

Fifty years of *Insight*



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Fifty years of *Insight*
Bernard Lonergan's
contribution to philosophy and
theology

Edited by Neil Ormerod, Robin Koning
and David Braithwaite

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William Mathews, SJ has taught courses on philosophical anthropology and narrative selfhood for many years at the Milltown Institute, Dublin. In his *Lonergan's Quest* (University of Toronto Press, 2005) he explored the startlingly strange desire involved in the authoring of *Insight*. He is currently working on a book relating the dynamism of consciousness (Lonergan's transcendental notions) with Memoirs, Biographies, Journals and Spirituality. Longer term interests include an exploration of emergence and finality with references to cosmology, nature, culture and economics.

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Meredith Secomb is currently a doctoral student in theology at the Australian Catholic University (Melbourne), having completed Bachelor and Master degrees in Theology at Yarra Theological Union over the preceding years. For some time, she conducted a private practice as a clinical psychologist, working at the interface of psychology and spirituality. Meredith has published on the topics of Catherine of Siena, the contemplative foundation for social action, and a Lonergan-based approach to therapy. She has presented papers at Lonergan and psychological conferences both in Australia and overseas.

David Legg is currently Head of Faculty for Religious Studies at St Peter's College, Auckland, New Zealand. His study of Lonergan's work started in 1964 after reading *Insight*, while he was engaged in the study of Aristotle and Aquinas in Australia. His doctoral research was in the Logic of Questioning as developed by Lonergan in *Insight*. His present interest is in applying Lonergan's methodology to explicate philosophical

problems, especially those found in modern and traditional cosmologies, including Indian and Islamic thought. As an educator he has developed programmes applying Lonergan's approach in teaching philosophy to secondary school students. He is presently involved with the New Zealand Ministry of Education in bringing the study of philosophy into the state secondary school curriculum.

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Tom Halloran was introduced to Lonergan's *Insight* while a student in Rome in the years following Vatican II. He was fortunate in being able to follow up his interest in Lonergan's thought through the annual workshops and several years of classes at Boston College. Prior to coming to Australia in 1987, he taught a variety of theological and philosophical subjects in both University and Pastoral Ministry's settings. His long-standing interest in the methodology of Bernard Lonergan continues through the Australian Lonergan Workshop Committee, of which he is currently Secretary. Tom lives in Canberra with his family and is very involved with his local parish

Introduction

Bernard Lonergan is one of the greatest Catholic intellectuals of the twentieth century. His writings cover an enormous range of topics including philosophy, theology, science, history, art, education and economics. His collected works, currently being published by Toronto University Press, will number over twenty volumes. However, for most people he is best known for two works, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* and *Method in Theology*. If these were the only two works he ever wrote, his reputation would be undiminished, marking him as a unique mind capable of the most profound philosophical and theological analyses. Perhaps because of the profundity of his writings he nonetheless remains an intellectual *terra incognita* for many people. He has a well-deserved reputation for being difficult to read, particularly if one's starting point is *Insight*. It is not that his writing is particularly dense or obscure, but his appeal to mathematical and scientific examples often leave an unprepared mind floundering. His writing assumes a reader who is at the 'level of the times', abreast of the scientific and cultural achievements of the day. It is this, more than the complexity of the writing, that makes for the greatest difficulty for a novice reader.

These present essays represent contributions from leading international and Australian scholars in the area of Lonergan studies. They were brought together to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Insight*. Though a little later than one might have liked, these essays reflect on the contribution of Lonergan's thought, principally *Insight*, but also his later work in *Method* have made to philosophy and theology. The essays contained in this work cover three general areas—philosophy, theology and what one might broadly call culture.

Mark Morelli takes up Lonergan's image of the 'half-way house', a half-way house between idealism and empiricism, and the different half-way

house which locates idealism between empiricism and what Lonergan calls critical realism. In particular he is interested in identifying this latter half-way house with the absolute idealism of Hegel, rather than the critical idealism of Kant. His work presents a positive appreciation of the contribution of Hegel to Lonergan's understanding of critical realism.

Elizabeth Murray also explores Lonergan's metaphor of the half-way house to examine the nature of intellectual conversion and its place within Lonergan's thought. Along the way she engages with the thought of a number of major philosophers, including Kierkegaard, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger and Fichte. Her argument is that intellectual conversion involves a two-fold movement, the moment of withdrawal to immanence and the moment of transcendence to objectivity. Further, intellectual conversion is not a final achievement. The horizon of critical realism must be gained and regained through rationally self-conscious and free commitment.

William Mathews' contribution examines how Lonergan's argument in *Insight* overcomes the Kantian problematic which split phenomena and noumena and sought to rule out the possibility of metaphysics. This involves appropriating Lonergan's notion of objectivity, as he notes, 'Mastering the meaning of the principal notion of objectivity involved in my own experience a fairly major intellectual conversion with which I struggled for many years and continue to struggle'. Mathews illustrates his argument with extensive reference to scientific insights, particularly the work of Crick and Watson in discovering the structure of DNA. In seeking to replicate in oneself their journey of discovery one can uncover elements of one's own intentional operations which ground a solution to the Kantian problematic.

Robin Koning undertakes an examination of Lonergan's understanding of consciousness and compares and contrasts this with an understanding of consciousness found in the writings of Karol Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II), particularly his work, *The Acting Person*. This is a significant issue because of the concerns raised by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* on the modern 'turn to the subject'. While Wojtyła may not be as thematic as Lonergan in his examination of the topic of consciousness, Koning finds a number of similarities in their approaches, as well as differences. In particular he concludes that Wojtyła means by reflexive consciousness what Lonergan means by consciousness *tout court*, revealing some fundamental convergence in the views of Lonergan and Wojtyła on consciousness.

Anthony Kelly presents the first theological contribution to the collection, suggesting that the Christian phenomenon needs a more explicit place in Lonergan's *Method*. In this regard, von Balthasar's aesthetic phenomenology of God's self-revelation appears to be the polar opposite to Lonergan's method based in the phenomenology of self-transcending consciousness. By referring to Jean-Luc Marion's recent phenomenology, particularly his notion of 'saturated phenomena', Kelly detects in all this a benign dialectic at work, even in the work of Lonergan himself, which can lead to a further enrichment of his theological inheritance.

Neil Ormerod takes up one of Lonergan's more philosophical contributions, that of contingent predication, concerning the relationship between creator and creature, to analyse the more theological issue of the relationship between the persons of the Triune God and creature. Such a stance has been developed in Lonergan's Latin writings recently made available in English translation in his collected works. Ormerod compares this approach to that adopted by Karl Rahner based on Rahner's account of 'quasi-formal causality'. He seeks to contribute to the debate between Lonergan scholars Robert Doran and Charles Hefling recently published in *Theological Studies*.

Following Kelly's suggestions in relation to the work of von Balthasar, Meredith Secomb deploys insights from both Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar to examine the notion of a personal 'call' or vocation. Both these theologians embraced the Ignatian principle of serving God in a concrete way and both endorsed the Ignatian means for discerning God's call. However, they present quite different emphases in their recommendations for how people should attend to God's call. While Balthasar argued that people found fulfilment in discovering God's 'idea' or mission for their lives, Lonergan recommended that people be attentive to their consciousness in pursuing God's call. Secomb refers to the distinction between these emphases as, respectively, the 'call-writ-large' and the 'call-writ-small'.

David Legg explores the relationship between cosmology, theology and the universe, with a particular focus on the question: What is the universe? His initial interlocutors in this exploration are Emmanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein before turning to Lonergan's *Insight* for an understanding of the universe as a whole. He concludes that while Kant restricted our knowledge of the universe to his theory of 'perception', and Wittgenstein restricted what we could say about the world to the 'bubble' of language-games, Lonergan affirmed the reality of the universe of every-

thing, as it really is, based on the unrestricted desire to know, expressed in our questioning.

Longstanding Lonergan scholar Philip McShane seeks to locate the larger cultural significance of Lonergan's work. Identifying the emergence of what Lonergan refers to as the 'second stage of meaning' with what Karl Jaspers refers to as an 'axial age', McShane asks what new axial age will characterise the emergence of a 'third stage of meaning' based on interiority as achieved in Lonergan's writings. As always McShane's essay is challenging, probing and wide-ranging over the full corpus of Lonergan's achievement. He asks us to consider not just the next fifty years but the next seven hundred years when a Lonergan-like lady in the Orient may find Lonergan as Lonergan found Aquinas. Typically the footnotes of this essay are an essay in themselves and worth pursuing.

We are particularly pleased to include the essay by Sean McNelis, the only contributor to explicitly consider Lonergan's contribution to economic thought. McNelis outlines the unique aspects of Lonergan's economics and its basis in his notion of a scheme of recurrence as developed in *Insight*. He argues that Lonergan's heuristic, the scheme of recurrence, poses a challenge for current social and economic research, particularly where it is dominated by common sense thinking. The essay illustrates some unique aspects of this heuristic: the ordered hierarchy of technology, economics and politics; the distinction between the patterns of an economy and the coincidental motivations of participants; the functional relations between series of groups of activities; the normativity immanent within the productive process; and the democratic focus of Lonergan's analysis. In particular McNelis seeks to apply these insights to the question of social housing.

In the final contribution, Tom Halloran contends that 'functional specialisation' is Lonergan's greatest contribution to philosophy and theology. Articulating his stand in a manner that recalls Lonergan's stand in 'Finality, Love, Marriage', Halloran writes, 'In the *recent fermentation of catholic praxis on the meaning and redemption of history*, the basic component of novelty would seem to be a *development in methodical collaboration*. Quite other factors, no doubt, account for the intense and widespread interest aroused in so-called Lonergan studies, but the ground of *the existential problem* must be placed, I think, in *one's judgement of value* with respect to functional specialisation.' As was the case in 1943, Halloran finds little evidence of the invited, relevant collaboration.

The editors would like to thank all the contributors for their contributions and patience in the publication of this volume. In particular Neil Ormerod would like to thank his fellow editors, David Braithwaite and Robin Koning for their careful reading and correction of the text, and for ensuring some sense of uniformity in the referencing used by our contributors.

