

THE FRAGILITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS: LONERGAN AND THE POSTMODERN CONCERN FOR THE OTHER

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THE TERM "POSTMODERNIST" was first coined in the 1930s to describe minor reactions to modernism in the arts. Its use expanded in the 1950s and 1960s to cover ever-wider phenomena in the arts, especially certain types of eclecticism in architecture. Eventually it became a cover-all for artistic trends that tended to break down the boundaries between art and everyday life, between high and low or popular cultures; to promote a certain promiscuity in styles and codes, mixing parody, pastiche, irony, and playfulness, and insisting on the absence of depth and the paradoxical importance of superficiality. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of Romantic expressivism that ends by debunking the putative originality and genius of the artistic producer, suggesting that ultimately art may be no more than repetition.

In philosophy and theology, postmodernism embraces a wide range of "second thoughts" about Enlightenment and Romantic versions of modernity in the guise of the classic forms of hermeneutics of suspicion. Marx used political economy to debunk the bourgeois subject and the Romantic subject, and Freud used psychology. But the central figure in postmodernism is Nietzsche, who used philology to radically critique the Enlightenments in fourth-century Athens and in 17th- and 18th-century Europe as culminating in the "Last Man" of the late 19th and 20th century. In calling into question not just Enlightenment rationalism but the Romantic reaction to that rationalism ushered in by Rousseau, postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion eschews both the Enlightenment myth of progress and any form of Romantic nostalgia for a pristine past beyond restoration in present or future as well.

In Western culture this double-barreled reaction is overwhelmingly evident in the arts. It plays a role in the music of Wagner, Stravinsky, Schönberg, and Berg; in the paintings of the Impressionists, the Post-impressionists, the Fauvists, the Cubists, the Futurists, Dada, the Surrealists, and so on; in the poetics of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire in France; of Pound, Eliot, and Joyce in England and Ireland; of Kafka, Kraus, Musil, and Mann in Central Europe; and of Chekhov and Dostoevsky in Russia.

Quite naturally, then, since Christian theology mediates between

the Christian communities of witness and worship and the cultures in which they exist, it has to come to terms with postmodernism precisely in the measure that postmodernism has been affecting our culture. And theologians have in fact been doing so, whether intentionally or not. In the Roman Catholic context, it is perhaps not too farfetched to say that what the Church feared in its great and fierce polemic against "modernism" was just postmodernism in its relativistic and nihilistic manifestations. This quite understandable fear continues to dominate today's skirmishes against postmodernism where it is written off as merely relativistic and nihilistic. The dangers of these trends are rampantly evident and unquestionable. Yet the understandable reaction of wholesale rejection may itself be unwise, because it is too undialectical. If postmodernists are simply wrong in their relativist and nihilist conclusions, this does not mean that they are not raising real questions about issues that need to be engaged—issues that are not engaged by the strategy of wholesale rejection of postmodernist conclusions.

But doesn't postmodernism need to be taken seriously by Christian theologians? Don't we have to grasp what is correct about the things it dismisses, and what aspects of reality it attempts to embrace, even if mistakenly? Don't we have to find a basis upon which postmodern concerns can be addressed without adopting postmodernism's destructive conclusions? This article gives an affirmative answer to these questions. Rather unexpectedly perhaps, it offers features of Bernard Lonergan's thought as a way of doing so. I have found him a Christian and Catholic thinker who actually shares many of the deepest concerns of postmodernism; but he does so in a way that takes relativity seriously without being relativistic; and that takes the absurdity and apparently random and chaotic dimensions of our world experience fully seriously without capitulating to nihilism in any form.

Let us begin by examining the context and chief features of postmodernism in philosophy and theology, in order to see whether Lonergan's approach really does meet postmodernist concerns without yielding to postmodernist mistakes.

FROM PREMODERN TO MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy originated with the question about the right way to live. But in order to answer this question satisfactorily philosophers broke into the world of theory to discover a standard that was not just a matter of convention, or *nomos*. Socratic or Platonic philosophy's heuristic name for this transconventional and hence transcultural standard was nature, or *physis*. But to know any part of nature led eventually to wondering whether the whole of reality is ultimately intelligible, and so in the premodern West the question about the whole came

to be traditionally asked and answered in the form of a philosophy of being.

The moral and scientific reorientation that occurred in the West in the wake of Machiavelli, Galileo, and Newton during the 16th and 17th centuries spelled the end of the philosophy of being (or of ontology or metaphysics as it had come to be called) as the first task of philosophy.

When philosophy existed under Islamic, Jewish, and Christian auspices, the question about the right way to live had been more or less taken for granted and rather isolated from the question about being as pursued in the Schools. Due to the Machiavellian revolution, that eminently practical question began to be asked and answered in a new way, in that all the premodern answers of the Great Tradition were considered to fall outside the scope of "effectual truth," and so both they and the questions which gave rise to them were relegated to the strictly private sphere of existence.

Due to the scientific revolution, the question about being as the first issue in philosophy had to yield to the question about knowing, the epistemological question. Modern physics in the style of Galileo and Newton not only did not depend for its intelligibility upon one's first understanding and agreeing about prior metaphysical terms and relations; but such physics also generated a consensus in the university faculties of natural philosophy which stood out in stark and scandalous contrast to the array of disputed questions that dominated the diverse schools of philosophy of being. The endless disputed questions in metaphysics with no commonly agreed upon basis for their eventual resolution naturally raised the question about the cognitive status of the scholastic theses about being *qua* being; and this in turn raised the criteriological question of how we know we know being at all.

But the great early modern philosophic propagandists for the illuminating and progressive promise of the new science—Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, the *philosophes*, and Kant—were Machiavellians. In their opposition to religion or Christianity as what Hobbes called "the kingdom of darkness," they associated, or better perhaps, coopted the scientific revolution not only into the project of opposing both the *idola* (Bacon) and the "vain imaginings" (Hobbes) of religious dogmas and the verbalisms of scholastic philosophy; but they also manufactured positivist, empiricist, and rationalist cover stories for the normative achievements of the new science. By means of these cover stories a scientific myth of rigor and proof was subordinated to purposes of technical prediction and control, so that modern science was recruited into the modern project: science "in the relief of man's estate" (Bacon), and science as the instrument for making human be-

ings "the masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes). Henceforth, technical, productive ends were to supercede the properly theoretic goal of contemplating the truth for its own sake.

Let us consider at this point, therefore, the modern "turn to the subject," looking closely at two phases: the truncation of the subject in the early modern Enlightenment, and the immanentization of the subject in modern Romanticism.

Early Modern Enlightenment's Truncation of the Subject

1. *The Primacy of the Epistemological Question.* Already in the late Scholastic period the scientific goal of true or even convenient (in the technical sense of Aquinas's *rationes convenientiae*) understanding had been replaced within a conceptualist or nominalist horizon by a concern for certainty both in theology and in philosophy. Such an overweening concern for certitude coupled with a neglect of understanding led inevitably to scepticism. But when such scepticism got joined to an orientation which screens out all but what a Machiavelli would admit as effectual truth, we have the ingredients for a quest in which the search for certitude could be generalized into a search for "sure and firm foundations" in the manner of Descartes. This then is the context for the modern turn to the subject. In the Cartesian preoccupation with certainty, however, this turn actually attained only the subject as object. But why?

In order to understand the modern turn to the subject, we must grasp what is most crucially distinctive about modern in contrast to premodern reflection on human being. It is not that premodern philosophers had not distinguished clearly the human from all other species of being, for they were admirable in the way they specified the qualities proper to vegetative, animal, and human substances. When, for instance Aristotle in *On the Soul* discriminates the human soul from that of other animals, the clear and precise determination is made in terms of examples related to the specific kinds of efficient causality undergone by the different kinds of souls and to the various sorts of final causality energizing them. But in making the relevant distinctions plain in terms of efficient and final causality, Aristotle does not speak explicitly about consciousness in its dynamisms and structures. Why not? Because premodern psychology is a subset of a philosophy of being, and in that framework it was sufficient for different ranges of objects to be correlated through their respective acts with types of potencies and souls. The different types of correlative qualities are accidents inhering in corresponding kinds of substances.

In contrast, the modern turn to the subject reflects upon human being from the standpoint not of substance but of consciousness. When

John Locke inveighs against the Aristotelian doctrine of faculties or "powers," he is making the point that we do not have direct experience of faculties; and it is true that the ancients were content to deduce the presence of the faculty from observations made about the relationships between objects and the intentional acts by which they are "known" sensitively or intellectually. If we prescind from Locke's nominalism, it becomes clear that Locke is interested not in the metaphysical paraphernalia of substantial forms or souls with their relevant faculties or accidents but in consciousness and what we can be conscious of.

Now it is one thing to require advertence to consciousness and its objects; but it is quite another to understand and conceive of them correctly. In what follows, I argue that modern thinkers tended to misconceive consciousness, which is the range of awareness, with a type of operation which, while it is conscious, is not synonymous with consciousness as a whole, but only a part of its structure and operation: perception. By perception I mean the act of explicit awareness, or of express advertence to whatever it may be. Consciousness however as an internal self-presence or awareness has to itself not only a dimension of explicit, foreground awareness, but a tacit or background dimension—namely, the most radical presence of ourselves to ourselves—that can never be made explicit exhaustively.

2. *Consciousness as Perception.* As exemplified by the *cogito*, the Cartesian variant of the modern turn to the subject conceived of consciousness itself as a perception. And this usage became fateful for modern parlance inasmuch as we are liable to say today that we are conscious of something if we perceive it expressly. Accordingly, when someone says they did something—say, started to exceed the speed limit while driving—"unconsciously," they do not mean that they were mysteriously knocked out cold as they were driving down the highway, but that they did not explicitly perceive or advert to the fact that they were driving above the speed limit. So Descartes doubles back upon himself and perceives that he is doubting/thinking so as to be able to infer that he must exist if he is doubting/thinking; but this doubling back is thought to be an inner perception on the part of the *res cogitans*. Just as through our external senses we perceive external objects, so too through inward perception we become aware of the subject as the primary object of our egos. By definition, consciousness as perception objectifies what it is aware of.

For Descartes, therefore, inner perception is conceived by analogy with taking a look with our eyes at something outside ourselves, and so consciousness is held—quite inconsistently, however—to be a faculty of inward perception. This Cartesian model of consciousness is

pretty much shared by Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and modernity in general. But while Kant shares it too, he does not completely agree with it. He wishes to use the perception model much more strictly and consistently than his predecessors. According to Kant, in order for anything to be an object of knowledge at all, it must first be an object of *sense* perception. Since there can be no sense perception of consciousness and its acts, they cannot be known in the strict sense of objective knowledge, but only deduced, or better, postulated as conditions of the possibility of the cognitional activity. So it is odd that Kant ultimately also maintains the model of consciousness as perception even though he denies that we are vouchsafed any objective knowledge of it.

3. *From Soul to Truncated Self.* In the context of the modern project, the premodern notion of the soul as the form of the living body, endowing it with natural and inevitable inclinations that point beyond the person toward a hierarchy of ends or goods, is simply eliminated. In its place is installed the subject as object, which is imagined to be a unitary ego capable of deploying disengaged reason's rigor and proof as a means of carrying out the project of mastery and control of human and subhuman nature.

This truncated model of the self is dominated by the crucial and highly questionable idea of consciousness conceived of as an internal, reflexive perception that leads ineluctably to the modern image of the subject as primary object, whether in the form of Descartes's disengaged reason or of Locke's punctual individual subject. In any case, reason becomes simply a calculating faculty in the service of the passions, but especially of the lower desires for self-preservation and material prosperity. Thus, if the modern subject is not the scared subject operating in fear of violent death, as in Hobbes, it is the Lockean bourgeois subject, laboring to turn nature into property to be exchanged and accumulated to the greatest degree possible. The modern self on this model is nothing if not commercial and so is dedicated to "utilitarian individualism," to use a term brought into vogue by the authors of *Habits of the Heart*.

This modern bourgeois subject is also truncated in still further senses: first, it is an individual, an atomic entity, related to nothing and no one except by voluntary choice or contract. Second, the bourgeois subject is sealed off from the sphere of the supernatural, which characteristically comes to be called "supranatural," suggesting the image of some superfluously juxtaposed upper storey of creation. Thus the bourgeois subject becomes the self-made man or woman who worships his or her maker.

Modern Romanticism's Immanentization of the Subject

1. *Romantic Critique of the Bourgeois Subject.* The life of the bourgeois individual is incredibly flat. The moderation Montesquieu believed to go hand in hand with the spirit of commerce does quell fanaticism and channel enthusiasm, but at the cost of the spirit's deepest longings. This was the message of Rousseau's great critique of the bourgeois, the first great assessment of the damaged existence of people socialized into believing in Hobbes's tenet that a person's worth is identical with his or her price. People in bourgeois society have lost their healthy, spontaneous self-love, which is gentle and compassionate, and exchanged it for self-esteem, which is a feeling derived from others, and so a dependent, reactive emotion. As a result we are radically alienated from ourselves, in that what would have been our own spontaneous and natural feelings now are never innocent but instead always spoiled, having been generated by a competitive and jealous regard for the opinion of others.

2. *Consciousness as Perception-Feeling.* Rousseau therefore replaces the truncated subject, whose consciousness is conceived as inward, reflexive perception on the model of sense perception, with the immanentist subject, whose consciousness is also perception-like, except that the privileged model now is not the look but the *feeling*, in contrast to the operations of disengaged observation or reasoning. The Cartesian subject perceives itself as an already-in-here-now object that perceives objects already-out-there-now. But the Rousseauian and Romantic subject not only feels, but feels its feelings, which is what is meant by "sentiment." For Rousseau and the Romantics, the truncated bourgeois subject is busy about objects all the time, and so is shallow, distracted from its own depths. The Romantic subject is deep, because it likes to feel its own feelings, which are inexhaustibly deep. These feelings are the voice of conscience, the *élan* of nature as surfacing within the self and perhaps holding the key to external nature, whose secrets are withheld from the prying gaze of the manipulative bourgeois subjects living supposedly "full and productive lives."

3. *Romantic Expressivism.* The inner feelings of the Romantic subject are so deep that they can only be discovered by expressing them through *imagination*. If for the likes of Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza imagination always has a negative valence, the valence is altogether reversed in the context of the Romantic expressivist's need to formulate feelings in symbols, myths, works of art, and religious rituals.

Imaginative expression has the twofold function of articulating the depths of feeling and of shaping those depths: through the imagination we endlessly explore the depths of feeling at the same time as we constitute the quality of the feelings we encounter in those depths.

From this perspective, the difference between morality and aesthetics dissolves in favor of the latter. The view of art as mimesis is eclipsed, too. *Creativity* and *originality* become the passwords. Both art and morality are seen to be a matter of sheer self-expression in which the key is to see if each one can express originally the unique depths of their own particular self, as is evident in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. The expressivist idea of self-formation in an aesthetics of production gets transmitted further by the Romantics, Schelling, Hegel, and Marx. Again, the moments of creativity and originality become central to the ideal of the well-rounded self-realizing individual in the philosophies of Herder, von Humboldt, and John Stuart Mill that have exercised such a great influence upon German, English, and American educational systems.

In contrast to the bourgeois ideal of the autonomous, self-determining individual who realizes him- or herself ideally as a bourgeois entrepreneur, producer, and consumer, Romantic subjectivism idealizes the untrammelled self of the Romantic subject who realizes him- or herself by *Habits of the Heart's* "expressive individualism."

POSTMODERN CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN TURN TO THE SUBJECT

Postmodernism in Philosophy: Nietzsche and Heidegger

In philosophy—and more belatedly in theology—the central figure is now acknowledged to be Nietzsche because of his audacious and provocative sounding of what Voegelin has analyzed as "the magic of the extreme."¹ He thus became paradigmatic for the crisis of modernity in the sense of making manifest and partially generating a peculiarly postmodern maelstrom of thought and feeling, thus initiating the third wave of modernity (to adopt Leo Strauss's phrase).²

Nietzsche first became well known as a thinker not because he was thought to be a great philosopher, but because he was in some fashion an inspirer of Hitler's National Socialism. Respect for Nietzsche as a philosopher grew once Heidegger confronted Nietzsche's thought for a ten-year period during the 1930s and early 1940s, at a time when the

¹ Eric Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1990) 12.315–75.

² Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity," in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. H. Giddin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975) 81–98.

most grotesque regime in world history was mounting its technologically based bid for world dominion. Heidegger interpreted Nietzsche's attempt artistically or artificially to overcome nihilism and *ressentiment* in terms of the unified conception of the will to power and the eternal return of the same as the end of metaphysics.³ In his (to Heidegger's mind) failed attempts to overcome the specifically modern results of Platonism, Nietzsche was still a model for his own quest to get over the forgetfulness of being. Heidegger learned from Nietzsche that the kinds of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and transcendental philosophy still ingredient in such a work as *Being and Time* (1927) were still too deeply infected by modern assumptions of Cartesian and Kantian "subjective objectivism." And so Heidegger underwent the *Kehre*, or "turning."

We might say then that although Nietzsche is the turning point into postmodernism in philosophy, Heidegger has been the catalyst of the transition to postmodernity in the 20th century. Heidegger not only exerted enormous influence, but the gradual working out of his philosophy also involved negotiating several crucial issues at stake in postmodernity. On the one hand he came out of a Christian, Roman Catholic milieu, so that even if he eventually became a nonbeliever and an atheist, he never stopped being religious and was constantly preoccupied with mystery. On the other hand his task was to overcome three quite significant forms of modern philosophy in which he had been trained: conceptualist-Suarezian Scholasticism, neo-Kantianism in both its Marburg and Southwest German versions, and Husserlian phenomenology of perception with its Cartesian and Kantian assumptions.

Before his ten-year-long encounter with Nietzsche, Kierkegaard's existentialism influenced Heidegger as much as Nietzsche, alongside the interaction between Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Dilthey's attempts to uncover the epistemological grounding for the historical and hermeneutical sciences. In spite of his portrait of Nietzsche as the "last metaphysician," Heidegger seems to have learned from him, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the utter futility of grounding human horizons in any way that is not rooted in freedom as arbitrary. By this insight, Heidegger paved the way for later postmodern interpreters of Nietzsche—notably, Derrida and Foucault—to discern in a way not thematized by Heidegger himself how dominant already were the respective "moves" of deconstructivism and genealogy in the fragmentary and aphoristic styles of Nietzsche's philosophizing.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 4 vols., trans. D. F. Krell, J. Stambaugh, and F. A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1979–1987).

The effective history of Heidegger's thought marks a divide within postmodern thought: the reception of Heidegger by Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology occurs under the sign of Dilthey and Kierkegaard; and the deconstructive-genealogical alternative to this reception on the part of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and the like, operates much more under the sign of Nietzsche.⁴

In reacting to the truncated, immanentist, and alienated opinions, institutions, and personalities that dominate the culture of our advanced-industrial bourgeois age, both the deconstructive-genealogical approach and the universal hermeneutic approach share the common trait of working with texts in ways that tend to favor a hermeneutics of suspicion on the one hand, and a hermeneutics of retrieval on the other.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology's Postmodern Correction of Modern Counterpositions

1. *Critique of Sheer Immediacy.* The truncation and immanentism of the modern problematic of the subject (as centered on the model of pure sense perception or of perception as feeling) involve a number of assumptions about the human subject that all the postmodern philosophers found to be untenable in the light of experience as it is concretely accessible to us.

First, the following Enlightenment (i.e. Cartesian or Kantian) presuppositions were called into question: (1) the primacy of the so-called subject/object split; (2) the putative objectivity to be attained through bridging this split by means of pure perception alone; (3) the very fact of pure perception as isolated from any mediations whatsoever; (4) the object as "already-out-there-now"; (5) the subject as the privileged "already-in-here-now" object; (6) the primacy of time as a raceway of instants (i.e. of physical or perhaps Laplacean time as opposed to psychological time) and a correlative image of the present as a punctual, isolatable, yet spatialized instant. For example, Heidegger—a veritable fountainhead of postmodern thought—called into question all these assumptions in terms of the horizon of *Vorhandenheit*. Or again, together they pretty much encapsulate what Derrida has critically labelled phono-/logo-/phallo-centrism. These assumptions and their ramifications in the construction of our world are to be dismantled or deconstructed in the interests of a certain ethical integrity.

As is clear from Husserl's famous exploration of the *Lebenswelt*, Scheler's phenomenological research, the gestalt psychologists Köhler, Strauss, Wertheimer, et al., and American pragmatists like Royce and

⁴ *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State Univ. of New York, 1989).

Pierce, pure perception by the senses is a limit phenomenon almost never verifiable in human experience once the human subject learns its mother tongue. In the same vein, Heidegger's thematization of the fact that the human phenomenon of perception—even sense perception—is mediated by language, brought about the transition from the phenomenology of perception to hermeneutic phenomenology.

As a language-animal, the human being exists only rarely in the world of immediacy. Instead human beings inhabit worlds mediated by meaning and value. That is, concretely, we experience our world as worded: our world is always foregrounded for us through interpretations. As a result, in almost all human lived experience, our self-understanding is mediated by the self-understandings of others. In this manner we participate in something moving in and through us which, however conscious of it we may be, can never be adequately explicated, thematized, and explained. Hence, from the standpoint of linguistic (or hermeneutic) philosophy, to be human is to share in a conversation which constitutes the human race as a whole. This conversation which we are (Hölderlin's *das Gespräch wir sind*) is irreducible to the perspective or the explicit knowledge of any single human person.

2. *Human Experience as Mediated.* In *Truth and Method* Gadamer speaks strangely of "an experience that . . . [is] being." The remote context of this expression is Kierkegaard's critique of the aesthetic stage of existence and Husserl's critique of any form of psychologism. Both of these play a role in Gadamer's own critique of the central concept of Dilthey's Romantic hermeneutics—*Erlebnis*. (Note that English uses one term, "experience," to render the two German words *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*.) Aesthetic existence for Kierkegaard, psychologism, and the theories of *Erlebnis* are rooted in what I have been calling Romantic expressionism: a model of existence in pure immediacy epitomized by the idea of pure perception, but enacted as a feeling supposedly removed from what Gadamer calls "the hermeneutic continuity of human existence," "that continuity of self-understanding which alone can support human existence."⁵

Consequently, Gadamer's phrase "experience as being" does not mean the subjectivization of being. Gadamer uses the German word *Erfahrung* to distinguish it from the Romantic term *Erlebnis*, which always implies a punctual discontinuity of experiences. In contrast, "experience (*Erfahrung*) as being" refers to "an encounter with an

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, eds. (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

unfinished event and is itself a part of this event."⁶ It has to do with self-understanding as "occur[ing] through understanding something other than the self, and includ[ing] the unity and integrity of the other."⁷ "Experience as being" happens whenever we understand ourselves in and through something other than ourselves, and in doing so we "sublate the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence."

For Gadamer then "experience as being" occurs as mediation—of past and present, of self and other, of whole and part. It is enacted as *Verstehen*, as interpretation, as question and answer, as decision and self-correction. In all its compactness and undifferentiatedness, it is never merely a matter of the pure perception or feeling of internal immediacy (the "already-in-here-now" of the self) or of external immediacy (the "already-out-there-now" of objects).

Historicity of Human Experience

When Gadamer elaborates the structure of experience, he appeals critically to Bacon to bring out that human experience in general does have an internal reference to the negative: it wants to be confirmed, and is, unless it encounters a contradictory instance. But essential to experience as human is precisely this openness for the negative, the new, the surprising.

Gadamer goes on to explicate human experience by setting it in the context of Aristotle's account of inference (*epagōgē*), with its marvelous metaphor of the stand by an army in rout. Here he wants to stress a universality of experience in contrast to the universality of science, or *logos*, an insight into what is common among diverse experiences but one that, while it becomes the basis of scientific generalization, is itself not yet capable of such reflexive control of meaning.

Then Gadamer invokes Hegel's dialectical account of human experience to bring out that, as a mediation of self-understanding with what is other, experience involves a reversal: in the moment of having one's anticipation of meaning or intelligibility corrected by a new experience, one finds that the elimination of past misunderstanding is actually a deepening or validation of what one thought one had already appreciated before. Yet for Gadamer, Hegel, thinking that "conscious experience should lead to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself,"⁸ failed to follow through on his own insight. He opted for the epitome of Cartesianly disengaged reason—absolute self-consciousness—rather than for what Gadamer

⁶ Ibid. 99.

⁷ Ibid. 97.

⁸ Ibid. 355.

names the hermeneutic consciousness that is actually available to us. Hermeneutic consciousness acknowledges that "the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself." As coming to terms with human finitude, hermeneutic consciousness realizes that "the truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience," because "the nature of experience is conceived in terms of something that surpasses it."

Gadamer then turns to the tragedian Aeschylus. The famous formula Aeschylus adopts, *pathei mathos* ("learning through suffering"), does not just teach the truism that "we become wise through suffering and that our knowledge of things must first be corrected through deception and undeception";⁹ Gadamer believes it also expresses "insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine."¹⁰

For Gadamer the correct understanding that "real experience is that whereby human beings become aware of their finiteness" is epitomized by what he calls the hermeneutical experience of the Thou:

Anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person "understands" the other. Similarly, "to hear and obey someone" (*auf jemanden hören*) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish (*hörig*). Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.¹¹

The key moment of experience of the Thou is the capacity not to overlook her claim but to let her really say something to us.

If this attitude of properly hermeneutical consciousness is generalized to include the totality of human historical existence, we have what Gadamer calls *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, historically effected and effective consciousness. In order to clarify what such a generalization of the hermeneutic experience of the Thou involves, Gadamer presents an analysis of Platonic dialectic and a correction of Collingwood's "logic of question and answer" by thematizing the hallmark of realized experience or experience as being: the hermeneutic priority of the question.¹²

Gadamer has often spoken candidly about the vagueness and modesty of his philosophical hermeneutics. For instance when Heidegger, after his decade-long confrontation with Nietzsche, eschewed com-

⁹ Ibid. 356.

¹¹ Ibid. 361.

¹⁰ Ibid. 357.

¹² Ibid. 362-79.

pletely the vestiges of transcendental philosophy in his own approach to the question about Being, he seems to have implied that transcendental phenomenology cannot be extricated from the Cartesian and Kantian presuppositions discussed and criticized above. Now while Gadamer thinks of himself as faithful to the most radical insights of Heidegger, he still associates himself with the transcendental phenomenological approach of *Being and Time*, even going so far as to coin the Kantian-sounding technical term "historically effective consciousness." While he concedes that Heidegger himself objected to this, Gadamer has remained convinced of the correctness of his position, and yet he has never satisfactorily explained how one could hold on to Heidegger's most radical insights and simultaneously continue to adopt the transcendental viewpoint and to use the language of consciousness. In light of the contrast to the deconstructive and genealogical postmodernists' complete acceptance of Marx's, Freud's, and Nietzsche's critique of consciousness, one cannot but wonder whether Gadamer may not simply have been content to be incoherent.

But as we shall see below, Gadamer was incapable of thematizing with full accuracy the idea of consciousness as experience over against the mistaken idea of consciousness as perception. In the context of the latter thematization, transcendental reflection does not have to imply an illusory escape from human finitude by departing from the realm of the phenomenologically ostensible or the empirically verifiable. This becomes clear in Lonergan's understanding of transcendental philosophy as a generalized empirical method which verifies its discoveries in the data of consciousness made available by performance. Indeed, Lonergan makes good the postmodern decentering of the subject from its modern status as the lord and master of the universe; and he redeems the implications of this decentering in a philosophy and theology of radical human displacement into a divine conversation. In comparing Lonergan's explication with Gadamer's hermeneutical correction of modern counterpositions we get a different appreciation of Abby Warburg's famous saying: "The love of God lies in the details."

LONERGAN'S POSTMODERN THEMATIZATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS EXPERIENCE

The Being of Consciousness

The comprehensiveness of Gadamer's adumbration of hermeneutic experience recalls what Lonergan says in a review of Coreth's *Metaphysik*: "We should learn that questioning not only is about being but is being, being in its *Gelichtetheit* (luminousness), being in its openness

to being, being that is realizing itself through inquiry to knowing that, through knowing, it may come to loving."¹³ No wonder Gadamer's notion of experience as being corresponds remarkably to Lonergan's description of "being oneself as being,"¹⁴ since for him, too, being is concrete, not abstract. As he often said, "It is not the universal concept 'not nothing' of Scotus and Hegel, but the concrete goal intended in all inquiry and reflection. It is substance and subject: our opaque being that rises to consciousness and our conscious being. . . ." In elaborating on the aspect of being oneself as conscious being Lonergan explains that it "is not an object, not part of the spectacle we contemplate, but the presence to himself of the spectator, the contemplator. It is not an object of introspection, but the prior presence that makes introspection possible."¹⁵ Hence, Lonergan disagrees with the Cartesian notion of the subject or *res cogitans* as the primary object.

One will recall that for Descartes consciousness as a power of inner, reflexive perception can be known by means of a doubling back of inward, reflexive perception upon itself; and that Kant links the objectivity of knowledge indissolubly to external perception which cannot reach an internal power. Instead for Lonergan "[conscious being] is conscious, but that does not mean that properly it is known; it will be known only if we introspect, understand, reflect, and judge."¹⁶ At a stroke Lonergan thereby, on the one hand, rejects the Cartesian notion of consciousness either as identical with or as knowable only by an inner, reflexive perception, while, on the other, disagreeing with Kant's position that consciousness cannot be objectively known.

Lonergan discovered that conscious being can be known by a heightening of consciousness comparable to that which occurs in "high" therapies in which people come to experience, identify, and name their emotions and feelings.

It is one thing to feel blue and another to advert to the fact that you are feeling blue. It is one thing to be in love and another to discover that what has happened to you is that you have fallen in love. Being oneself is prior to knowing oneself. St Ignatius said that love shows itself more in deeds than in words; but being in love is neither deeds nor words; it is the prior conscious reality that words and, more securely, deeds reveal.¹⁷

¹³ Bernard Lonergan, "Metaphysics as Horizon," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. F. E. Crowe, S.J. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967) 202–20, at 206.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, "Existenz and Aggiornamento," in *Collection* 240–51, at 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 248.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 248–49.

First, note that feeling, the "prior conscious reality" about which Lonergan is speaking here, is pure experience in the sense that as an internal experience it is a mode of consciousness as distinct from self-knowledge. In other words consciousness itself is prior to and distinct from any later process in which we heighten our awareness through inquiring about and understanding, through checking out and judging what we undergo in experiencing feelings.

We can grasp the significance of this distinction in the following passage about passing from feelings as conscious experience to feelings as integrated into self-knowledge:

Feelings simply as felt pertain to an infrastructure. But as merely felt, so far from being integrated into an equable flow of consciousness, they may become a source of disturbance, upset, inner turmoil. Then a cure or part of a cure would seem to be had from the client-centered therapist who provides the patient with an ambiance in which he is at ease, can permit feelings to emerge without being engulfed by them, come to distinguish them from other inner events, differentiate among them, add recognition, bestow names, gradually manage to encapsulate within a superstructure of knowledge and language, of assurance and confidence, what had been an occasion for disorientation, dismay, disorganization.¹⁸

Secondly, however, we can be correct in calling the "feelings as felt" knowledge in an improper sense precisely because they are conscious before being focused upon, explicitated, and thematized. But it is important to specify this as performative knowledge or, as I have said, knowledge in an improper sense of the word. Nevertheless, it is knowledge of the subject as subject, not as object—a kind of knowledge to which neither Descartes nor Kant could do justice, because in one way or another they each identified consciousness with perception. This performative or improper sort of knowing is knowledge under the formal aspect of "the experienced," as Lonergan phrased it, and not under the formal aspect of being, of intelligible form, or of the true. The latter—knowledge in the proper sense of the term—would require our adding a superstructure through introspection, through inquiry and understanding and articulation, as well as through reflection and judgment.¹⁹

If, in contrast to this account, one conceives of consciousness exclusively on the model of perception, then one will be unable adequately to come to terms either with consciousness as external experience in sensation (as distinct from perception²⁰) or with consciousness as in-

¹⁸ Bernard Lonergan, "Prologomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of Our Time," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. F. E. Crowe, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1985) 55–73, at 58.

¹⁹ Bernard Lonergan, "Christ as Subject: A Reply," in *Collection* 164–97, at 178–80.

²⁰ Sensation is the same as Aristotle's *aisthēsis*, or actuation of the sense potencies: of

ternal experience in consciousness's own modes and operations.²¹ From the postmodern as opposed to the modern perspective, consciousness means "an internal experience in the strict sense of the self and its acts."²²

Let me stress two more points about this postmodern understanding of consciousness. First, consciousness defined as internal experience is more primitive and more originaive than standard modern conceptions of consciousness would have it, rooted as they are in Cartesian or Kantian epistemologies of the subject. It is empirically accessible or phenomenologically ostensible. And yet, because it is so primitive, our original access to it is not what Habermas has called "the objectifying attitude in which the knowing subject regards itself as it would entities in the external world."²³ As Lonergan insists, "one must begin from the performance if one is to have the experience necessary for understanding what the performance is."²⁴ Thus, one begins from "a performative attitude," in Habermas's phrase.

The second point is that properly to know consciousness as internal experience is to know something that is contingently constitutive of the being of the subject, on the one hand. But inasmuch as it involves using our ordinary language to inquire, grasp, and formulate, and then to check out and judge whether articulations of possibly relevant relationships are contingently verifiable in the experiences themselves, such self-knowledge also has the quality of what Habermas, borrowing from Piaget, calls reconstruction. That is to say, in the postmodern understanding of consciousness as experience, "reconstructive and empirical assumptions can be brought together in one and the same theory."²⁵

The Passionateness of Being and Human Consciousness

1. *Decentering of the Subject within Vertical Finality.* We can hear many overtones of Gadamer's idea of experience in Lonergan's further elaboration of "being oneself as being":

sight by visible objects, or hearing by sound, of touch by something felt, of taste by something flavored, and of smell by something that has an odor. Note that in contrast to perception, sensation can be utterly tacit or background for our focal awareness, such as, e.g., peripheral vision.

²¹ Note that this internal experience is that tacit, implicit, or background presence of ourselves to ourselves concomitant with any conscious acts which is the radical meaning of "consciousness" and "conscious."

²² Lonergan, "Christ as Subject" 184.

²³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987) 296.

²⁴ Lonergan, "Christ as Subject" 186.

²⁵ Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 298.

That prior opaque and luminous being is not static, fixed, determinate, once-for-all; it is precarious; and its being precarious is the possibility not only of a fall but also of fuller development. That development is open; the dynamism constitutive of our consciousness may be expressed in the imperatives: be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible; and the imperatives are unrestricted—they regard every inquiry, every judgment, every decision and choice.²⁶

If Lonergan does not go to the postmodern extreme and, with Foucault, proclaim the “death of the subject,” still his postmodern conception of the conscious subject does entail a radical dismantling of the modern subject conceived in Cartesian or Kantian terms and a radical decentering of the conscious subject correctly conceived. For if the dynamism constitutive of consciousness is actuated in fulfilling those imperatives (be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible) then our consciousnesses realize themselves in self-transcendence. For Lonergan self-transcendence means just what it says. Moreover the framework of self-transcendence in this universe gives an even more radically decentering or eccentric twist to the conscious subject, because the concrete evolution of “that prior opaque and luminous being” is swept up, in Lonergan’s account, into a vertical finality²⁷ that is at once possible, multivalent, obscure, and indeed mysterious.

Such vertical finality is another name for self-transcendence. By experience we “attend to the other; by understanding we gradually construct our world; by judgment we discern its independence of ourselves; by deliberate and responsible freedom we move beyond merely self-regarding norms and make ourselves moral beings.” The disinterestedness of morality is fully compatible with the passionateness “of being. For that passionateness has a dimension of its own: it underpins and accompanies and reaches beyond the subject as experientially, intelligently, rationally, morally conscious.”²⁸

So we can see that the crucial upshot of a correct analysis of consciousness as experience leads us to the realization that there is nothing in our consciousnesses that has not been, in a precise sense, given to us, including consciousness itself.

2. Consciousness as Conditioned by the Passionateness of Being. Human consciousness is conditioned overwhelmingly from below and from above by the gift of the passionateness of being that underpins,

²⁶ Lonergan, “Existenz and Aggiornamento,” in *Collection* 249.

²⁷ On “vertical finality,” see Lonergan, “Finality, Love, Marriage,” in *Collection* 16–53, esp. 18–22; and “Mission and Spirit,” in *A Third Collection* 23–34, esp. 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 28.

accompanies, and reaches beyond the conscious subject. For philosophy and theology rightly to acknowledge this passionateness of being and its gift character is to carry out the delicate and complicated passage from the enlightened self-interest inscribed into the heart of the modern project to the disinterestedness of morality upon which the survival of a humanly livable ecology will depend.

In the passage quoted above Lonergan goes on to speak of the passionateness of being as underpinning conscious being:

Its underpinning is the quasi-operator that presides over the transition from the neural to the psychic. It ushers into consciousness not only the demands of unconscious vitality but also the exigences of vertical finality. It obtrudes deficiency needs. In the self-actualizing subject it shapes the images that release insight; it recalls evidence that is being overlooked; it may embarrass wakefulness, as it disturbs sleep, with the spectre, the shock, the shame of misdeeds. As it channels into consciousness the feedback of our aberrations and our unfulfilled strivings, so for the Jungians it manifests its archetypes through symbols to preside over the genesis of the ego and to guide the individuation process from the ego to the self.²⁹

Then Lonergan goes on to describe how the passionateness of being accompanies the subject's conscious and intentional operations: "There is the mass and momentum of our lives, the color and tone and power of feeling, that fleshes out and gives substance to what otherwise would be no more than a Shakespearian 'pale cast of thought'."³⁰ Finally, he speaks of the passionateness of being as overarching the conscious performance:

There it is the topmost quasi-operator that by intersubjectivity prepares, by solidarity entices, by falling in love establishes us as members of community. Within each individual vertical finality heads for self-transcendence. In an aggregate of self-transcending individuals there is the significant coincidental manifold in which can emerge a new creation. Possibility yields to fact and fact bears witness to its originality and power in the fidelity that makes families, in the loyalty that makes peoples, in the faith that makes religions.³¹

DECONSTRUCTIVE/GENEALOGICAL POSTMODERNISM'S CONCERN FOR OTHERNESS

Derrida

Under the heading of "logocentrism," Derrida began with criticizing conceptualist and perceptualist counterpositions in Husserl's theory of

²⁹ Ibid. 29–30.

³⁰ Ibid. 30.

³¹ Ibid.

signs,³² and he went on from there to criticize the entire history of sign theory in the West down to Saussure as both "phonocentric" and wedded to "the determination of the Being of beings as presence."³³ This has to do with two rather closely associated matters, which we can only mention here.

First, if I may oversimplify, because of conceptualist and perceptualist accounts of Aristotle's statement that "spoken words (*ta en tē phonē*) are the symbols of mental experience (*pathēmata tēs psychēs*) and written words are the symbols of spoken words,"³⁴ Derrida rejects the possibility of any truthful and positional construal of Aristotle's statement. As long as one is confined to thinking of consciousness as perception as Husserlian and, it would seem, Heideggerian transcendental phenomenology are, then it is impossible to verify in Aristotle's statement an empirical meaning which would serve as a way of controlling the seemingly limitless conventionality and metaphoricity of human language. What, then, makes more sense: to submit without reason to the imposed limits of a conceptualist or nominalist univocity of signifiers, or to let oneself in for the more wide-open plurivocity of human metaphors?

Second, Derrida opposes the metaphysics of presence he regards as explicit in Heidegger and implicit in the entire tradition of Western philosophy since Plato. He objects to Heidegger's reliance on "an entire metaphysics of proximity, of simple and immediate presence, a metaphysics associating the proximity of Being with the values of neighboring, shelter, house, service, guard, voice, and listening."³⁵ Anyone who, like Derrida, rejects the normativity of the naive realist's "already-out-there-now" and the idealist's "already-in-here-now" without finding out what the position on normativity is will naturally be decentered and disoriented. If one is intelligent enough to realize that extrinsic norms, if extrinsic is all they are, are ultimately fictional and arbitrary, what is one to do? Instead of submitting to the traditional extrinsic norms, why not just make fictiveness and arbitrariness into a virtue, so that decenteredness and disorientedness are no longer signs of being lost, but rather *the* marks of true authenticity?

For, as Derrida argues, Nietzsche revolutionized "the concepts of

³² Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ., 1973).

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1979) 11–12; see also *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1978).

³⁴ Cited in *Grammatology* 11.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1982) 130.

interpretation, perspective, evaluation, difference,"³⁶ by rigorously excluding the "primary" or "fundamental" or "transcendental," "whether understood in the scholastic, Kantian, or Husserlian sense,"³⁷ or understood as a Heideggerian primordial homeland or absolute proximity.³⁸ In any of those senses, differences are derivative and secondary in relation to identities, because the other is subordinated to the same. Similarly, contingency is always governed by necessity. But when the decadent scholastic, Kantian, Husserlian, and Heideggerian premises are eliminated, one enters the regime of *differance* in which the reverse is true: identities are contingent upon the adventitious play of differences; and necessities are displaced by contingencies.

This is of course most evident to Derrida in the case of language, where, in accord with its ineradicable conventionality, what is constitutive is not the relation of a word as signifier to its referent as signified, but the positive determination of signs by reason of the differences available in any given system of signs. Pure significance is totally unrelated to anything but the internal system of differences in traces or markings.

As with language, so too with structure in its purity. Under the tutelage of the foundational or the transcendental, structures are centered in terms of some imagined center, origin, or presence outside the structure itself. According to Derrida this "concept of a centered structure" is "the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play."³⁹ The certainty of a center "beyond the reach of play" fends off anxiety, "for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset." The key is playfulness and the play of differences. Finally, as for the subject, he or she is simply "an effect of *differance*, an effect inscribed within the system of *differance*."⁴⁰

Derrida makes *differance*, or lack of origin and end or foundation or ground, basic because it destabilizes any attempts to close down directions of thought or to homogenize dimensions of specificity or particularity or uniqueness in reality. It melts down distinctions between abnormal and normal, literal and figurative, serious and fictive, since they are all rooted in the contingency of arbitrary will that are forgotten either willfully or not. And so the strategy of deconstruction is one

³⁶ Derrida, *Grammatology* 19.

³⁷ Ibid. 22.

³⁸ Ibid. 23.

³⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 279.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago, 1974) 28.

of displacement, intervention, impertinence, explosive laughter, which it shares quite comfortably with the genealogical approach of Foucault.

Foucault

Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx"⁴¹ points to a narcissistic revolution in hermeneutics wrought by *Genealogy of Morals*, *Interpretation of Dreams*, and *Capital*. According to Foucault each of these works demonstrates that interpretation has no foundation and points to nothing beyond itself but further signs, which are themselves sedimented interpretations. In these works the crucial signs—money for Marx, symptoms for Freud, good and evil for Nietzsche—also have a distancing, threatening, defamiliarizing role to play. They indicate the subterranean role of dissonance in our lives, whatever the surface sweetness and light.

In a later essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,"⁴² Foucault calls into question all history insofar as it looks to an endpoint or operates teleologically, thereby obliterating the contingency of events, the discontinuity involved in emergence and decline or extinction, the conflictual singularity of events.⁴³

Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations which gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.⁴⁴

Nietzsche's affirmation that "whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it"⁴⁵ does not mean, Foucault suggests, that in all such revisionist interpretations a "will to power has become master of something less powerful and im-

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," *Cahiers de Royaumont* 6 (1967) 183–92.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 76–100.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 76.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 81.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1969) 77.

posed upon it the character of a function."⁴⁶ More significantly, according to Foucault, Nietzsche is teaching us to regard "the entire history of 'a thing,' an organ, a custom" as a "continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion."⁴⁷

The general teaching then is that "all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable."⁴⁸ But this is closely related to other of Nietzsche's radical assertions, such as: "The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms."⁴⁹ And then his famous answer to the query "What is truth?" in the 1873 essay, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense":

A moving army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, in short a summa of human relationships that are being poetically and rhetorically sublimated, transposed, and beautified until, after a long and repeated use, a people considers them solid, canonical, and unavoidable. Truths are illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and lost their imprint and that now operate as mere metal, no longer as coins.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, for Foucault the emergence, survival, and decline of any discourse is always inextricably joined to one mode of power or another. In his far-reaching research he sought to show empirically how distinctions in discourse are imposed pragmatically by social institutions. Ruling metaphors or modes of discourse are constantly reconstituted in radically different ways at different times in history. His genealogical method seeks to trace these correlative changes via quite unusual stints of archival work.⁵¹ Thus, the thrust of Foucault's practice of genealogy was to "incite the experience of discord or discrepancy

⁴⁶ *The Foucault Reader* 77.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 80.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974) 168.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984) 880–81, cited in Ernst Behler, *Confrontations: Derrida/Nietzsche/Heidegger*, trans. S. Taubeneck (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ., 1991) 84. Behler is one of the clearest and most reliable interpreters of deconstructive and genealogical postmodernism in light of Nietzsche and Heidegger.

⁵¹ Compare Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977); also *The History of Sexuality 1: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978).

between the social construction of self, truth, and rationality and that which does not fit neatly within these folds."⁵²

Summary

The program of deconstruction and genealogical strategies is one of distantiating and defamiliarization as a way of enacting a responsibility for otherness. This postmodern program thus entails championing plurality, difference, changeableness, instability, and lack of hierarchy. All this is based on the Nietzsche-instilled recognition of how much social (technological, economic, and political) and cultural set-ups are ultimately conventional, and so fallible, precarious, and always revisable. The net effect of all this, of course, can be an extreme relativism and an actual fostering of nihilist tendencies. I have chosen not to emphasize this, however, because leading interpreters like Norris on Derrida and Bernauer on Foucault insist that these philosophers' final intent is ethical. Perhaps we need to place the efforts of deconstructivist-genealogical postmodernism in the context of Lonergan's suggestion, in his lectures on the philosophy of education,⁵³ that Marx and Nietzsche expressed a more profound and effectual appreciation of the sinfulness of modern social and cultural structures than their Christian contemporaries had done.

But what is the point of this overriding ethical intent? The brief answer is: concern for the other. But we must understand by this not just—or even mainly—in the sense of other people, but in the more abstract sense of what is otherwise. Thus the heart of the postmodern protest on the part of deconstruction and genealogy is the relationship of contingency to an ultimately unlimited plurality of meanings and values, and therefore to many possible concrete solutions to the problem of human living.

LONERGAN AND CONTINGENCY

Among Christian theologians, one of the greatest tests for modern theology has been that of coming adequately to terms with what the rationalist German and Jewish philosopher Gotthold Lessing formulated as the "ghastly abyss" between necessity and contingency, especially the accidental character of history both sacred and profane. Per-

⁵² William Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory* 12 (May 1984) 365–76, at 368.

⁵³ In the summer of 1959 Lonergan directed an Institute on the Philosophy of Education at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, the transcripts of whose lectures have circulated in the form of a typescript available at all Lonergan Centers. This will eventually appear, under the title *Topics in Education*, in *The Collected Works* being published by University of Toronto Press.

haps the typical Protestant temptation in reaching a solution has been to lean in the direction of a historicism whose rejection of dogma includes the rejection of the intelligibility of the Word of God as true. In reaction, the typical Catholic temptation has been an ahistorical orthodoxy which cannot take the relativities of history seriously. Neither side is capable of handling contingency in a way that does justice to the actual historicity of Christian meanings and values. As a result, the contemporary climate of opinion in theology is dominated by what Anglican theologian Lesslie Newbigin has called "agnostic pluralism" and "fundamentalist sectarianism."⁵⁴

This is the place not to expound Lonergan's thought on contingency, but to mention several contexts relevant to deconstructivist and genealogical postmodernism's concerns. In the measure that those concerns are legitimate, how can they be taken seriously without requiring theologians to leap headlong into Lessing's "ghastly abyss" by adopting the so-called New Historicism?

Contingency and the Virtually Unconditioned

We might begin by saying that the deconstructivist and genealogical postmodernism rejects wholesale Aristotle's conception of knowledge in accord with the logical ideal of apodictic truth. For Aristotle science, or *epistēmē*, in the most proper sense is knowledge of things through their necessary causes. "Necessity" here entails a note of absoluteness untainted by any possibility of being otherwise. Accordingly, if the relationships among terms in a strictly scientific definition were to meet the purest requirements of the Aristotelian ideal of *apodeixis*, they would express intelligible connections among things that simply had to be such-and-such a way and could not be otherwise. Where the deconstructivist or genealogical postmodernist revels almost to the point of vertigo in the aleatory possibilities of being otherwise, most of the philosophical and theological tradition has identified the fulfillment of (or at least approximation to) Aristotle's logical ideal of knowledge as the only rational alternative to relativism and nihilism.

But as Lonergan has insisted, that logical ideal of knowledge is so exorbitant that it excludes the possibility of empirical science. Indeed, Aristotle's recognition that all terrestrial reality is penetrated by contingency led him to deny the possibility of a science of earthly causes or of history, since for him science properly so called regards only necessities.

In contrast, Lonergan from his earliest theological publications

⁵⁴ *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

pointed out how Thomas Aquinas's breakthrough to divine transcendence brought with it a recognition that divine action through infinite understanding was beyond both necessity and contingency.⁵⁵ Moreover, because divine revelation is integrally concerned with a concrete world process which is made up of realities that occur contingently, and which therefore not only might not have happened but also might have been otherwise, Aquinas proposed as a legitimate goal of theological science the attainment of *rationes convenientiae* which would explain the matter-of-fact intelligibility of merely accidental or contingent matters such as creation, fall, redemption, and revelation. These aspects of Thomist teaching tended, however, to be disregarded by decadent scholasticism's overweening preoccupation with the certainties and necessities of *Konklusionstheologie*. Can we reject such a theology and its illegitimate preoccupations without falling into relativism?

For Lonergan the intelligible connections between the scientific terms which express explanations of accidental or contingent realities have a necessity about them which is not absolute but only hypothetical: if A, then B; but A, therefore B. The intelligible, if-then link between terms A and B is conditioned: if the conditions for A obtain, then B exists or occurs. For modern empirical science, according to Lonergan, such hypothetical necessity is the goal of classical scientific method. Thus, classical method reveals as many instances of "If A, then B" as it can; while statistical method discloses how often those instances actually happen.⁵⁶ Whenever such classical or statistical intelligibilities are verified, Lonergan calls them *virtually* unconditioned.⁵⁷ This is to distinguish the kind of intelligible reality proper to created nature (which, both as a whole and in its detailed particulars, not only did not have to be as it is, and so could have been otherwise, but also did not have to be at all) from the only intelligible reality which is absolutely necessary and hence beyond the contingency and necessity of created nature—God, who is *formally* unconditioned.

⁵⁵ We are speaking of the so-called "*Gratia Operans* articles," a recasting of Lonergan's doctoral dissertation for the Gregorian University published originally in *Theological Studies* ("St. Thomas' Thought on *Gratia Operans*," *TS* 2 [1941] 289–324; 3 (1942) 68–88; 375–402; 533–578) and republished as *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. J. P. Burns (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971).

⁵⁶ *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 35–53 on classical heuristic structures; 53–62 on statistical heuristic structures; 78–83 on classical and statistical laws; and 107–39 on the complementarity of classical and statistical investigations.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 280–81; 662–63.

Lonerган's highlighting the centrality of contingency for human judgment in terms of the distinction between the formally and the virtually unconditioned does take postmodern concerns seriously. In terms of this distinction every event, with the exception of the infinite and unconditional act of understanding love which is God, is conditional and conditioned.⁵⁸ Only the formally unconditioned has no conditions whatsoever; the virtually unconditioned has conditions that happen to be fulfilled, but their fulfillment may or may not happen. Correspondingly, every human judgment itself is an instance of the virtually unconditioned. So our human judgments possess that odd combination of normativity, fallibility, and possible revisability that distinguishes Lonergan's idea of the absoluteness proper to acts of judgment from both fallibilists' and the dogmatic naive realists' ideas.⁵⁹

In contrast, deconstructivists and genealogists use their awareness of the contingency besetting the remote and the proximate contexts or grounds for judgment to deny judgment any absoluteness whatsoever. Their different versions of conventionalism lead them to advocate what amounts to agnostic pluralism. They enjoy carrying the day against fundamentalist sectarians, whose style of being concerned for the truth habitually excludes alternative approaches, overlooks the possible need for any correction and revision of their judgments, and practically rejects the possibility of honest disagreement. But in the posture of sensitivity to otherness and difference that goes together with agnostic pluralism, radical postmodernists fail to come to terms with the way in which it takes correct judgments adequately (if never exhaustively) to come to terms with the other as other. As Lonergan so eloquently put it:

Condemnation of objectivity induces, not a merely incidental blindness in one's vision, but a radical undermining of authentic human existence. . . . It is quite true that the subject communicates not by saying what he knows but by showing what he is, and it is no less true that subjects are confronted with themselves more effectively by being confronted with others than by solitary introspection. But such facts by themselves only ground a technique for managing people; and managing people is not treating them as persons. To treat them as persons one must know and one must invite them to know. A real exclusion of objective knowing, so far from promoting, only destroys personalist values.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid. 659, 670.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: "The Notion of Judgment" 271–78; "Reflective Understanding" 279–316; "The Notion of Objectivity" 375–84.

⁶⁰ Lonergan, "Cognitive Structure," in *Collection* 221–39, at 238–39.

Contingency and the Nonsystematic

In relation to the contingency of both knowing and the known, what the deconstructive and genealogical approaches have a keen sense of is the limitations of any claims concerning regularity (or classical intelligibility). They subversively suggest that the closure such classical formulations entail (i.e. defining *omni et soli*) is based in the final analysis not on any correspondence between intelligence and reality, but on an arbitrary decision to privilege one metaphorical expression over others. But they also possess an affinity for Aristotle's insight that (as Lonergan once put it) "events happened contingently because there was no cause to which they could be reduced except prime matter, and prime matter was not a determinate cause."⁶¹ Indeed, Derrida's "différance" seems to function like Aristotle's *hylē* or perhaps Lonergan's "empirical residue,"⁶² although its function stands outside the context of overall intelligibility.

Admittedly, it is salutary to have a feel for what Lonergan has called "the nonsystematic character of material multiplicity, continuity, and frequency."⁶³ But if this instinct for the nonsystematic becomes a basis for overlooking statistical, genetic, and dialectical methods, as well as for just debunking all classical intelligibility, it is not really taking contingency seriously. It is just glorifying the aleatory. Then the other can only be perceived as other in its punctual evanescence. This sort of acknowledgment can be exquisitely witty or filled with pathos, but isn't it also a rejection of intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility in one's life and a failure to be faithful to the other?

The brilliant sensitivity for disjunctions, slippages, and the discontinuous in general can also be used as an excuse for not properly acknowledging higher viewpoints that emerge inasmuch as the mind comes to terms with discontinuities and leaps in being which are not explicable in terms of the logical expansion of the lower viewpoints.⁶⁴ In contrast, Lonergan explains how diverse classical higher viewpoints are related intelligibly but not logically; and how statistical methods are complementary to classical, as we gradually come to understand concrete states, trends, groups, and populations of beings. If the other happens to be an instance of "systems on the move," it does no service to reduce the intelligibility proper to genetic method into simply an-

⁶¹ *Grace and Freedom* 79.

⁶² *Insight* 25–32.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 618.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 13–14, where arithmetic and algebra are compared as lower and higher viewpoints; for other instances, chemistry's basic terms and relations are not just a subset of the basic terms and relations of physics, nor are biology's deducible from those of chemistry, and so on.

other case of classical intelligibility, thereby obviating intelligible accounts of the continuity-in-discontinuity involved in dynamics of development.⁶⁵ Similarly, extraordinary alertness to the aspects of dissonance, discord, and discrepancy in our moral lives cannot substitute for a dialectical analysis in Lonergan's sense which would confront the abyss of the absurd in the universe, and yet still be open to being surprised by joy.⁶⁶

Contingency and Understanding

Even prior to judgment, the act of direct understanding is fraught with contingency.⁶⁷ In the movement from potency into act, intelligence is marked by multiple dependencies. Most obviously, intelligence depends upon (i.e. is conditioned by and conditions) sense perception. How attentive are we? This is not something that can be taken for granted. Aside from the biases causing selective inattention to different areas of possible inquiry, there is the sheer historicity of the lower manifolds of the sensing subject. Some people just see or hear less well than others. But there is also the conditioning of the psyche with its feelings and images. Since insight is into, or occurs in, data represented through feeling-laden images, it can rightly be spoken of as "bubbling up" in a person's psyche. But understanding is also dependent upon the asking of questions. What kinds of questions a person is liable to ask depends on all sorts of internal and external conditions. Above all it is important to acknowledge that all the acts of consciousness except decision are not human *actions* in the ordinary sense, but operations. They occur *to* one in a way that is irreducible to one's own doing.

Therefore, the direct act of understanding or insight, the reflective act of understanding that checks the evidence, and the responsible act of understanding that follows on questions for deliberation⁶⁸ are similarly fraught with contingency, if not more so. And so the Faustian image of Enlightenment reason as masterfully disposing of an instrument is demolished. But we cannot go into this now.

Contingency and Language

As we have seen, the deconstructivist and genealogical postmodernists delight in the possibilities of intervention, interruption, and ex-

⁶⁵ Ibid. 461, 458–83 on genetic method.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 484–86, 685 on dialectical method; 607 on dialectic as method in ethics; 632–33 on the dialectical manifold as requiring a higher integration.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 3–33 on the direct act of understanding or insight.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 609–10 on practical insight and reflection.

plosive laughter provided by the conventionality of language. Their brilliance in exploiting what Husserl called *sedimentation* (namely, the possibility of detaching expressions from acts of meaning or from referentiality) and in making capital on Nietzsche's insights into the metaphoricity of linguistic conventions is spellbinding. But it is one thing to exploit these aspects of language by playing with the seemingly endless polyvalence of conventional signs as disclosive of worlds of meaning, and by thinking through the many implications of what Wittgenstein called language games.⁶⁹ It is quite another to take the position which Lyotard speaks of as "just gaming."⁷⁰ This involves two things: (1) debunking any link between immanent acts of meaning in direct, reflective, and responsible acts of understanding and their respective terms of expression;⁷¹ and (2) rejecting any possible relevance of reference.⁷²

Here it is important to recall that Lonergan's analysis of inner word⁷³ does not deny the role played by language in perception and in imagination leading up to insight.⁷⁴ Nor does he deny the role of available and to-be-invented language when it comes to using one's own understanding of some matter to guide one in articulating and formulating just what it was that one had come to understand, prescinding from all that is irrelevant or adventitious.⁷⁵ Nor, again, does he fail to note how, when the realization that our understanding of something is only possibly relevant prompts us to check that hunch or guess or hypothesis out, we set out to verify not simply insights, but insights formulated in language or symbolic formulae of some kind.

Nevertheless Lonergan refuses to use this full-blown acknowledgment of the role of language in our understanding, verifying, and deliberating to deny the fact that we understand and make limited judgments of fact and value that are achievements of intentional and cognitive and real self-transcendence.⁷⁶ He insists that as intelligent,

⁶⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

⁷⁰ Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Vlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1985).

⁷¹ *Insight* 568–73.

⁷² Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 81–85 on realms of meaning.

⁷³ Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. D. B. Burrell (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Univ., 1967) 1–11, 151–53, 155.

⁷⁴ *Method in Theology* 70–73 on linguistic meaning; 92 on linguistic process; 88, 97 on linguistic feedback.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 88, 97.

⁷⁶ On self-transcendence as intentional, cognitive, and real, see Lonergan, "The Re-

reasonable, and responsible, we finite human beings use language to get beyond ourselves in knowing reality and in transforming it. This in no way occludes all the ways in which it is also true to say that language uses us perhaps even more than we use it. But by being more attuned to the way the structure and dynamisms of consciousness mutually "horizon" language, we may be more responsible and care-full in our utterances and actions.

Contingency and Interpretation

The deconstructivist-genealogical view, in which we are used by language so that we chiefly become its instrument in the production of endless texts as interpretations and commentaries as texts, leads thinkers like Derrida and Foucault to install mirrors in between all signifiers, signs, and signifieds in the construction of an anti-hermeneutical theory of interpretation. Any attempts to talk about realities are regarded as mistakes at best, or as masks for just talk about talk, or as power moves disguised as persuasion. In other words, the contingencies besetting language usage by way of background cultural conventions and social practices render any subject's putative interpretation the effect of an inscription by some force or forces outside his or her control. Once again, this can give rise to an incredible indeterminacy in the deciphering of codes. The fertility of deconstructive-genealogical postmoderns in coming up with alternative interpretations and alternative plausible contextualizations for what to the less sophisticated scholar might appear a more straightforward matter is truly astonishing. They are maestros of the possibly productive misunderstanding.

With such anti-hermeneutical theories of interpretation, Lonergan would agree, interpretation is not a simple, no-nonsense, intuitive affair.⁷⁷ Rather, as he wrote in the context of a controversy with typical scholastic methods of interpretation:

Logically, the interpretation of a writer is a matter of formulating an hypothesis, working out its presuppositions and its implications, and verifying in the text the hypothesis itself, and the implications. Deductions of what a writer must have meant are just so much fancy; in reality they are deductions from the hypothesis assumed by the interpreter; and whether that hypothesis is

sponse of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the World," in *A Second Collection*, ed. W. Ryan and B. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 165–87, at 166–70.

⁷⁷ For Lonergan on interpretation the basic texts are *Insight*: "The Truth of Interpretation" 562–94; and *Method in Theology*: "Interpretation" 153–73; "History" 175–96; and "History and Historians" 197–234.

correct can be determined only with a probability, a probability that increases only with the extent and variety of the verification.⁷⁸

If, in the process of interpretation, the only grounds for certainty about any but the most obvious negative conclusions would be the ability to show that one had considered every possible alternative interpretation and had demonstrated that all but one alternative was incorrect, a great opening would be left, through which the person with a deconstructivist or genealogical bent can march with an often uncanny capacity to conceive of any number of possibly relevant alternative interpretations of a given text. Such creativity and imaginativeness can be productive. If, as Lonergan too would insist, the "principle of the empty head" is sterile in interpreting, it does follow that interpretation will be enriched by the exploration of many alternatives. But a law of diminishing returns would also seem to go into effect at the point where the probabilities of verifying possibly relevant proposals start to diminish apace, or when such further interpretations really start to become trivial or frivolous. Doesn't the art of interpretation begin at that point to turn into a glass-bead game for effete intellectuals?

Contingent Predication

The deconstructivist-genealogical complaint about having an origin and end or a center of the universe is based in part on the obviousness of a contingency about terrestrial events that flies in the face of claims to certainty based upon necessary causes. Since they are incompatible with contingency, such strong necessity and certitude claims would also exclude freedom and the need to risk and dare. Then, too, illusionary necessities and certitudes are employed to frame the so-called "master-" or "meta-narratives" used to legitimate people and forces who would impose disciplines upon us, depriving us of the liberty to be ourselves, to be different, to include others, and so forth.⁷⁹

Lonergan's idea of contingent predication is based on the fact that whenever we make assertions about any matter of fact, all that is required for the truthfulness of the predication is that the conditions for the existence or occurrence of its referent be fulfilled, even though they might not have been fulfilled, and even though things might have been otherwise. By analogy, contingent predications are also made

⁷⁸ Lonergan, "On God and Secondary Causes," in *Collection 62* (emphasis mine).

⁷⁹ See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1984).

about God, whether on the basis of immanently generated judgments or on the basis of judgments based on the assent of faith.⁸⁰

According to the analogy of contingent predication,⁸¹ the glorious thing about the created order of this universe is the fact that it does not have to exist at all, and does not have to be as it is. That is to say, once we make the breakthrough to an explanatory conception of divine transcendence as utterly beyond necessity and contingency and completely unconditioned by space and time, it is proper to analogically understand and affirm that the infinitely loving, creative power is a mystery of freedom, who in knowing, willing, and bringing about the universe that exists is completely free. Note that this statement or predication about God is not necessary but utterly contingent. All that has to have occurred in order for this contingent predication to be true is the fulfillment of the conditions for the existence of any finite order of beings, conditioned either intrinsically or extrinsically by space and time.

What we do in the analogy of contingent predication, then, is to let God be a transcendent mystery. This means that God cannot function as a presence strictly comparable to any other presence in space and time, and that God cannot function as a center or fulcrum for managing the lives of people and things, as in what seems to be the post-structuralist reading of Christian narratives. Furthermore, according to the analogy of contingent predication, there is an absolute compatibility between free creation by a divinely transcendent creator, and emergent probability as the shape of the concrete, created world order.⁸² Moreover, because this creation and this emergently probable (not necessary) world order is constituted by such long times and great numbers of things, no surprise or miracle can be apodictically ruled out *a priori*.

Such an explanatory conception of creator and creation is in complete harmony with the best and noblest instincts of the deconstructive-genealogical postmodernist, especially in its admission that "there is in this universe a merely empirical residue that is unexplained."⁸³ Indeed it grounds precisely the magnificent diversity, strangeness, wonder, and surprise so deeply yet ambiguously appreciated by postmodernity's art and philosophy. In Lonergan's words, "the empirical residue grounds the manifold of the potential good and, in-

⁸⁰ *Insight* 703–18 on the distinction between knowledge as immanently generated and knowledge as belief; *Method in Theology* 118–19, 123–24 on the distinction of religious belief from faith.

⁸¹ *Insight* 661–68; *De Deo Trino II: Pars Systematica*, 3d rev. ed. (Rome: Gregorian Univ., 1964) 216–19.

⁸² *Insight* 665.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 663.

asmuch as it stands under world order, it possesses the value that accrues to the contingent through the reasonableness of the freedom of a completely wise and good being."⁸⁴

Contingency and Liberty

The freedom about which deconstructivist and genealogical post-moderns are concerned seems to be separate from any finality whatsoever. This notion of freedom is suspiciously like Sir Isaiah Berlin's idea of negative freedom. Negative freedom is "freedom *from*" as opposed to "freedom *to*": "Some portion of human existence must remain independent of social control"; "there ought to exist a certain minimum of personal freedom which must on no account be violated."⁸⁵ This judgment on these postmodernists seems to be borne out in Stephen K. White's interpretation of Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard as saying there are two options for human practical engagement: on the one hand, rationalization or total subordination to singularity-squashing master narratives purveyed by rationally purposive, bureaucratic regimes; on the other, countermodes with no rationale or goal except to unmask metanarratives and rationalization processes.⁸⁶

Where Lonergan agrees with deconstructivist and genealogical post-modernists' ideas about freedom is in understanding freedom as a case of contingency. But for Lonergan it is a "special kind."

It is contingency that arises, not from the empirical residue that grounds materiality and the non-systematic, but is in the order of the spirit, of intelligent grasp, rational reflection, and morally guided will. It has the twofold basis that its object is merely possibility and that its agent is contingent not only in his existence but also in the extension of his rational consciousness into rational self-consciousness. For it is one and the same act of willing that both decides in favour of the object or against it and that constitutes the subject as deciding reasonably or unreasonably, as succeeding or failing in the extension of rational consciousness into an effectively rational self-consciousness.⁸⁷

For the deconstructivist-genealogical approach, the only models for rational consciousness or rational self-consciousness are either the abstract self-reflection in the mode of Kantian or (via Kohlberg) Habermasian complete internalization and complete universalization of rules or the modern bourgeois or Romantic model of the self as subjecting itself to a dominant practice or what Lyotard calls a "phrase

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1958) 11, 46.

⁸⁶ Stephen K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1991) esp. 1-30, 55-94.

⁸⁷ *Insight* 619.

regime." Both of these models are dominated by the image of the unitary and controlling consciousness of the utilitarian or the expressive individualist discussed above. But they also fail to account for the more concrete and usual dimension of moral practice which, long after *In-sight*, Lonergan spoke of as development from above downwards.⁸⁸ While this dimension is perfectly compatible with the model of development from below upwards in which the order is that of experience, understanding, judgment of value, decision, and action, its order is different because it takes into account the role love plays in socialization, acculturation, and education, and hence in the genesis of the person's rational self-consciousness. And it shows how practice, even before it involves extending one's intelligence and rationality into the further phase of moral and existential consciousness, ordinarily has already involved being-in-love within some communal context.⁸⁹ Our relationships of love have already been transforming our feelings as intentional responses and thus bringing about all sorts of affective and cognitive effects in us through the examples, images, symbols, stories, and beliefs that spell out for us in a performative fashion the meanings and values that enframe our moral deliberations.

It can, of course, be the case that the stories dominated by utilitarian or expressive individualism specify our horizon of deliberation and discernment as a matter of fact; but those stories as accounts of human practice contradict the way moral action actually unfolds by way of our loves and as mediated by the narratives handed over to us as paradigmatic for living out our loves. This is true even in cases of alienated dependency and disoriented loving. Even for the disordered self-love of modern individualists, the surd is socially and culturally mediated.

Now the postmodernists want to replace the homogeneous and unified ego with a decentered, detotalized, heterogeneous self, capable of unmasking and resisting controlling narratives that would smother or extinguish the self's capacity ever to be otherwise. This is why, by demonstrating the conventionality and revisability of social and cultural schemes of recurrence, postmodernists are out to deconstruct the oppositions between normal and abnormal that serve to close down certain directions of thought and action in our deliberating upon proposals for action. But in this, as Stephen White agrees, they do not

⁸⁸ See, for instance, "Healing and Creating in History," in *A Third Collection* 100–109, at 106 on "two quite different kinds" of development: "from below upwards" and "from above downwards." This distinction becomes almost a commonplace for Lonergan in the post-*Method* essays published in *Third Collection*.

⁸⁹ For a pithy statement of this, see *Philosophy of God and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 58–59.

even get as far as "a radicalization of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*."⁹⁰ Never-ending oscillation between debunking conventionally accepted and enforced social practices and the disclosure of ever new and other fictions by which to live is not enough. "The postmodern theorist who models his or her self-understanding *exclusively* on the role of ceaselessly exposing otherness slides all too easily into the position of the ring master of otherness."⁹¹ To put the issue in rather Aristotelian terms, such theorizing as unrelenting hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the imputations of ideals that support our practical judgments does not yet furnish criteria for figuring out the difference between disordered self-love and right-ordered self-love.

Instead of dwelling further on the possible defects and lack of seriousness of the postmodernists, with all the relativist and nihilist implications of their thought, I would like to propose a completely different framework in which to think about free practice through the direction opened up by them. Let us note to begin with that this direction of postmodernist thought is in remarkable consonance with Aquinas's insight into the liberating character of prudential judgment in the context of the contingency of particular and concrete situations.⁹² Because in most practical situations "there are many ways to skin a cat," the more ways that occur to us of accomplishing some good in some situation that is inherently complicated or fraught with conflicts between quite choiceworthy courses of action, the more likely are we to hit upon the suitable course of action. By the same token, when we do at last hit the nail on the head, we feel a great weight lifted from our shoulders, and it is a glad relief.

Next, this direction of thought is also rather in the spirit of Lonergan's reflections regarding the practicality of the people on the spot for whom the insights into the concrete situations relevant to needed decisions can occur in a way that is not possible for others not so situated.⁹³

Furthermore, the postmodernists typically play off the rationalization of action in the mode of what Weber formulated as the ethics of consequences (*Verantwortungsethik*) against the distantiating, defamiliarizing strategies that render agents more sensitive to plurality, differences, instability, the dissolution of arbitrary hierarchies, and so

⁹⁰ *Political Philosophy and Postmodernism* 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² For a more complete delineation of themes in this paragraph, see Frederick E. Crowe, "Universal Norms and the Concrete 'Operabile' in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Sciences ecclésiastiques* 7 (1955) 114-49; 257-91.

⁹³ *Insight* 234-35 for the classic statement; also, "Prologomena to the Study of Religious Consciousness of Our Time," in *A Third Collection* 55-73, at 60-63.

forth, in order to heighten our responsiveness to the other. This motif is not just akin to Weber's delimitation of the ethics of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*); it can also remind us of Lonergan's contrast between a horizontal and a vertical exercise of liberty.⁹⁴ By the former we operate within an already established orientation to choose courses of action within some already understood and agreed upon horizon of meanings and values specified by some master narrative; by the latter we undergo a radical change of overall orientation in which a different, incommensurate or disproportionate horizon of meaning and value is specified by a new master narrative.⁹⁵

If we recontextualize the postmodernists' moral and aesthetic sense of responsiveness to otherness within Lonergan's framework, then the decentering, detotalizing, and becoming heterogeneous of the self can be reinterpreted as the basic and radical displacement of the subject that occurs most paradigmatically in religious conversion. Then the epitome of responsibility for the other is achieved when we fall in love with the "mystery of love and awe." The resultant religious differentiation of consciousness, Lonergan tells us,

begins with asceticism and culminates in mysticism. Both asceticism and mysticism, when genuine, have a common ground that was described by St. Paul when he exclaimed: "God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us" (Rom 5:5). That ground can bear fruit in a consciousness that lives in a world mediated by meaning. But it can also set up a different type of consciousness by withdrawing one from the world mediated by meaning into a cloud of unknowing. Then one is for God, belongs to him, gives oneself to him, not by using words, images, concepts, but in a silent, joyous, peaceful surrender to his initiative.⁹⁶

Hence, all the postmodernist highlighting of the inexhaustibly open-textured character of language and of what White calls the world-disclosing power of innovative linguistic expression,⁹⁷ can be reunderstood as the role played by beliefs in the light of faith as the "eyes of being-in-love."⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Method in Theology* 40, 122, 237–38, 240, 269.

⁹⁵ Compare Lonergan's references to Karl Rahner's interpretation of "consolation without a cause" in the latter's commentary on Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, especially Chapter 3: "The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola" [New York: Herder & Herder, 1964] 84–170); for example, in *Method in Theology* 106; and *A Third Collection* 201 nn. 47–48, and 249 n. 2.

⁹⁶ *A Third Collection* 242.

⁹⁷ White, *Political Philosophy and Postmodernism* 21.

⁹⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 115–19.

Like the deconstructivist and genealogical postmodernists, Loneragan too is concerned with the dismantling of the truncated utilitarian, the immanentist romantic-expressivist, and the exploited and alienated subject. But for him this dismantling happens adequately only when by receiving the gift of God's love we enter into a horizon that corresponds with what is ultimately a friendly universe.⁹⁹ The term "friendly" here, and the stories of faith that communicate its meaning concretely, have nothing to do with Lyotard's "regimes of truth" that are just legitimating masks for powers who know what is good for us and wish to "force us to be free." Instead I am hinting at a context of God's glory by which the postmodernist taste for excess, extravagance, and intensity is made good in the light of God's astonishing desire for the flourishing of each and every person and thing in creation in all their specificity and particularity.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

My claim has been not just that the postmodern concern for the other, but even that the radical decentering of the modern subject carried out in various ways by the hermeneutic, deconstructivist, and genealogical orientations in contemporary philosophy has to be taken utterly seriously by Christian theology. The importance of this postmodern concern is underlined by the most radical movement in contemporary theology—liberation and political theology. Indeed, the evangelical call to concern for the victims is today being enlarged to embrace not only human, but also subhuman nature: justice and love for the neighbor, we realize today, cannot be separated from care for the natural ecology proper to genuine human thriving. Neither utilitarian individualism nor expressive individualism—the regimes in which the modern subject holds the primacy—are adequate to the contemporary demands for justice and love. Hence, the relevance for Christian theology of the hermeneutic, deconstructivist, and genealogical strategies for overcoming modern subjectivism for the sake of respecting and loving the other of nature, of fellow human beings, and of God.

Nevertheless, my argument has been that the hermeneutical strategy of Gadamer is too undifferentiated, while the deconstructivist and genealogical strategies are too dialectically flawed, to offer the theoretical and systematic basis for making good the requirements of contemporary liberation and political theology. As Jürgen Habermas from

⁹⁹ Ibid. 117, 290.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 116–17.

the left and Leo Strauss from the right have both argued, Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy is so general that it can all too easily devolve into an insufficiently critical traditionalism. And as we have suggested above, the deconstructivist and genealogical strategies as they stand easily justify agnostic pluralism, a posture also not critical enough for contemporary theology's needs. The alternative for those longing to recover the pristine radicality of the Christian gospel to everyday practice, of course, cannot be any form of restoration theology or of ahistorical orthodoxy which fosters fundamentalist sectarianism. But finding an adequate alternative is quite difficult, especially for us theologians who ourselves are often infected with the many different versions of Enlightenment rationalism or Romantic expressivism that dominate the cultural climate today.

This article has tried to show how Lonergan's thought takes seriously most of the major concerns of hermeneutic, deconstructivist, and genealogical postmodernism. When Lonergan thematized his breakthrough to the subject as subject and to consciousness as experience in terms of the self-appropriation of our rational self-consciousnesses (to use the language of *Insight*) and of intellectual conversion (to use the language of *Method in Theology*), and when he explicated the radical displacement from ourselves as the center of the universe entailed by the intellectualist apprehension and affirmation of an utterly transcendent God beyond necessity and contingency, oddly enough he was carrying forward a postmodern program. All the themes of displacement of the subject as the primary object, of the fragility of consciousness and the contingency of the universe, of the constitutive role of freedom, of the radical historicity of meaning and value receive systematic treatment in terms of the structure and dynamism of finite human consciousness as gift and as precarious achievement.

But Lonergan's explication of postmodernist themes can avoid both agnostic pluralism and fundamentalist sectarianism. I say "can avoid" advisedly, since those claiming to have appropriated Lonergan's thought are not immune to utilitarian and expressivist individualism, either. How many of us know students of Lonergan who use Lonergan's panoply of terms and relations to serve the power goals either of individuals or of groups? How many of us have experiences of so-called Lonergan people who assume the romantic pose of having worked so much harder, or suffered so much more, or become so much deeper than everyone else? Perhaps postmodernism under hermeneutic, deconstructivist, and genealogical auspices can offer an astringent for Lonergan scholars who may have missed the radically postmodern challenge posed by Lonergan's thought.

Conversely, my guess is that, precisely because it shares postmodern concerns so profoundly, only Lonergan's thought as grounded in the fragility of consciousness offers an immanent critique of the postmodernist strategies discussed in this article. Readers will naturally judge for themselves whether my argument and the suggested lines of immanent critique have been successful.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ A major postmodernist theme not addressed above, however, regards confronting the objective surd of individual and structural evil. According to Stephen K. White and Thomas L. Pangle, the heading under which postmodern thinkers like Lyotard and Derrida treat the human response to pain, danger, and terror involves a transformation of the traditional idea of the sublime (Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Era* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1992] 23–29). Lonergan, of course, approaches this issue from the standpoint of the mystery of love and awe with its specifically Christian historical intelligibility of the law of the cross, again, in a way that takes the postmodern sublime seriously without just euphemizing them. But that is so large a theme that it will call for another article.