

INITIATING BEGINNINGS TOWARDS A MANIFESTATION  
OF OUR SELF-ASSETS

Robert Henman  
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“If the transition from the undifferentiated to troubled consciousness cannot be avoided when it is clear that common sense and theory, though disparate, must both be accepted, an entirely different set of procedures has to be learnt before interiority can be revealed and the self-appropriation of differentiated consciousness achieved.”<sup>1</sup>

What is this “different set of procedures” that we, in the second stage of meaning<sup>2</sup>, have to learn if a control of meaning is to emerge over the next millennium? To read and to ask questions is a natural desire of consciousness to create an intelligible pattern of meaning in one’s own mind. That pattern of meaning is concomitant with the structure of consciousness which is the creator or origin of meaning. That creator is you and I. An awareness of that patterned origin is a beginning of a manifestation of that “different set of procedures”. An understanding of that patterned origin is to heighten our awareness. A formulation of that understanding in judgment is a move towards a self-appropriation of one’s own creative process of meaning. A verification of that formulation is self-appropriation. Such self-appropriation has the possibility of initiating a differentiation of consciousness within the individual. Such an individual has the possibility of initiating this same procedure in other individuals. Groups of individuals have the possibility of initiating this procedure as a pattern within history.

What I have outlined in the above paragraph and what Lonergan outlines in the opening quotation intimates what history could be, or better said, what history is calling

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Herder & Herder, NY, 1972, pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> The second stage of meaning is marked by the emergence of theory within the context of fragmented consciousness.

us towards. When Lonergan published *Insight*<sup>3</sup> in 1957 I have no doubt that he had this in mind<sup>4</sup>. It is fifty years since the book's occurrence. I suggest that the few instances of self-appropriation since 1957 are indicative of the following: 1) that the appropriation of consciousness is a very difficult process, 2) that the axial period<sup>5</sup> we now live in creates a distortion of consciousness of which we have very little appreciation, 3) that present education, from primary through to post-graduate school, constitutes a structure of continuing self-alienation, 4) that the so-called Lonerganians<sup>6</sup> are subsumed within point 3 through their comparative commentaries and their efforts to introduce individuals to Lonergan rather than to themselves<sup>7</sup>, and 5) history is patient even in the midst of human suffering.

The articles that I have written and placed on my site over the past few years continually have been attempts to help a reader self-read<sup>8</sup>. So I have used phrases such as a beginning is initiated by a "turn to the subject"<sup>9</sup>, a phrase Lonergan coined. Is it a beginning? If you read that phrase did it initiate a "beginning" in you? It failed to do so in my early years of reading *Insight* or *Method in Theology*. There are and always will be days when I will experience my own inadequacy in expressing my own self-understanding. But if this inadequacy manifests a denial of the process of self-understanding and if this is the present situation, where does one begin if one is sincerely

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Originally published in 1957 by Darton, Longman & Todd, London.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 748. See the last paragraph of the text for a brief expression of Lonergan's "program."

<sup>5</sup> S. Drage, *Thinking Woman*, See Introduction and chapter 5 for a discussion of the Axial period.

<sup>6</sup> A term denoting those "attracted" to the thought of Lonergan. Unfortunately, such "attraction" does not necessarily breed self-appropriation.

<sup>7</sup> A distinction would be the teachings and writings of Philip McShane. See his website for articles and texts on various aspects of "beginnings". <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/>

<sup>8</sup> "At a higher level of linguistic development, the possibility of insight is achieved by linguistic feedback, by expressing the subjective experience in words and as subjective." *Method in Theology*, op. cit., p. 88. The third stage of meaning would be a context in which all reading would be a self-reading-a reading of the self.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of self-presence and the mistaken notion of introspection see *Method in Theology*, p. 8.

curious and compassionate about shifting history out of its present mire of a lack of control of meaning? I believe that has been Dr. McShane's effort for over 4 decades<sup>10</sup> and I am still growing in my small appreciation of his focus on beginnings. In my former articles I have used puzzles, geometry, reflective traits in parenting and growing children, as well as therapeutic methods in an attempt to explore interiority from various disciplines. And you might ask, well why continue to try other ways of initiating beginnings? Two reasons come to mind: 1) I am not detecting a self-reading from readers, and 2) probabilities can increase with a diversity of creativity. So, this morning I again attempt to discuss beginnings in a manner that may offer a new "way" for a reader.

One could speak of the crisis in education, economics, world poverty, political ignorance, the antiquity of contemporary theology and religions, war as solution, and general violence as expressions of bias, relational inadequacy, and on and on in an effort to point out that all is not well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most people attempt to avoid such events and put their energy into surviving and creating good times. And so they should. The effects of the fragmentation of the second stage of meaning in history can not be resolved by common sense solutions to each particular symptom of the axial period<sup>11</sup>. Such efforts merely invoke in some a tension in existence, in some a cause, and in others, a denial of the reality. The academy is caught up in what I have named a structure of continuing self-alienation contributing little to the emergence of the third stage of meaning. The solution is a long term process of a more refined experience and expression

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<sup>10</sup> Philip McShane has often shared in conversation with me and in his writing that in 1958 after he read the book **Insight** he was convinced that this "stuff (meaning the insights expressed in the book **Insight**) wasn't going to take."

<sup>11</sup> **Insight**; See chapter 1, section 3 "Higher Viewpoints". What will eventually resolve the fragmentation of the Axial period is a higher viewpoint concerning history and the role of human consciousness in the making of humanity.

of human subjectivity, the foundation of human inquiry. But, there I go again, expressing words that may have no meaning for my readers.

Loneragan's writings are a refined expression of human subjectivity. They too, are presently suffering the dis-ease of the second stage of meaning. So, how does one cajole in a possible reader a desire to heighten their own awareness of their own subjectivity? A brief reflection on the goal of history may serve as persuasive context for such awareness. Lonergan's writings, as far back as the early 1930's, reveal an interest in the goal of history. This interest led him to reflect on a theory of history.<sup>12</sup> Quoting Brown; "In short, Lonergan's aim in his efforts at historical theory from the 1930s was not only the systematization of historical inquiry, but also the higher systematization of historical process, the "objective movement" of the space-time solidarity of humankind."<sup>13</sup> From this "aim" of Lonergan we have later the following statement: "From the distinction of spontaneous and reflex thought, we have three periods of history: (a) spontaneous history and spontaneous thought; (b) spontaneous history and reflex thought; (c) reflex history and reflex thought."<sup>14</sup> We are in the second period of history and the goal of history is to reach the third period, what Lonergan has named the third stage of meaning, a "higher control of meaning."<sup>15</sup> That higher control of meaning can only be attained "through the attainment and implementation of a higher viewpoint."<sup>16</sup> Putting all of this in another form of expression, the goal of history is the manifestation of human consciousness, of

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.mun.ca/jmda/guidelines.html> for two articles by Patrick Brown on Lonergan's developing thought on a theory of history and its importance in the manifestation of human consciousness. Also see Brown's PhD thesis abstract "System and History in the Thought of Bernard Lonergan" on the Lonergan website: <http://lonergan.concordia.ca/>.

<sup>13</sup> P. Brown; "System and History" <http://www.mun.ca/jmda/guidelines.html>

<sup>14</sup> Lonergan, "Analytic Concept of History" 10.

<sup>15</sup> Lonergan, "Philosophy of History," MS at 112.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, "Lonergan's Historical Manuscripts" <http://www.mun.ca/jmda/guidelines.html>

you and I. You might say the goal of history is you, an ongoing growth in your self-understanding which gradually leads to a greater control of meaning.<sup>17</sup>

If the second period in history is to evolve into the third, the higher viewpoint need become a possibility and eventually a reality. We have come full circle to the topic of this paper, initiating beginnings towards a control of meaning. Such control emerges from a heightened awareness of 1) what consciousness is, 2) how it functions, and 3) why it functions as it does, in other words, an explanatory account of consciousness.<sup>18</sup> These three outcomes of a heightened awareness parallel three questions that Lonergan often used to orientate the reader; the first concerning cognition 1) What am I doing when I am knowing? The second concerning epistemology; 2) Why is doing that knowing? The third concerning a metaphysics; 3) What do I know when I do it?<sup>19</sup> These three questions are orientated towards helping the individual to heighten their awareness of their own conscious activity leading to a possible increase in the control of meaning. Where do we begin?

We begin...*”by recognizing in our expressions the objectification of his (our) subjective experience.”*<sup>20</sup>

What or how do we do this? Let us begin with the child’s constant activity of asking questions. A child might ask and quite often does; What is that? as they point to some seen experience. What does that verbal question indicate about their inner conscious activity? It indicates that ‘they’ are curious and that their question is a

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<sup>17</sup> You might compare your meaning of this objective of history and your school studies of history as written as a way of grasping some appreciation of the second period of history. Is the current focus of historical studies the manifestation of human consciousness or.....? Women’s studies are beginning to explore the role of women in history. It is quite a different experience from the history of politics, Kings and Queens, and battles which much of previous history focused in school texts.

<sup>18</sup> Lonergan’s **Insight: A study of human Understanding**, is just such an account.

<sup>19</sup> Lonergan, **Method in Theology**, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, **Method in Theology**, p. 9.

manifestation of a particular form of presence to an experience as well as an orientation to being intelligent. This presence and orientation are conscious experiences that are objectified in the question; What is that? This presence and orientation are subjective experiences of the subject, the child. What is that? is an objectification of the subjective experience. Does the child reflect and ask her or himself; ‘How will I objectify my subjective experiences of being curious or desiring to understand this experience?’ The child does not reflect on this activity. The objectification is a natural attribute of human consciousness. Just as the goal of history is the manifestation of human consciousness, so the child’s natural dynamic is an objectification or manifestation of consciousness. History is driven by the dynamic of human consciousness. When a child asks a question there is a transformation of an inner experience of being curious and desiring to understand into a verbal expression that we call a question. This process of transformation, when understood, is what contributes to a refinement and higher control of meaning. Because the process of objectification occurs without awareness it is unknown and functions haphazardly. This is the source of the crisis in education and the healthy development of children. An awareness and understanding of this dynamic process of the human subject can lead to a new perspective on education and the growing of a child. What are we growing when growing a child? Might we be growing a quest?<sup>21</sup> This focus of consciousness directs our awareness to reflect on our awareness, on consciousness itself, the invisible essence of each of us, and source of meaning that is orientated towards living intelligently and knowing ‘reality’.

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<sup>21</sup> Philip McShane often uses the terms **Teaching Children Children** and **Childout Principle** as ways of expressing what it is to grow a child. It is the objectification of the proper pattern of the child’s consciousness in parenting, in education, in living. See <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/books.html> under **Eldorede** series for articles on this point.

What is this crisis in education of which I write? It is the continuous introduction of information, in nominalist form, to children who eventually become child care professionals, parents, teachers, or professors who unintentionally neglect the interior functioning of children, and students as well as their own conscious activity. Students who are asked who their favorite teacher was in early schooling will usually recall those teachers with whom they felt they had some form of relationship that was integrated with the teaching. Why is that? That type of response manifests the child's natural desire to be loved and understood. That desire, when acknowledged by a teacher in the teaching relationship opens the child up for a more free experience to learning.<sup>22</sup> But what if the teaching of a topic, any topic,<sup>23</sup> in its methodology, went to the core of the student's self-assets<sup>24</sup> as well as manifesting the teacher's self-assets? By self-assets I mean the elements of meaning that constitute the drive and structure of human consciousness. The acknowledgment through a teaching methodology of a student's self-assets manifests to the student a form of caring that cultivates the core of their maturation process.<sup>25</sup> You might reflect for a moment on your own dedication to a question you have labored over. Or the dedication you give to your curiosity over a puzzle.<sup>26</sup> Can you distinguish between the dedication to the puzzle and the dedication to your questioning dynamic? That

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<sup>22</sup> This, of course, functions in a positive manner as long as the student is healthy. An emotionally abused child will become focused on the attention provided rather than the topic taught. The greater the emotional need, the greater the need for attention to the point where the student learns nothing.

<sup>23</sup> See my **Towards Foundations in Education: Prologue to the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium**, chapters 5 and 6 on teaching geometry. <http://users.eastlink.ca/~rhenman50/>

<sup>24</sup> See Philip McShane, **Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations: Self-Axis of the Great Ascent**, Exposition Press, NY, 1975. Available on his website <http://www.philipmcschane.ca/books.html>

<sup>25</sup> This does not rule out the need for the education and maturation of feelings. See <http://www.philipmcschane.ca/books.html> for "The Solution to the Problem of Feelings in Lonergan Studies". See also Suzanne Langer, **Feeling and Form**, Scribner Press, NY, 1951, p. 401 on the education of feelings. The education of feelings pertains to the realm of artistic meaning which is a truncated neglect of the child's self-assets in contemporary education.

<sup>26</sup> You may find in your reflection that you have a diminished capacity of patience with your own curiosity. That can be a problem of emotional disturbance or a symptom of this Axial Period. In such a case you may have little patience for anyone else's curiosity.

dedication to your question is your own self-caring, you are caring for and respecting the dynamic that is you. Can you offer the same dedication to someone else's question, a child's question in your classroom? The child's question as a manifestation of their subjectivity is the child living out its existence and its nature. Can we offer the same dedication to the child's objectification of its subjectivity that we might offer our own? In order to develop an appreciation of the child's self-assets we first need acquire an appreciation of our own self-assets, the origin of a higher viewpoint, and the source of a higher control of meaning.

What are these self-assets? In print I can only name them and that process tends to cultivate the nominalism that I have spent not a little time attempting to transpose.<sup>27</sup> But at least a name might point some curious reader to her or his own experience. The objectification of our subjective self-assets is achieved through; 1) experiencing something 2) asking a question: What is it? 3) achieving and insight, 4) formulating that insight into an answer, 5) asking if that answer is so; Is it so? 6) through a further insight grasping the correctness of one's first insight, 7) formulating that insight in judgment, 8) what will I do with this knowledge, 9) insights towards forming options, 10) formulating those options, 11) which option is to be done, 12) insight into the most intelligent and reasonable option, and 13) carrying out that option.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://users.eastlink.ca/~rhenman50/> **Towards Foundations in Education** for discussions on the shortcomings of nominalism in education.

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/books.html> Philip McShane **Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations: Self-Axis of the Great Ascent**, page 15 and chapters 3 and 4.

In diagram form our 13 elements or self-assets function as follows.

- 11) Is-it-to-be-done question → Insight → Action
- 8) What to-do-question → Insight → Options
- 5) Is-it-so-question → Insight → Decision YES/NO
- 1) Experience → What is it question → Insight → Judgment

This list appears as a rather long process of interior activity from experience to carrying out some action. You might respond that you do not do all of that each time you work out what action you will take. Obviously, we do not do this completely with each experience. It depends on the meaning<sup>29</sup> we give to what we are experiencing. If you are tired and it is bedtime, you may just go to bed without too much ‘thought’ on the matter. Much of life is routine or habitual and does not require our full exercising of our 13 self-assets.<sup>30</sup> But much of life does and if you carry out some self-examination of your past decisions you may notice that you have exercised those 13 elements but did not advert to them at that time. Contemporary culture does not advert to or cultivate these self-assets<sup>31</sup> so it is not uncommon for us to make what many would consider important decisions without going through all 13 steps. I recall my experience of teaching medical ethics to 85 final year medical students. I stated that many of them probably thought seriously about the 7 to 10 year commitment and the financial burden taken on in order to become physicians. Only 3 or 4 students, women I might add, admitted to seriously thinking it

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<sup>29</sup> See **Method in Theology** chapter 3 for a discussion of types of meaning.

<sup>30</sup> See **Insight** for a discussion of the differences between common sense and explanatory thought. Much of our daily living is an expression of common sense, the 13 elements are still exercised but not in an explanatory manner. Explanation is in the order of theory or science and it manifests an entirely different ‘sense of reality’ than that of common sense. See chapters VI and VII on common sense and chapter III on empirical method as explanation.

<sup>31</sup> A central characteristic of the Axial period is the unknown subject.

through and these were Asian students studying abroad. I asked other students how or why they made the decision to become physicians. Their responses ranged from the financial reward of such an occupation to “My parents were doctors, so I decided to do the same.” The few that were honest enough to say so, admitted to not taking the decision too seriously and definitely did not exercise their 13 elements of meaning. I admitted to being somewhat surprised but later in solitude recalled many decisions of my own that I now deem as important having been made haphazardly skipping over many of my own self-assets. Such is the experience of a culture that unintentionally neglects our self-assets.

I offer another example that may assist in highlighting our self-assets. When a community desires to have a bridge built over a body of water they hire the competent people, the people who understand bridge making. When we hire people to build children we hire teachers or professors. Such people may understand their field, say bridge building, but do they understand people building?

So, how do you teach people about bridge building, and build the people at the same time, in an appreciation of their self-assets? The order in which one grows in understanding of how to build a bridge is the order of our self-assets. The order of our self-assets orchestrates the order in which we teach bridge building or any other topic.<sup>32</sup> How can one do this if one is unfamiliar with their order of self-assets? A neglect of this order is a neglect of the person’s subjectivity. Such neglect leads to the fragmented consciousness of our time and its perpetuation is the crisis of contemporary education, and culture. You cannot escape the fragmentation in our times for by the time one learns

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<sup>32</sup> See Lonergan’s **Insight** for the many examples he uses throughout as well as the implications for all zones of science and human thinking. See also my chapters on teaching geometry in **Towards Foundations in Education: Prologue to the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium** <http://users.eastlink.ca/~rhenman50/>

of such the fragmentation has taken place. But one can begin to unravel some of that fragmentation by gradual efforts at becoming aware of their own self-assets. So the teacher of bridge building who has become aware of the order of his or her own self-assets has the challenge of laying out their lectures and teaching in a manner that parallels the order by which the student comes to understand. For the order of our self-assets is the same in all of us. What is different is the context within which that order functions. So, women's studies are revealing a different context for thinking.<sup>33</sup> One's emotional status is a context. A context can disrupt or short circuit the order. So, impatience can encourage one to leap to judgments or drop a question. Neurosis can inhibit the occurrence of insight. Some people cannot get a joke. It's not the joke they cannot get, it's insights that are being inhibited leading to a missed joke. Children often get the insight into puzzles before adults. Their nervous system has 'usually' not been as abused to the same extent as an adult and this greater freedom of their integrative system allows for the spontaneity of insights.

We are back to Lonergan's quotation at the beginning about being unable to avoid troubled consciousness. I repeat it here.

"If the transition from the undifferentiated to troubled consciousness cannot be avoided when it is clear that common sense and theory, though disparate, must both be accepted, an entirely different set of procedures has to be learnt before interiority can be revealed and the self-appropriation of differentiated consciousness achieved."<sup>34</sup>

The different set of procedures is two fold. The first procedure is to begin to notice or become aware of how our expressions objectify our subjective activity. The second is the different mode of being present to oneself and how such presence is an expansion and revolution of the empirical principle. A refinement of both of these

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<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Drage, *Thinking Women*, Axial Press, Vancouver, BC, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Herder & Herder, NY, 1972, pp. 84-85.

procedures leads to the possibility of linguistic feedback when we can express “the subjective experience in words and as subjective.”<sup>35</sup> In our expressions we begin to notice our ‘self’ as objectified leading to the possibility of self-understanding and a heightening of consciousness. The procedures need to be learned before interiority can be revealed. The awareness and the learning are also two different activities. Awareness is a first step of refining our experiencing. Learning is the activity of questioning, understanding and judging of what we have become aware of leading to self-understanding and a higher control of meaning. To experience is one activity, understanding is a further development leading to that higher control of meaning. The higher control of meaning has the possibility of a more authentic expression of interiority in order that one’s world gradually manifests a more humane existence. We are now back at the goal of history; the manifestation of human consciousness, the ground of transforming a world that is presently caught in the second stage of meaning, a non-reflective existence leading to the disorientations of human livability.

"What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness."<sup>36</sup>

If the liberty of the subject and the freedom of consciousness are to occur, then the origins of their beginning need be manifested in the individual’s own struggle to slowly become aware of his or her own self-assets. Perhaps this brief article has at least raised one question that you as reader might take seriously. If such an occurrence was

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<sup>35</sup> **Ibid**; p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> Bernard Lonergan, **Topics in Education**, University of Toronto Press, CWL 10, 1993, p. 232.

evoked in your mind perhaps a beginning is initiated.<sup>37</sup> Two final quotes from Lonergan on the focal point of beginnings and the benefit of understanding understanding fittingly end this brief essay.

*For the appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness ,.... is not an end in itself but rather a beginning. It is a necessary beginning, for unless one breaks the duality in one's knowing, one doubts that understanding correctly is knowing. .... From the horns of that dilemma one escapes only through the discovery (and one has not made it yet if one has no clear memory of its startling strangeness) that there are two quite different realms, that there is an incoherent realism, half animal and half human, that poses as a half-way house between materialism and idealism and, on the other hand, that there is an intelligent and reasonable realism between which and materialism the half-way house is idealism.<sup>38</sup>*

*Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> There are some questions I have in mind that I would like a reader to have, but reflective history would highlight the meaning more of the asking than of the content of such a question. Does this comment raise a question about questioning in you?

<sup>38</sup> Bernard Lonergan, **Insight: A Study in Human Understanding**, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970, p. xxviii.

<sup>39</sup> **Ibid**, p. xxviii.