9.

chooses not only what one will make of one's world, but also what one will make of oneself.

Questions for deliberation sublate the previous three levels. They are concerned with the good. They end the one-sidedness of purely cognitional endeavor to restore the integration of sense and conation, thought and feeling. They do not merely ask about a distinction between satisfaction and value but also assume the existential viewpoint that asks me whether I am ready, whether I am determined, to sacrifice satisfactions for the sake of values. Having put the question of moral authenticity, they reward acceptance with a good conscience and they sanction rejection with an uneasy conscience. Finally, they push the requirement of authenticity to the sticking point: good decisions must be complemented by good conduct and good actions; and failure in this respect is just the inner essence of hypocrisy.<sup>57</sup>

This fuller account of self-appropriation does not place the existential subject into opposition with the subject-as-knower but rather reveals the existential subject as a higher integration of the subject-as-knower. "The fourth level of intentional consciousness—the level of deliberation, evaluation, decision, action—sublates the prior levels of experiencing, understanding, judging. It goes beyond them, sets up a new principle and type of operation, directs them to a new goal but, so far from dwarfing them, preserves them and brings them to a far fuller fruition."<sup>58</sup>

In light of this expanded anthropology, the merely cognitional subject, i.e., the intellectualist subject of *Insight*, can only be regarded as something of an abstraction. In actuality, existential operations specify and transform the conditions under which cognitional subjects concretely operate. Cognitional subjectivity is motivated, directed, and recontextualized by the ethical and religious dimensions of human existence. This was not adequately acknowledged in *Insight*. By tending to assume that cognitional subjectivity is what is definitive, chapter nineteen presupposes an intellectualist anthropology which is not so much wrong, as it is incomplete—or rather, is wrong insofar as it remains incomplete.

Loneran's emerging appreciation for the significance of existential subjectivity was accompanied by an even firmer appreciation for the significance of religious experience. In his explication of the methods and canons of modern empirical science, Lonergan had certainly emphasized the importance of experiencing the data of sense. And his own generalized empirical method was possible only on the basis of experiencing the data of consciousness. Yet the proof of *Insight* 19 was not to depend upon religious experience. Decisively breaking with Kant's latent empiricist criterion of the real, Lonergan insisted that

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<sup>57</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon," *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12/2 (1994): 130.

<sup>58</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 316.

“what has to be added to mere conception is, not an experience of God, but a grasp of the unconditioned.”<sup>59</sup> The existence of God would be affirmed neither on the basis of sense, nor intuition, nor any appeal to immediacy, but rather by an act of judgment mediated by a rational argument. Lonergan later came to identify this neglect of religious experience as “the main incongruity” between chapter nineteen and the rest of *Insight*: “While my cognitional theory was based on a long and methodical appeal to experience, in contrast my account of God’s existence and attributes made no appeal to religious experience. . .”<sup>60</sup>

By the time *Method in Theology* was published however, Lonergan had come to attribute a fundamental significance to religious experience. He thematized religious experience in terms of the gift God’s love, and the religiously converted subject as one whose living is radically transformed by a free response to that gift.

That love is not this or that act of loving but a radical being-in-love, a first principle of all one’s thoughts and words and deeds and omissions, a principle that keeps us out of sin, that moves us to prayer and to penance, that can become the ever so quiet yet passionate center of all our living. .

. . Such unconditional being-in-love actuates to the full the dynamic potentiality of the human spirit with its unrestricted reach and, as a full actuation, it is fulfillment, deep-set peace, the peace the world cannot give, abiding joy, the joy that remains despite humiliation and failure and privation and pain.<sup>61</sup>

Being in love is transformative because it is a conscious state that establishes the conditions under which the fourth level of conscious intentionality is concretely operative. The state of being-in-love affects one’s deliberations, one’s judgments of value, one’s decisions, one’s free and responsible living. Being in love facilitates commitment to others and to genuine self-actualization. “It becomes the immanent and effective first principle. From it flow one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s discernment of values, one’s day-to-day decisions and deeds.”<sup>62</sup> One who has fallen in love “apprehends differently, values differently, and relates differently because he [or she] has become different.”<sup>63</sup> As occupying the ground and root of the highest level of intentional consciousness, the gift of God’s love “takes over the peak of the soul, the *apex anima*.”<sup>64</sup> This divine occupation neither diminishes human freedom, nor

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<sup>59</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 695.

<sup>60</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *Second Collection*, 129. While Lonergan explicated religious experience in a specifically Christian context, often by referencing Romans 5:5, in which St. Paul speaks of “the love of God poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given to us,”

Lonergan also proposed that the dynamic state of being in love in an unrestricted manner is a basic phenomenon that underlies and unifies all major world religions. See Lonergan, *Method*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Lonergan, “Religious Experience” in *Third Collection*, 123.

<sup>63</sup> Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context,” in *Second Collection*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 107.

obviates human reason, but simply cultivates the affective ground in which the fulfillment of human cognitional and moral capacities *de facto* will become more probable.

Just as unrestricted questioning is our *capacity* for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the proper *fulfillment* of that capacity. That fulfillment is not the product of our knowledge and choice. On the contrary, it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on and it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing.<sup>65</sup>

Religious conversion (understood as an ongoing, dynamic, unrestricted state of being-in-love with God) establishes a most basic horizon. This horizon functions as an existential (although not a propositional) first principle. It motivates, purifies, and illuminates—always in cooperative tension with the conscious subject—all of the subject’s intentional operations. The fundamental importance of moral and religious conversion however, was not adequately acknowledged in *Insight*. Although that work did magnificently explicate *intellectual* conversion, its failure to illuminate the horizontal significance of existential choosing and religious loving allowed the latter chapters of that book to take on quasi-classicist overtones. As an unfortunate consequence, the less acute reader of *Insight* could be left with the mistaken impression that logical proof, rather than conversion, is what is most basic and fundamental. As Lonergan himself later stated the matter: “One might claim that *Insight* leaves room for moral and religious conversion, but one is less likely to assert that the room is very well furnished.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Most Basic: The Proof or the Gift?**

I have articulated Lonergan’s general claim that rational argumentation always occurs in the context of some concrete horizon of meaning and value, and that this fact calls for an understanding and appreciation of a sense in which that underlying horizon is more basic than argumentation itself. I then considered the incompleteness of Lonergan’s intellectualist anthropology, briefly adumbrated the later Lonergan’s discovery of the existential level of conscious intentionality, and indicated that operations of deliberating, evaluating, and deciding are conditioned by the presence or absence of conversion. I would now like to raise the question: Insofar as Lonergan is correct concerning the function of religious conversion, is his apparent devaluation of the significance of the *Insight* 19 proof justifiable?

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 106. Emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 12.

More specifically, if it is true that “our basic awareness of God comes to us not through our arguments or choices but primarily through God’s gift of his love,”<sup>67</sup> that religious conversion is a responding to that gift which reconstitutes one’s very being as a being-in-love, and that this new identity illuminates the meaning and value of all one’s living—then it seems that religious experience does establish a most basic horizon, and indeed “is the first principle.”<sup>68</sup> In light of this recognition, it seems apparent at least *prima facie* that Lonergan is justified in his various attempts to attenuate the significance the *Insight 19* proof.

One misses the point entirely though if one supposes that Lonergan recognized some weakness in his *Insight 19* argument and was simply calling for some better argument. First, as far as I am aware, Lonergan never acknowledged any *intrinsic*, logical, flaw with the *Insight 19* argument. And second, it was simply not the case that Lonergan wished to promote some new argument, or to replace, say, premises asserting the contingency of proportionate being for other premises, perhaps asserting God’s gift of love in religious experience. Lonergan’s transition was not from one argument to another, but from a concern for argumentation to a concern for concrete existential horizons.

Propositions function in the context of logical proof, but “the fact of the matter is that proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon, that the formulation of horizons varies with the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, religious conversion, and that conversion is never the logical consequence of one’s previous position, but on the contrary, a radical revision of that position.”<sup>69</sup> Conversions modify the horizons in which propositions have meaning and arguments have value. It is conversion then, and not proof, that is basic. Lonergan writes: “Basically the issue is a transition from the abstract logic of classicism to the concreteness of method. On the former view what is basic is proof. On the latter view what is basic is conversion. Proof appeals to an abstraction named right reason. Conversion transforms the concrete individual to make him capable of grasping not merely conclusions but principles as well.”<sup>70</sup>

This has ramifications for the practice of theology. Insofar as conversion actually is “the first principle,” and is recognized as fundamental, the theologian’s time may be better spent reflecting upon the dynamics of conversion than upon formulating proofs which absentmindedly prescind from the concrete horizons of those subjects whom the proofs are supposed to convince. “Theology, and especially the empirical theology of today, is reflection on religion. But conversion is fundamental to religion. It follows that reflection on conversion can supply theology with its foundation and, indeed, with a foundation that is concrete, dynamic, personal, communal, and historical.”<sup>71</sup> Lonergan’s position also clarifies the limitations of rational apologetics. “The apologist’s task is neither to produce in others nor to justify for them God’s gift

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<sup>67</sup> Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” in *Second Collection*, 277.

<sup>68</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

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

<sup>71</sup> Lonergan, “Theology in its New Context,” in *Second Collection*, 67.

of his love. Only God can give that gift, and the gift itself is self-justifying. People in love have not reasoned themselves into being in love.”<sup>72</sup>

### Part III: The Problem of Assessment

The foregoing considerations leave us with the problem of interpreting the significance and ongoing relevance of Lonergan’s *Insight 19* argument. If we affirm, with Lonergan, an expanded anthropology, an appreciation for the fundamental importance of religious experience, the argument that all rational argumentation is situated within some horizontal context, and the conclusion that “proof is never the fundamental thing,” then we must also affirm, with Lonergan, that the proof of *Insight 19* is not fundamental.<sup>73</sup> But this does not resolve for us what the residual significance of that proof is to be, for the claim that the proof is not fundamental certainly does not entail that it is worthless. Hence we are faced with the task of reassessing the significance of that proof, of re-evaluating its import.

Yet we are not constrained to follow Lonergan’s lead in this task. In any case this would be difficult to do, for at the end of the day his own assessment remains ambiguous: On the one hand Lonergan stated that *Insight 19* “seemed to be a mere survival, if not a piece of wreckage, from an earlier age.”<sup>74</sup> On the other hand he also stated that he had formulated the proof for the existence of God “as best I could in chapter nineteen in *Insight* and I’m not repudiating that *at all*.”<sup>75</sup> The presence of such ambiguity invites, requires, further exploration and discernment on our part. Are these two positions consistent? And if so, how is their apparent inconsistency to be reconciled? While the hardheaded logician or the dyspeptic Thomist might be tempted to restore coherence simply by writing off the later Lonergan as having gone soft, corrupted perhaps by the confusion of the 1960’s, I certainly have no interest in going down that path. Nor do I think it is desirable simply to view chapter nineteen as a mistake, as something that simply went out of date and is now to be ignored. But if these two extreme options are barred, then we are faced with the question of how to move forward. How might *Insight 19* be integrated with the positions Lonergan developed and advanced subsequent to *Insight*? How might rational argumentation be reconciled with an affirmation of a priority of religious experience? Given that Lonergan himself devoted much effort to defending his later views, and to clarifying how these involved a normative break from the quasi-classicist assumptions of *Insight 19*, any such reassessment is liable to seem to run against the grain of Lonergan’s own mature positions. Yet if coherence is sought we have no alternative but to face that risk. We proceed then, fully affirming the developments of the later Lonergan, recognizing the problems and limitations of *Insight 19* relative to those

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<sup>72</sup>Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 123.

<sup>73</sup>Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 41.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 41. Emphasis added.

developments, seeking to defend a place for chapter nineteen in a theological future that gives due priority to religious experience.

### Not a View from Nowhere

In a 1973 presentation to the Jesuit Philosophical Association, later published as “Insight Revisited,” Lonergan raised the criticism: “In *Insight* the treatment of God’s existence and nature, while developed along the lines of the book, nonetheless *failed to provide the explicit context* towards which the book was moving.”<sup>76</sup> I would like to focus here specifically on Lonergan’s failure “to provide the explicit context.” We have discussed ways in which *Insight 19* can be faulted for prescinding from horizontal issues. But despite that failure, *Insight 19* cannot be construed as some “view from nowhere.” It turns out that “providing” any explicit context, directly communicating any horizon, is an extremely difficult thing to do. Furthermore, the fact that Lonergan was unable to render the context of *Insight 19* explicit does not require the informed *reader* of that chapter also to prescind from contextual issues. For what is implicit can be rendered explicit retroactively—and this is precisely what any good interpreter of a text attempts to do. Lonergan seemed to have assumed that the author must carry the entire burden. But reader-interpreters may attempt to disclose for themselves contexts that remain merely implicit in texts. In the interest fostering this possibility, I would like to identify three kinds of contexts implicit in *Insight 19* (relative to the text, the author, and the reader), each of which would be salutary to render explicit.

First, there exists the implicit context of chapter nineteen’s relation to chapters eighteen and twenty of *Insight*. Lonergan’s proof does not simply appear on its own, in isolation, as some kind of “intellectual parlor game.”<sup>77</sup> Rather, the occasion for posing the question of the existence of God in *Insight* was the recognition, in chapter eighteen, of a seemingly insurmountable moral incapacity for sustained development. Chapter twenty works out how that incapacity could be overcome by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which effect a “higher integration of human living.”<sup>78</sup> The point to be appreciated is that the question of the existence of God, in the context of *Insight*, is not a merely speculative matter, but functions as a pivotal issue in the context of Lonergan’s presentation of the radical problem of human liberation.

Second, there exists the implicit context of chapter nineteen with respect to the less than ideal circumstances of its authorship. Telling of these, Lonergan wrote: “I had been informed that I was to be shipped to Rome the following year to teach theology at the Gregorian. I foresaw that my ultimate project would have to be postponed. I decided to round off what I had done and publish the result

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<sup>76</sup> Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” in *Second Collection*, 277. Emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> A phrase used by Thomas Williams in the Introduction to his translation of Anselm. See Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), xi.

<sup>78</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 655.

under the title, *Insight*. Chapter nineteen in that work was part of the process of rounding things off.”<sup>79</sup> William Mathews reports that “chapters 19 and 20 were rapidly composed during the summer of 1953.”<sup>80</sup> Aware of these circumstances, one wonders how chapter nineteen might have been different had Lonergan been granted another year, or even a few more months. Might he have settled upon a mode of discourse as fitting to the exigencies of existential and religious subjectivity as the early chapters of *Insight* had been to those of cognitional subjectivity?

Third, it is notable, especially given Lonergan’s own extensive criticism, that chapter nineteen *does* in fact manage to explicitly emphasize the subjective conditions which must obtain if it is to be profitably read. Even there Lonergan did acknowledge the limitations of logic.

Proof is not some automatic process that results in a judgment, as taking an aspirin relieves a headache, or as turning on a switch sets the digital computer on its unerring way. All that can be set down in these pages is a set of signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned. But grasping it and making the consequent judgment is an immanent act of rational consciousness that each has to perform for himself and no one else can perform it for him.<sup>81</sup>

Although perhaps not sufficient, such a statement, fully taken to heart, could go a long way toward “illuminating the context” towards which *Insight* was moving.

### **Appropriating *Insight* 19**

While *Insight* 19 “treated God’s existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion,” that objectivist intent did not altogether submerge Lonergan’s overarching concern with subjectivity. Although it is true that *Insight* 19 “made no effort to deal with the subject’s *religious* horizon” only on a very superficial reading could one also assert that that chapter involves a corresponding neglect of the subject’s *intellectual* horizon.<sup>82</sup> In fact, in a striking and potentially unsettling manner, chapter nineteen very much calls into question the subject’s intellectual horizon. The proof, we recall, requires one to operate in the intellectual pattern of experience. It demands that one be completely genuine in one’s acceptance of the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to inquire intelligently and reflect reasonably. It “presupposes an acceptance of the positions and a rejection of the counterpositions.”<sup>83</sup> In making these demands, *Insight* 19 should be interpreted as pushing to the limit the ultimate ramifications

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<sup>79</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> William A. Mathews, *Lonergan’s Quest: A Study of Desire in the Authoring of Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 429.

<sup>81</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 695.

<sup>82</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 13. Emphasis added.

<sup>83</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 696.

of critical realism. Because critical realism can be affirmed only on the basis of adequate self-appropriation, there is also a more than implicit sense in which *Insight 19* calls into question the completeness of one's present achievement of self-appropriation.

Certainly the proof is presented in a logical form. The logic of the argument (*modus ponens*) is *valid* and, as such, is unassailable. Yet existentially the proof nevertheless remains "wide-open." Whether the argument is to be recognized as *sound* or not, depends upon one's judgment of the truth of the premises. That judgment, in turn, will depend upon *who one is*, i.e., upon one's attainment, or not, of intellectual conversion. One key issue is whether or not the minor premise of the *Insight 19* proof can become for oneself a matter of real assent, for that premise especially strikes at the root of one's deepest epistemological assumptions. Is the real completely intelligible? Is this a proposition I understand, and to which I can rationally assent? Or are these just words for me, a mere *flatus vocis*? Or am I perhaps somewhere in the middle, striving toward self-understanding, struggling to differentiate the "two quite different realisms" inherent in my polymorphic self, making perhaps only slow progress in the long and winding process of self-appropriation? The answer, whatever it may be, is well worth knowing. And so the question is well worth asking. That the real is completely intelligible is simply not the kind of assumption to which one can freely help oneself. The proof of *Insight 19* invites us into this question, and hence into our cognitional selves, in an unrelenting, complete, and perhaps intolerable manner. It is easy to walk away from chapter eleven of *Insight* with smug self-confidence. But not so from chapter nineteen.

Another way of stating the issue would be to note that *Insight 19* never explicitly raised the question: *For whom* is this a proof? But again, that need not be the end of the matter. Recognizing the question becomes the occasion, the invitation, to take it up explicitly, to ask oneself: Is *Insight 19* a proof—for *me*? And if it is not, why is it not? If I am put off merely by an aversion to the logical trappings of the argument, that's one thing. But, given the possibility of an interpretation that delves beneath the logical form of the argument to the underlying cognitional import of its premises, perhaps this objection to the logic is not as significant as some, including Lonergan himself, have made it out to be.

*Insight 19* apparently has been a stumbling block for many. Yet if Bernard Tyrrell is correct in suggesting that "failure to accept Lonergan's position on general transcendent knowledge is almost inevitably rooted in a failure to accept fully the positions on knowing, being and objectivity," perhaps facing up to the stumbling block of *Insight 19* may be one effective inroad for dialectically exploring these foundational issues, for putting intellectual conversion to the test, for critically examining the present limitations of one's cognitional self-appropriation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Bernard Tyrrell, *Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 176.

## Primacy of the *Question of God*

Having made substantial breakthroughs in his understanding of the intentionality of moral consciousness and the dynamics of religious conversion, Lonergan reworked his approach to the affirmation of the existence of God in *Method in Theology*. There he would emphasize—not some new logical argument directed at attaining some correct propositional conclusion, not the possibility of attaining “transcendent knowledge,” not merely the rational exigence for the unconditioned—but rather the dynamism of the human spirit as implicitly raising the *question* of God, in several distinct ways, by its orientation to self-transcendence. Lonergan’s mature position, compactly stated, was that “man’s spirit, his mind and his heart, is an active power, an *eros*, for self-transcendence; consequently, the subject is related intrinsically and indeed, constitutively to the object towards which it transcends itself; finally, knowledge, morality, and religion are the three distinct phases in which such self-transcendence is realized.”<sup>85</sup>

The question of God is inherent in our self-transcending intentionality and becomes explicit when we allow intentionality to question and reflect upon itself. As there are several basic kinds of questioning, the question of God can arise in several different ways. It is possible to inquire into the possibility of inquiry. Questions for intelligence are met by the satisfaction of understanding, but why should understanding amount to anything *more* than merely a subjective satisfaction? Why do our acts of understanding also reveal to us a universe that is intelligible? Could the universe be *intelligible* if it lacked an *intelligent* ground? But to ask such a question is to wonder about God.<sup>86</sup>

It is possible to reflect on questions for reflection. Questions for reflection are met by acts of judgment in which is grasped the virtually unconditioned, i.e., that conditions for rational affirmation have, as a matter of fact, been fulfilled. Now whatever is affirmed as virtually unconditioned is not necessary being, i.e., a being which has no conditions whatsoever, but rather contingent being, i.e., conditioned being whose conditions happen to be fulfilled as a matter of fact. But this raises a question. Is it possible that all being could be contingent? Or must there exist also a necessary being, a being whose existence is absolutely without conditions, a being that could provide sufficient reason for the actual fulfillment of all the conditions of all contingent beings? But to wonder about this ultimate condition for the possibility of making judgments is to wonder about the existence of God.<sup>87</sup>

It is possible to deliberate about the significance of our deliberating. We do this whenever we wonder whether or not our moral aspirations are worthwhile. In moral living, we renounce satisfactions for the sake of values. We each struggle for authenticity. We strive together for progress. But is all this

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<sup>85</sup> Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *Second Collection*, 130.

<sup>86</sup> See Lonergan, *Method*, 101; Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 53.

<sup>87</sup> See Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 53-4; Lonergan, *Method*, 101-2.

worthwhile? Is human moral endeavor obligated, supported, confirmed, or even consciously noticed, by a reality beyond itself?

Is the universe on our side, or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the ever mounting welter of decline? The question arises and, clearly, our attitudes and our resoluteness may be profoundly affected by the answers. Does there or does there not necessarily exist a transcendent, intelligent ground of the universe? Is that ground or are we the primary instance of moral consciousness.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, in religious experience there may occur an opaque and mysterious objectification of an absolute fulfillment of one's desire for the intelligible, the real, the good.

With that objectification there recurs the question of God in a new form. For now it is primarily a question of decision. Will I love him in return, or will I refuse? Will I live out the gift of his love or will I hold back, turn away, withdraw? Only secondarily do there arise the questions of God's existence and nature, and they are the questions either of the lover seeking to know him or of the unbeliever seeking to escape him. Such is the basic option of the existential subject once called by God.<sup>89</sup>

The approach to the affirmation of God in *Method* can be contrasted to that of *Insight 19*. While *Insight 19* affirmed the existence of God as the conclusion to an argument, *Method* poses the question of God precisely *as a question*, or rather as an integral series of distinct questions correlative to a reduplication of intellectual, rational, and moral intentionality, and to their fulfillment in religious experience. While the basis of the *Insight 19* argument was the cognitional subject, the question of God as raised in *Method* is grounded in an expanded anthropology that includes not merely the cognitional, but also the moral and religious dimensions of human existence. Whereas *Insight 19* effected an extrapolation from a metaphysics of proportionate being to knowledge of transcendent being, the fundamental questioning of *Method* regards the most radical conditions for the possibility of our self-transcending operations, and the ultimate objective of those operations.<sup>90</sup>

In the previous section I have argued that *Insight 19* is not so objective that it entirely fails to engage the horizon of the subject, that one's intellectual horizon is very much engaged, albeit implicitly, as it grapples with the presuppositions of that chapter. Yet *Method* maintains a clear advantage. Because it explicitly focuses upon questioning, intentionality, and self-transcendence, its

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 102-3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of the various levels of self-transcendence, see *ibid.*, 104-5.

approach to the affirmation of God far more explicitly emphasizes the concrete horizon of the subject, and not merely in its cognitional aspects. Lonergan's emphasis upon questioning is relevant because theology can all-too-easily turn into a set of answers to questions that nobody happens to be asking. Insofar as too few in contemporary secular cultures are effectively motivated even to ask the questions, it is primarily the questions, rather than their answers, which must be illuminated first. Lonergan clearly recognized this: "The question about God is much more important than the proof of God, because at the present time people deny that the question exists."<sup>91</sup> The statement is remarkable, because it shows how seriously Lonergan took the exigencies of historical existence, and also how far he was willing to go to get beyond the classicist confines of scholasticism.

### The Ongoing Relevance of *Insight 19*

We have just contrasted *Insight* and *Method* with regard to their respective approaches to the affirmation of God. While granting the advantages of the latter, and the justifiability of Lonergan's critique of his earlier effort in *Insight*, I would like to conclude this paper by arguing that *Insight 19* remains important and relevant, and perhaps to an extent that we have generally failed to appreciate given the later Lonergan's own emphatic and sustained self-criticism. I would like to propose that, properly interpreted, there does not exist any ultimate incompatibility between the two quite different approaches of *Insight* and *Method*, that a philosophical complementarity obtains between the two approaches, and that we are far better off with both together than we would be if *Method* were emphasized to the neglect of *Insight*.

Since it is the case that "knowledge, morality, and religion are the three distinct phases in which . . . self-transcendence is realized" and so also are the distinct fields in which the question of God may arise, we may begin by noting that *Insight 19* remains very profoundly concerned with the first of these three phases.<sup>92</sup> Granted that questioning and subjectivity are explicit and foremost in *Method*, yet remain merely implicit in *Insight 19*, submerged under the weight of its logical form, nevertheless, *Insight* is salutary in the way it does bring objective *answers* to those fundamental questions concerning the ground of intelligibility and rational verification that *Method* would have us raise. Certainly we must recognize and avoid the idolatry of allowing such answers to become ends in themselves. Answers are, at most, a condition for the possibility for a new beginning, or of sustaining a conversion that has already begun. Yet if our most fundamental religious questions are not intellectually and rationally satisfied, the new beginning might never occur, or the conversion might founder under the weight of doubt.

Lonergan writes, "In *Method* the question of God is considered more important than the precise manner in which an answer is formulated."<sup>93</sup> Again,

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<sup>91</sup> Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in *Second Collection*, 130.

<sup>93</sup> Lonergan, "Insight Revisited," in *Second Collection*, 277.

we grant that questions are primary. But Lonergan would be the last to deny that questions are also intentional, and that what questions intend are answers. We may grant that subjectivity is neglected only at the price of self-alienation, but Lonergan would be the first to insist that any philosophy of subjectivity that thinks it can do without objective knowledge ultimately undermines itself. We may grant that “our basic awareness of God comes to us not through our arguments or choices but primarily through God’s gift of his love,”<sup>94</sup> that “only secondarily do there arise the questions of God’s existence and nature,” and that such questions occur only within an existential horizon in which there exists an exigence for a personal response to divine initiative.<sup>95</sup> But Lonergan would be the last to conclude that our intellectual arguments concerning God’s existence and nature are rendered insignificant by an acknowledgment of these facts. In his 1968 Aquinas Lecture, for instance, Lonergan argued that the denial of the possibility of objective knowledge of God’s existence and goodness is symptomatic of a highly undesirable mode of being that he termed the “alienated subject.”<sup>96</sup> Clearly what is at stake here is something more than protecting the intellectual respectability of theism.

For all of these reasons, I am suggesting that the relation of *Method* to *Insight* 19 should be construed not as an either/or, but rather as one of obverse to reverse, as subjective to objective approaches centering upon the same concern, in short, as complementary. I believe this position is consistent with Lonergan’s insistence that “attempts to separate and isolate the intellectual, the moral, and the religious are just so many efforts to distort or to entirely block authentic human development.”<sup>97</sup> Hence I suspect that something important would be lost if the clear superiority of Lonergan’s approach in *Method*, relative to his post-*Insight* priorities, were tacitly allowed to justify neglect of his approach in *Insight*, or perhaps not so tacitly, to foster disparagement of that earlier effort as merely underdeveloped, outdated, or even mistaken.

*Insight* at root was a book about questioning, and about the possibility of self-transcendence through questioning. The problem with chapter nineteen, again, was that “the treatment of God’s existence and nature, while developed along the lines of the book, nonetheless failed to provide the explicit context towards which the book was moving.”<sup>98</sup> I have argued that we should not allow this assessment, Lonergan’s own assessment from his 1972 paper “*Insight Revisited*,” to remain the last word on the matter. The context that Lonergan failed to make explicit as the author of *Insight*, he subsequently has made explicit. Insofar as the horizontal issues I have identified in this paper can be brought to bear upon an interpretation of *Insight* 19, that early effort can be re-situated into (or at least not entirely evicted from) the broader context of the later Lonergan’s expanded existential and religious anthropology.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 116.

<sup>96</sup> Lonergan, “The Subject,” in *A Second Collection*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *Second Collection*, 128.

<sup>98</sup> Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” in *Second Collection*, 277.

It is possible, in other words, to read *Insight* 19 in a deconstructive manner. By this I simply mean in a manner that imports retroactively understandings that happened not to be those of the author at the time of his writing, and which remain merely incipient within the text itself. By bringing to one's interpretation of *Insight* 19 a recognition of the questioning, the underlying horizontal assumptions, and the intellectual conversion that that chapter actually presupposes, albeit implicitly, it becomes possible to interpret that chapter in a manner which is not limited, misled, or taken in by the overtly logical mode of presentation that Lonergan perhaps regrettably employed there.

Is such a deconstructive reading hermeneutically responsible? I do not consider it to be anything other than what Lonergan meant by his own "moving viewpoint." Of that guiding procedure of *Insight* Lonergan wrote: "Not only are earlier statements to be qualified by later statements, but also the later qualification is to the effect that earlier statements tend to be mere scaffolding that can be subjected to *endless revision*."<sup>99</sup> Presumably, by "endless revision" Lonergan did not mean endless revision ceasing merely in 1957, with the publication of *Insight*.

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<sup>99</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 20. Emphasis added.