CRISIS AND DISCERNMENT

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During a Jesuit institute held February 6-8, 1970, at St. Louis, Bernard Lonergan said: "A principal function of the Society of Jesus, in its original conception, was to meet crises." One historical example was the crisis brought about by the serene complacency of the classical culture in the Renaissance age that no longer saw any need for further progress. It was a crisis, for although there were opportunities for progress, there were also dangers of decline. Ignatian response to this crisis consisted in discerning the need for change and in organizing a community of discerning individuals to effect the necessary adaptations.

... the Jesuits worked in hospitals taught catechism, preached, and dispensed the sacraments. There were voyages of exploration and the beginnings of colonization, and the Jesuits were in India, Malaya, Indonesia, Japan, China, and North and South America. There was the Reformation, and the Jesuits were eminent in the labors of the Counter-reformation. The renewal of Greek and Latin studies contained a threat of a revival of paganism, and the Jesuits became the schoolmasters of Europe.

If we can be proud of our predecessors, we must also note that they took on the coloring of their age and shared its limitations... It included a built-in incapacity to grasp the need for change and to effect the necessary adaptations...

Another example was the crisis that became visible in the decade following the Second Vatican Council. It was discerned by Lonergan to be in the area of "modernity, secularism, and self-

2. Ibid. 182.
d destructiveness generally associated with technology. Strategies for dealing with this crisis have not yet been worked out, and Lonergan’s discernment is limited to some general suggestions:

First, any such strategy is not a conclusion from premises but a creative project emerging from a thorough understanding of a situation and a grasp of just what can be done about it. Secondly, it is not some static project set forth once and for all but, on the contrary, it is an ongoing project constantly revised in the light of the feedback from its implementation. Thirdly, it is not some single, ongoing project but a set of them, constantly reported to some central clearinghouse with the two-fold function (1) of drawing attention to conflicts between separate parts and (2) of keeping all parts informed both of what has been achieved elsewhere and what has been tried and found wanting. Finally, all such projects must be in Christ Jesus, the work of those who take up their cross daily, who live by the Spirit in the Word, who consecrate themselves to loving, who banish all tendencies to hatred, reviling, destroying.4

These general suggestions are like an outline of communal discernment, and so furnish an opportunity to work them out in some detail on the basis of particular insights arising in various contexts of Lonergan’s writings. At present, many scholars all over the world are engaged in some exercise of communal discernment in search of ways of effecting the adaptations necessary to meet the crisis of self-destructiveness of the world of the twentieth century. Lonergan’s contributions may here be taken as those of a facilitator in this communal exercise.

In describing the modern crisis with three words “modernity, secularism and self-destructiveness,” Lonergan is equivalently pointing to the rejection of past achievements and to the rejection of sacrality as the tendencies that lead to self-destruction. The achievements of antiquity are rejected as inconsequential because they have allegedly been surpassed by technological progress. Religious attitudes are discarded because they are not seen as empirical. And yet, the empirical technologies underlying the actual situation in modern industries are producing instruments of economic dysfunctions and ecological disasters that can easily become genocidal.

3. Ibid. 183.
4. Ibid. 187.
Genocidal tendencies have now become obvious even to the technologists themselves. In this crisis, the need for discernment is universally felt, but this has not been systematically undertaken, probably because discerner in the technological sector are not familiar with any method or "rules" of discernment.

The Ignatian method of discernment is here proposed. However, there is need of restructuring its terminology. One way is by using the set of terms and relations found in *Method in Theology*. In this book, Lonergan has taken pains to articulate a system that sublates the cognitional process in the modern sciences discussed in his previous book *Insight*. If the restructuring is successful, the Ignatian rules of discernment become meaningful to technological minds and may facilitate their exercise in search of appropriate responses to the present crisis.

METONYMIC CORRESPONDENCES

A start is here made by assuming four pairs of correspondences: the Ignatian term "will of God" corresponds to Lonergan's "human good"; Ignatian "inordinate attachment" corresponds to "bias"; the "spirits" to be discerned correspond to "functions of meaning"; and these spirits are "good" or "evil" depending upon the presence or absence of "authenticity." These correspondences are not reductionist but metonymic.

The figurative language of metonymy denotes one thing with something else associated with it or suggested by it. For example, angelic spirits are denoted by their function of messengers (from the Greek *angelos*) or communicators of meanings. Meanings are communicated intuitively in dream symbols or intellectually through conscious experience; communicated meanings subsequently emerge and take concrete form through empirical discovery.

On the road to such discovery is the "systems approach" being considered in technological circles, e.g. as described by Fritjof

Capra in his book *The Turning Point.* This approach considers all scholarly specializations as analogically interrelated under one conceptual system and may here be taken as the content of an exercise of discernment; however, our concern here is not with content but with method. Method is a human response to the divine gift of an eschatological faith that envisions a world of justice and peace, and may be understood by conducting a “thought experiment” and observing Ignatian rules of discernment operative in a concrete situation.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: PART ONE

This thought experiment projects an exercise of communal discernment in a community of technologists. Even if they are not professedly seeking God’s will, even if they believe themselves to be atheists or agnostics, their unexamined concern for philanthropic undertakings is hardly different from — and may be a preamble to — a religious concern for the human good. This concern would be frustrated by genocidal schemes. In turn, the genocidal schemes are conditioned by bias, whether individual bias or group bias or general bias. Bias is flagrantly unscientific. It is symptomatic of human unauthenticity.

Bias is any arbitrary restriction on the desire to understand the human good in all its concrete totality. The human good is so vast that the labor of understanding it has to be divided into many fields and subjects of specialization. But this division of labor, although ultimately aimed at the human good, is now seen to be failing in its ultimate aim. Why? Is it because to division of labor there is added separation or even conflict of specializations?

For example, specialists in economics may choose to ignore the insights of specialists in psychology and anthropology. Economists deliberating about an economic decision may refuse to reflect on the psychological processes operative in their own act of deliberating. At best, they may relegate psychological insights to

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8. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1985) 285-332. Capra’s implicit parallelism between physics and the human sciences is open to epistemological criticism in that some important differences are ignored. However, this does not affect the thought experiment being proposed here.
“behavioral constraints” to which mathematical coefficients are assigned arbitrarily, i.e. without objectivity. Thus the ensuing decision would not be free of bias.

If the deliberation is to be free of bias, it will not arbitrarily repress empirical data that have led anthropologists to the concept of synergy. Although this is also not capable of mathematical quantification, it can at least distinguish between two kinds of behavior: high-synergy behavior and low-synergy behavior.

I shall speak of cultures with low synergy where the social structure provides for acts which are mutually opposed and counteractive, and cultures with high synergy where it provides for acts which are mutually reinforcing. . . . I spoke of societies with high social synergy where their institutions insure mutual advantage from their undertakings, and societies with low social synergy where the advantage of one individual becomes a victory over another, and the majority who are not victorious must shift as they can.9

The high-synergy trait was observed among the Zuni, the Arapesh, the Dakotas and the Northern Blackfoot tribes. The low-synergy trait was observed among the Chuckchee, the Ojibwa, the Dobu and the Kwakiutl tribes. Among the former, ownership of an automobile, a dwelling, or even a gold mine, involved obligations of sharing and hospitality. Among the latter, wealth was an occasion for jealousy, envy and enmity. It was a contrast between an economy of generous sharing and an economy of competitive greed.

UNAUTHENTICITY

To repress these empirical data in the deliberations of transnational economists is to allow bias to promote genocidal tendencies. It is to prevent the emergence of meanings that promote the human good. It is to be unauthentic. In Ignatian terms, it is to follow the movements of the evil spirit.

Unauthenticity in the economics profession was very much in the mind of perceptive economists. For example, Schumacher's best-selling book Small is Beautiful bears the subtitle "Econom-

ics as if People Mattered." The use of the subjunctive mood is indicative of the unauthenticity of an economic system that merely maximizes the profits of the biggest investors instead of raising the standard of living of the majority of the people. Likewise, Milton Friedman, addressing the American Economic Association in 1972, said with contrite frankness: "I believe that we economists have done vast harm — to society at large and to our profession in particular — by claiming more than we can deliver." The language of financial engineering, expressed in graphs and charts and esoteric equations, does give an exaggerated impression of being as systematic as engineers. But system is precisely what is deficient. As pointed out by Capra, it lacks a holistic system that attends to all empirical data, including those from other empirical sciences like psychology and anthropology, including data on high-synergy behavior.

Friedman, Schumacher and a few others are painfully aware of the unauthenticity of the economic tradition inherited by modern financiers. This tradition arbitrarily assumes that low-synergy behavior is the only behavior that can be expected of all the sectors of world economy. The assumption is partly verified by the frequency of trade wars erupting into military wars that include arsenals of chemical and nuclear weapons of genocide. The assumption further amplifies the low-synergy behavior of world populations with heavy investments in the armament industry.

COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

How can a discernment process identify this unauthenticity and discover its remedy? Ignatius and his contemporaries used a method of communal discernment when deliberating upon some major decision involving their religious community. Can this method be used in a non-religious community? If so, perhaps it may be taken at least as a starting model and some adaptations may be necessary. We here suppose a community of philanthropic participants who, even if they might believe themselves to be atheists or agnostics,

have been living out a *praxis* whose ultimate concern is the human good, and in this concern they wish to collaborate with like-minded people. Specifically, a community of economists who share the concerns of Friedman and Schumacher may be imagined in this exercise.

The original Ignatian model stresses the importance of prayer, gathering of evidence and confirmation. In choosing between decision A and decision B, each participant first betakes himself to prayer, and considers both the evidence that favors A and the evidence that favors B. Then all participants come together to present the evidence discovered in favor of decision A. After this presentation, all participants come together again to present evidence discovered in favor of decision B. These two separate presentations are followed by two prayerful discussions for weighing the evidence for A and then for B. A preliminary voting may or may not reveal a preponderance for either A or B but will make it easier for each individual prayerfully to determine a more definite viewpoint. (Notice the words "prayer," "prayerful" and "prayerfully" in this paragraph.)

Can anyone pray? Yes, but only through divine grace, whether explicit or implicit in one’s awareness. Divine grace is implied in the act of raising one’s heart and mind in an affirmation of one’s ultimate concern for the human good and of a desire for freedom from all bias. This is a divinely graced preamble to prayer, if not prayer itself. The process is mysterious and need not be reduced to an analytical problem that is needlessly complicated. More complicated in economic discernment is the weighing of evidence in favor of decision A (high-synergy) or decision B (low-synergy).

**WEIGHING EVIDENCE**

During the weighing of such evidence, the following questions may be asked: What are the main dysfunctions that presently afflict world economy? Can these dysfunctions be traced to expectations about the economic behavior of world populations? Do these expectations assume a preponderance of high-synergy behavior? Of low-synergy behavior? To what extent are these expectations due to feedback from previous expectations that may or may not have been self-fulfilling?
The original source of data on these two kinds of behavior were the researches on eight tribes of primitive Americans and yielded a 50-50 ratio of the two behavioral patterns. These empirical findings may now evoke further questions: Are these two patterns of behavior empirically verifiable in world population? Can cultural diffusion through education and media of mass communication facilitate the sharing of tribal values throughout the global village? Can this sharing be facilitated by the increasing mobility of world populations?

Recalling that our main aim is to clarify the Ignatian method of discernment, let us now assume that the discernment process is beginning to converge towards a near-unanimity in favor of assuming high-synergy behavior among all the sectors of world economy. Concretely, this means a consensus towards voluntarily dismantling oligarchic control of the pricing mechanisms such that world markets enjoy the "perfect competition" required by authentic democracy. Towards this end, a voluntary adaptation of the coefficients of consumption, investment and savings in all the stages of production, exchange and finance, becomes the next step of the discernment process.

This is a very difficult step, for it will involve an unpacking of insights similar to Lonergan's insights into macroeconomic circulation and Peter Burley's structuring of these insights along the lines of a Von Neumann growth model. A series of questions in deciding between A1 and A2 now becomes the next topic in the process of prayerful discernment.

Many more such questions can emerge in this phase of weighing evidence and may take some time for communal discernment to converge towards near-unanimity. However, even a minority opinion, if arrived at without bias, can include an attitude that "if the majority is so large, we fully agree."

**CONFIRMATION PHASE**

This phase of weighing evidence, although prayerful, is more of an analytic exercise of understanding and judgment. Distinct from

this phase is the confirmation phase and is a very important part of the discernment process. It involves a reflection of each individual participant on his experience of unanimity or non-unanimity and a sharing of his reflections face to face with all the other participants.

Authenticity is revealed in certain experiences. These may be "peak experiences" or "plateau experiences" that can accompany the awareness of unanimity in shared meanings. When deliberations about matters of ultimate concern for the human good lead to a felt consensus about the meaning of these matters, the participants feel satisfaction, serenity, joy in their unanimity. In Ignatian terms, they experience "consolation." Its absence signals unauthenticity of some sort.

Abraham Maslow\textsuperscript{13} distinguishes peak-experiences from plateau-experiences in that the latter are more serene, calm, voluntary, available almost at will, and somewhat casual, whereas the former have more of the element of emotion, shock, novelty. It is interesting to compare these with the Ignatian "consolation without a previous cause" and "consolation preceded by acts of intellect and will." The comparison does not reveal a one-to-one correspondence between the two vocabularies, but Maslow's terms are easier to recognize and can prepare the technological mind for a grasp of Ignatius' distinction.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: PART TWO

So much for the first part of our thought experiment. Its main purpose was to outline a program of communal discernment, and an example derived from economics was presented as an illustration. The illustration might be regarded merely as a best-case scenario and was largely imaginary. Even purely imaginary scenarios can be useful when the purpose of the thought experiment is not yet to gather data but initially to clarify a method of understanding them, judging them and making responsible decisions on them. This was a preliminary step.

The moment has come to extend our thought experiment to macroeconomic reality. It may be characterized as one of "mixed

\textsuperscript{13} Maslow, The Farther Reaches, 348.
synergy." Thus Maslow:

It must have occurred to you by now that our own society is one of mixed synergy. We have high-synergy and low-synergy institutions.

We have a wide pervasiveness of high energy in philanthropy, for instance, which does not occur in many other cultures at all. Our society is a very generous culture and frequently in a very nice, very secure way.

On the other hand, there are obviously institutions in our society which set us against each other, making us into rivals necessarily, which put us into a situation where we must scrap for a limited amount of goods. This is like the zero-sum game where one can win and the other must therefore lose.\(^{14}\)

In such a world situation, how would Lonergan apply the Ignatian method of discernment? Like Ignatius, he would begin with the subject and his interior experiences. Meanings emerging from these experiences and communicated to two or three others might reveal common meanings that constitute community. Such a community might include Friedman, Schumacher and others who share their common concern for a well-functioning macroeconomy, and a facilitator might ask them to attend to the empirical data of mixed synergy and then to proceed to the second transcendental operation of understanding them.

There is no dispute about the existence of such a community. But there can be dispute about its constituency. On the one hand, Friedman says: "Much of what is regarded as disagreement among economists comes about because so many people who are not economists — even though some of them may call themselves economists — write about economics."\(^{15}\) On the other hand, Schumacher in 1973 prefers to include Buddhist economists:

No one seems to think that a Buddhist way of life would call for Buddhist economics, just as the modern materialist way of life has brought forth modern economics.

Economists themselves, like most specialists, normally suffer from a kind of metaphysical blindness, assuming that theirs is a science of absolute and invariable truths, without any presuppositions. Some go as

\(^{14}\) Ibid. 207.

far as to claim that economic laws are as free from ‘metaphysics’ or ‘values’ as the law of gravitation.\textsuperscript{16}

This dispute falls under Lonergan’s functional specialty of dialectic whose aim is not to prove a position or refute counterpositions but to exhibit the diversity and to point to the evidence of its roots.\textsuperscript{17}

Diversity in this case is rooted in the need for field and subject specialization\textsuperscript{18} and the danger of over-specialization. Field and subject specializations are needed because the increasing amount of data and the multiplicity of academic departments make it very difficult for scholars to keep abreast of the whole movement or even a part of it. Intellectual inquiry, although unrestricted ideally, has to accept division of labor. Thus one highly specialized field of economics is econometrics or the study of the measurable aspects of economics. The mathematical language of econometrics is difficult to understand and can be accepted only on faith by most concerned people or totally ignored by others.

Because of the fragmenting tendency of field and departmental specializations, Lonergan, with the human good in mind, proposes “functional specialization.” This distinguishes and separates successive stages in the total process from data to results. Its importance lies in its presupposition that all the stages are functionally interdependent. When this presupposition is denied or ignored, there results over-specialization. In turn this results in destructive conflicts among all departmentalized specialists without exception, whether epistemologists or theologians, psychologists or mathematicians, sociologists or econometricians.

Constructive harmony within such a multi-lateral community of specialists who appreciate the value of intelligent inquiry will emerge from a common concern for the human good. When the members of such a community manage to appropriate this concern in their individual interiority, they will begin to transcend the biases of over-specialization and become authentically scientific. Facilitating this appropriation of interiority is the principal function of Lonergan’s \textit{Insight} and of this thought experiment on Igna-

\textsuperscript{16} Schumacher, \textit{Small is Beautiful}, 44.
\textsuperscript{17} Lonergan, \textit{Method}, 254.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 125.
tian discernment.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

A thought experiment has been outlined. If remains for the community of inquiring intelligence to carry out the experiment in actual face-to-face dialogue in the hope of confronting the present crisis of self-destructiveness through prayerful discernment. It may evoke consolation indicative of authenticity of the common meanings emerging from a successful experiment. On the other hand, human unauthenticity emerging from bias may lead to discouragement and desolation indicative of the failure of the experiment. The crisis of self-destructiveness intensifies.¹⁹

¹⁹. The failure of this "thought experiment" is predicted by those who "do not believe that this is how the world works in reality." In reality — they would claim — Ignatian discernment need not be tried in any experiment because it is bound to fail.