

# The Springboard to the Future: How to Create a Modern Culture of Credibility and Cooperation

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## *Introduction*

Bernard Lonergan argued that the transition to an empirical view of culture transformed the modern person's relationship to the past. Having recognized that collectively we are responsible for the worlds in which we live, he or she is no longer "dedicated to perpetuating the wisdom of ancestors," but has come to view the past as "the springboard to the future."<sup>1</sup> Unlike many of modernity's detractors, Fr. Lonergan reported this development without sneering or intoning nostalgic lament. Instead, he surmised that this situation calls Christians to an age-old ecclesial task: "disengagement from a culture that no longer exists and involvement in a distinct culture that has replaced it."<sup>2</sup> Frederick Crowe, in his 1980 Pere Marquette Theology Lecture, characterized Lonergan's *Method in Theology* as a "new organon" for effecting this engagement, this involvement in modern culture. He proposed the term "organon"—in the place of "method"—both because it suggested a whole mentality by which to pursue the needed knowledge for realizing our collective future, but also because it indicated (according to its biological connotation) that this mentality has "a differentiated structure and specific function... serving the life of the body as a whole."<sup>3</sup> *Method in Theology* spells out the differentiation of its internal structure—that is, functional specialization—but what of its place within the wider social and cultural structure? What of its specific function for and service to the life of "the body" of humanity?

In a number of essays prior to the publication of *Method*, Lonergan hinted that theological method (and indeed methodical control in all of our scientific and scholarly enterprises) was a matter of boosting and bolstering the credibility necessary for effective cooperation.<sup>4</sup> For Christian engagement with and involvement in modern culture cannot be a one-sided endeavor. For the springboard of the past to be

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<sup>1</sup> Lonergan, "The Absence of God in Modern Culture," in *A Second Collection*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Lonergan, "Absence," 95–96.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick E. Crowe, *Method in Theology: An Organon for Our Time* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Bernard Lonergan, "Belief: Today's Issue," *A Second Collection*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe, Robert M. Doran, 75–85 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

adequately compressed and the full measure of its potential energy unleashed, the collective weight of the whole human community will be required. Christians will not be able to join our modern fellows at its far end, however, unless we show ourselves reliable "in the task of discerning humanity's true good in this life or in the task of bringing it about." *Method in Theology*, then, can be understood as an organon in the hunt for a modern culture of mutual credibility and cooperation concerned with realizing the common good for which we are, God help us, responsible. What follows, then, will consider the integral relation of cooperation and credibility, especially as they are considered in Lonergan's occasional essays from the 1960s. Along the way, I will trace the advent of certain cultural technologies for boosting credibility and their significant modern revision. In the home stretch, I will turn to consider the case of modern philosophy and theology among these.

### *Lonergan's Theory of Culture*

On Lonergan's view, "the source of power [in a community] is cooperation."<sup>5</sup> Cooperation can simply mean many hands applied to a common task, but the real power is unleashed with the division of labor and a coordinated-but-differentiated cooperative order. The prior condition, Lonergan thought, of such cooperation is precisely being-a-community, which for Lonergan means being "people with a common field of experience, with a common or at least complementary way of understanding people and things, with common judgments and aims."<sup>6</sup> Lonergan would abbreviate this litany to "shared meanings and values," and these he gave the appellation "culture."

Simple cooperation requires we share an understanding of a common task and a sense it is worth doing, but a differentiated cooperative order makes mutual credibility essential. I have to trust you understand what you are doing *and* that it is worth setting you off to go do it, all without myself necessarily understanding the nuts-and-bolts of your task, except perhaps approximately where it fits in the order. Breakdowns in credibility, in turn, threaten the entire order. If I do not trust my fellows, I may withdraw from cooperation, sapping the community's power. Alternatively, I may feel the need to resort to force to impose my idiosyncratic vision of the order, preserving it for a time, but poisoning the roots of community via resentment, fear, etc. And communities can err-by-excess in credibility as well: misplaced trust or simple naivete invites catastrophes of mismanagement, negligence, corruption, etc.

Such culture as animates a community's cooperation may remain immediate in their way of life. It will be the common sense by which courses of action are judged prudent or foolish. But communities may

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "The Dialectic of Authority," in *A Third Collection*, eds. Robert M. Doran, John D. Dadosky, *CWL* 16 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Lonergan, "Authority," 4.

and often do objectify the meaning and value of different cooperative departments and their products. So there are crafted the sigils, costumes, decorations, stylizations, entertainments, etc. in and by which a culture expresses itself to itself, as well as to its others. Such objectifications communicate across a cooperative order the meaning and value of the disparate departments, inviting credence among them. The “excess” or surplus labor devoted to such expressiveness symbolizes the commitment, the investment of those involved in an enterprise to one another.

The expressive objectifications a culture produces for itself provide material occasion to reflect on the meaning and value not only of the community’s products, but also on the departments that produced them, and—most importantly—on the cooperative order that empowers the whole enterprise. Often, this reflection will spontaneously produce intra-community conflict. Differentiated cooperation empowers a community, through the same surplus that underwrites cultural objectification, to grow large enough that there will exist both departmental sub-communities, but also other kinds of affiliations and associations of fellow-feeling. These sub-communities will, *qua* community, also have a (sub-)culture, which will be partially the common meanings and values of the whole, but also partially a distinctive set marking them out within it. What seems meaningful and worthwhile to the larger community will seem, in the limit, stupid and pointless to this sub-community. Conversely, the larger community will view the eccentricities of such sub-communities as inexplicable and, again in the limit, deplorable. Of course, each group will appeal to their own common fund of meanings and values to justify their judgements, but because these are precisely what is not shared, inevitably a struggle for bare power will ensue over the direction of the community going forward.

### *Science as Cultural Superstructure*

Lonergan thinks that science—and here, think of the medieval *scientia* rather than modern lab coats and beakers—he thinks that science appears as a technique for establishing the credibility of meanings and values without appealing to brute power, to Thracymachus’s “advantage of the stronger.”<sup>7</sup> But all along the way—from Socrates’ insistence on universal definition to the high medieval *summae* and especially

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<sup>7</sup> Lonergan takes two examples to illustrate such credibility-boosting techniques, one originating in Athens, the other in Jerusalem. One technique involves the effort to state exactly and precisely what one means and affirms with a minimum of ambiguity. In Athens, think of the Socratic search for philosophical definitions. Coming out of Jerusalem, think of conciliar, doctrinal definitions. Another technique involves an effort to establish whether the understandings and affirmations expressed in such definitions accord with reality or not. From Athens, this appears in the maieutic art of the Platonic dialogue and Aristotle’s dialectical sifting of opinion, as well as the guiding ideal of *physis*, of the nature of things, the ideal to which results should correspond. From Jerusalem, it takes the form of an integration of *lectio divina* with the scholastic *quaestio*, measured against the guiding ideal of God’s knowledge and will. A third technique involves an effort to establish the coherence of, not just this or that doctrine, but of the whole set of animating meanings and values with the reality intended by the guiding ideal. From Athens, Lonergan points both to the ambitious scope of Aristotle’s *organon*, but also to the technique of implicit definition he used to establish it, where the reciprocal relations of terms controls their meaning. From Jerusalem (by way of Paris), Lonergan notes the development of the *Summa* as a genre meant to fit not only the aggregated doctrines of medieval books of sentences, but also the questions to which they are putative answers into a unified and coherent picture of Christian belief and value.

the early-modern treatises—this classical form of science relied primarily on a *logical* ideal of knowledge consisting in five elements: truth, certainty, knowledge, necessity, and causality. This has significant advantages over the slippery equivocations of common sense. Methodologically, it meant one could “ascend from the earth to the heavens and beyond the heavens to the first mover” with “no logical break between knowledge of this world and knowledge of ultimate causes.”<sup>8</sup> It meant, in other words, that a science of God could be unproblematically integrated with the rest of what Lonergan called the cultural “superstructure.” And insofar as classical science sought to give an account of the human, the procedure was similarly logico-metaphysical: “one was to know acts by their objects, habits by their acts, potencies by habits, and the essences of souls by their potencies,” and so “in his *De anima* Aristotle employed one and the same method for the study of plants, animals, and [humans].”<sup>9</sup> But to sustain this methodological uniformity, classical science had also to maintain what now we consider a naïve view about human culture(s)—namely, that there is only one, with a capital C, and to the extent one fails to participate in it, one is a barbarian.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the intra- and inter-communitarian *agon* had not been adequately expunged by a classical science of the human.

The dominance of a logical ideal of knowledge in classical science made verification primarily a matter of valid inference and sound argument. The Cartesian complaint that such procedures produced, not truth, certitude, knowledge, or necessity, but only *plausibility*—to say nothing of Hume’s skepticism about causality—signaled a new problem for scientific knowledge. It sent Descartes and other rationalists searching for new foundations on which to re-build its credibility. In theology, medieval doctrines—produced at the nexus of *lectio divina* and *quodlibetal* disputation—had become conclusions to be deduced, with scripture and the tradition rendered corresponding premises. What was gained in logical clarity, coherence, and rigor was matched by a significant loss in the operability of classical science as a credibility-boosting enterprise in the cultures of Europe. On the wider scene, Lonergan notes how the logical ideal of science did not just withdraw, but was also *displaced*. In order to place some constraint on rationalistic speculation, he reminds, “the Royal Society in England had a rule: questions were not considered unless they could be settled by an appeal to observation or experiment. Science was to be not just science but *empirical* science.”<sup>11</sup> And so putatively unified natural philosophy would transform into a cadre of increasingly autonomous, specialized, empirical sciences. Science, in

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Belief,” 81.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Future of Thomism,” in *A Second Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., CWL 13 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Lonergan, “Belief,” 79.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Aquinas Today: Tradition and Innovation” in *A Third Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert M. Doran and John D Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 42.

other words, became itself a highly-differentiated cooperative order and its empirical method the criterion of credence within it.

“It was inevitable,” Lonergan asserts, “that the success of the new idea of science should profoundly affect the rest of the cultural superstructure,”<sup>12</sup> creating the impression that human sciences, to be credible, must be “conducted on the same lines as the natural sciences.”<sup>13</sup> And this is laudable to the extent that, “one observes performance, proposes hypothetical correlations, and endeavors to verify one’s hypothesis as probably true.”<sup>14</sup> However, if this point of analogy between the natural and the human sciences is overemphasized, “distortion occurs in man’s apprehension of man,” producing a human self-understanding that “if not mechanistic, is theriomorphic.” We might take excesses in evolutionary psychology as an example of the tendency to treat the rational animal foremost as animal and only superficially as rational.

Lonergan pointed out some problems with such modern methodological uniformity. For one, it demands naïveté about what the humanities investigate. Lonergan imagines sending investigators into a court of law:

*They could count, measure, weigh, describe, record, analyze, dissect to their hearts’ content. But it would be only by going beyond what is just given and by attending to the meaning of the proceedings that they could discover they were dealing with a court of law; and it is only insofar as the court of law is recognized as such and the appropriate meanings are attached to the sounds and actions that the data for a human science emerge.*<sup>15</sup>

In other words, quantifying via measurement the sensible elements of a court *qua* sensible would fail to investigate that institution at all. The constitutive factor of human institutions can only be found in the meaning and value it holds for the people who enact them. And such procedures have an even more fundamental epistemological problem. Lonergan again:

*If the sciences of nature can be led astray by the blunder that the objective is, not the verified, but the 'out there' [to be sensed and measured], so also can the human sciences; but while this blunder in physics yields no more than the ineptitude of Galileo's primary qualities and Newton's true motion,*

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<sup>12</sup> Lonergan, “Absence,” 89.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World,” in *A Second Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., CWL 13 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 157.

<sup>14</sup> Lonergan, “Absence,” 89.

<sup>15</sup> Lonergan, “Absence,” 89.

*it leads zealous practitioners of scientific method in the human field to rule out of court a major portion of the data and so deny the empirical principle [behind the modern ideal of science]. Durkheimian sociology and behaviorist psychology may have excuses for barring the data of consciousness, for there exist notable difficulties in determining such data; but the business of the scientist is not to allege difficulties as excuses but to overcome them, and neither objectivity in the sense of verification nor the principle of empiricism can be advanced as reasons for ignoring the data of consciousness.<sup>16</sup>*

In other words, human sciences that pretend to an epistemologically stoic or spartan or otherwise hard-nosed imitation of the natural sciences produce an intellectually tragic outcome: they aspire to scientific objectivity by *a priori* excluding data, an *a priori* unscientific commitment.

Loneragan also considers what, until then anyway, had been a predominantly German approach to sciences of the human - what Dilthey named the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Where the above approach had over-extended the analogy with the natural sciences, this one “stresses the basic difference between natural and human science” which lies “in the very data of the two types.” On this model, the humanities invite culture to appropriate itself precisely as “the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, insofar as the *Geisteswissenschaften* accept that meaning is integral to and constitutive of their objects, they set out not to establish what human persons and communities are universally and necessarily, but to give progressive and cumulative account for “all the [people] of every time and place, all their thoughts and words and deeds, the accidental as well as the essential, the contingent as well as the necessary, the particular as well as the universal(.)”<sup>18</sup> They aspire, in other words, to the modern scientific ideal, but without repeating the problematic methodological uniformity.

### ***Modern Philosophy and Theology***

For Lonergan, the human sciences *qua Geisteswissenschaft*—while certainly more adequate than their quantitative cousins—nevertheless face a persistent challenge. “Phenomenology and hermeneutics and history assume basic importance” for such studies and so there develops an unavoidably “close connection with—or strong reaction against—idealist, historicist, phenomenological, personalist, or

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: a Study of Human Understanding*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe, Robert M. Doran, vol. 3 in *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 260.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert M. Doran and John D. Didosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” in *Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 241.

existentialist thought.”<sup>19</sup> The underlying problem here is that philosophies are also cultural objects, constituted by meanings and values, albeit about the nature of meaning and valuing. Resting the *Geisteswissenschaften* on philosophical foundations only moves the problem of their credibility back a level. If there are no credible means of settling philosophical disagreement, of verifying or falsifying philosophical meanings and values, then the credibility problem remains unresolved and the communitarian *agon* persists, albeit in the thin air occupied by philosophical cultures.

One might expect modern philosophical science should aspire to empirical verification. But mostly philosophers continue to rely on the logical ideal and its techniques. Some try to give philosophy a veneer of natural scientific procedure by engaging in “thought experiments,” but of course, from the perspective of the natural sciences, this is literally, explicitly inventing the data under investigation and would putatively serve as evidence. Phenomenological approaches fare much better at attending to the data as given and philosophical hermeneutics has extended this enterprise into the conditions and dynamics of interpretation, while philosophies of historical mindedness raise the problem posed by the horizontal bounds of interpretive sense—a problem that remains, I think, the stickiest wicket.

In *Insight*, Lonergan proposed a “generalized empirical method” in philosophy. Later he would reframe this as “intentionality analysis.” Under either appellation, the intent is the same: to derive an integral heuristic structure, a “transcendental method” for all human inquiry—phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of history included. He sought, to put it another way, to theorize the normative variable that gives rise to all cultural variation, including philosophical differences. A modern philosophy, if it would serve the credibility of the modern *Geisteswissenschaften*, cannot simply posit definitions of knowledge and decision and dialectically hash out which meet the logical demands of clarity, coherence, and rigor. It must begin with and from such data as may pertain to knowledge and decision and be measured against the evidentiary data on the same. So Lonergan insists that philosophy needs “full and precise answers to three basic questions”: What is one doing when one is knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What does one know when one does that? So much for knowledge, but for decision we may add Patrick Byrne’s three further questions: What is one doing when one is being ethical? Why is doing that ethical? What does one bring about by doing that? These are, in Lonergan’s view “the core contribution a philosophy can make” to the humanities, to theology, and, through these, to all human communities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lonergan, “Absence,” 88.

<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, “Philosophy and Theology,” in *A Second Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadasoky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 171.

Above I noted how the classical ideal of science made the integration of theology with the other sciences largely unproblematic, even if thinkers realized how revelation and faith made it something of a special case. But the modern ideal calls that integration into question. On the very first page of *Method in Theology*, Lonergan claims that modern theology “mediates between a cultural matrix [of meanings and values] and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.” A number of Lonergan’s occasional essays from the 1960s (upon which I have been extensively relying) reveal that he conceived of that mediation as, at least in part, serving the credibility-boosting function with which I am here concerned. Can modern theology’s mediation be scientific, though? Again, modern science is empirical.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, “it is methodically geared to knowledge of this world.”<sup>22</sup> That, in Lonergan’s terms, is its “specialization” in the differentiated cooperative order of modern culture. The crux of the problem is that there are no data on God. An empirical science must begin from and find sufficient evidence among the data, but the infinite and eternal, absolute and unconditioned God cannot be an object of experience. Consequently, modern science “tends to replace theology... with religious studies, which treat of [humans] in [their] supposed dealings with God or gods or goddesses.”<sup>23</sup>

Still, Lonergan thought that even “if increasing specialization prevents modern science from speaking of God, one would expect it to enable modern theology to speak of God all the more fully and effectively.” But when Lonergan was putting the question to audiences in the 1960s, he thought the promise of theology as a modern science (in whatever analogous or even singular sense) remained unfulfilled. *Method in Theology* and its model of functional specialization appeared in the subsequent decade as his framework for an answer.

## *Conclusion*

Fred Crowe’s point in *An Organon for Our Time*, however, was that Lonergan was not solving for a boutique methodological problem suffered in isolation by a confessional corner of academia. Rather, if I may put it in my own words, Lonergan saw the theological case as a particularly neuralgic version of the credibility crisis faced by every department in the school of humanities. But even this is too narrow an aperture to take in the light Fr. Lonergan’s work would cast. Crowe reminds us that, in Lonergan’s view, logic (and with it, presumably, mathematics) “is derived from the dynamism of incarnate spirit.” And “the same remark,” by extension, “can be made about the procedures of empirical method” in the

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<sup>21</sup> “It begins from data, it discerns intelligible unities and relationships within data, and it is subject to the check of verification, the correction and revision to be effected by confrontation with further relevant data,” (Lonergan, “Absence,” 91).

<sup>22</sup> Lonergan, “Belief,” 81.

<sup>23</sup> Lonergan, “Absence,” 91.



sciences.<sup>24</sup> The crisis, as Husserl went to such great lengths to show, concerns the whole of the university. But even if we follow Lonergan in noting that the primary contribution that philosophy can make not only to theology, but to every single scientific and scholarly department consists in its answer to his three central questions and Byrne's ethical addenda, I hope the foregoing has indicated how even this charts only the microcosm. The wider field of concern is the whole of the human future and our collective cooperation in guiding it. For even if the bright minds can raise the relevant questions, let alone settle the needed answers, still it will remain to propose them to such communities as possess the corporate power-in-potency to act in light of them. It matters very much, then, on what basis the creative minority will be received, if at all. Will only the promise of wealth move us to act together? Perhaps the twentieth century taught us how the allure of commerce is to be preferred to the threat of force. Still, that which is preferable is not always adequate. Fr. Lonergan put it this way:

*To know what is truly good and to effect it calls for a self-transcendence that seeks to benefit not self at the cost of the group, not the group at the cost of mankind, not present mankind at the cost of mankind's future. Concern for the future, if it not just high-sounding hypocrisy, supposes rare moral attainment. It calls for what Christians name heroic charity. In the measure that Christians practice and radiate heroic charity they need not fear they will be superfluous either in the task of discerning man's true good in this life or in the task of bringing it about.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Crowe, *Organon*, 42–43.

<sup>25</sup> Lonergan, "Absence," 98.