

**The Pivot Point between Recovering History and Creating the Future:
The Fruits of Lonergan's Transcendental Method
Montreal, Fall 2015**

Description:

In 1945, the first year that the Thomas More Institute offered courses to adult learners, Bernard Lonergan was one of TMI's first leaders offering a course titled, "*Thought and Reality*". The course was Lonergan's "testing ground" for a book he had in mind. Due to the tremendous success of the course and the reception to Lonergan's explorations as he laid them out in the course, Lonergan decided to move forward with the publication of a book on which the course was based: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Seventy years later, we wish to honour Lonergan's legacy by exploring the various ways Lonergan's work contributes to an understanding of the interpretation of history and how our interpretation shapes the way we move forward into the future. In this course we explore, the relevance of Lonergan's work in the world today, by going back into history, exploring the impact of historical consciousness on human understanding and how that might guide us in moving forward into the future.

The course will draw on three key Lonergan texts: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, *Method in Theology*, and *The Subject*. We will also draw on secondary readings to enhance the theme of individual classes.

Week One: Pivot points and the Need for Choice

Introduction to the idea of the pivot point, the difference between facing backward and facing forward, and the need for choosing among different options.

Method: chapter 5: Functional Specialties, pp. 125-145.

Week Two: Insights and Oversights, Progress and Decline

Focus on insights and oversights as essential for human progress and decline as we recover the past and set the foundations for the future at this pivotal point in history; understanding in an age of historical consciousness and the empirical sciences.

Insight: Introduction, pp. 11-24.

Method: Chapter 2, sections 6 & 7: "The Structure of the Human Good" and "Progress and Decline", pp. 47-55.

Week Three: Transdisciplinary Work in an Era of Specialization

The search for "global" understanding; the essence of transdisciplinary work; cognitive operations as the rock upon which a satisfactory epistemology may be determined and a sound metaphysics developed; clarifying the difference between recovering the past and setting the foundations as the individual carries the lessons of the past into the future.

Method: Chapter 1: "Method", pp. 3-25.

Method: Chapter 10, section 2: Conversions and Breakdowns, pp. 237-244.

Week Four: The Critical Decisive Role of the Subject

In the end, it is the individual—the subject—who decides what is to be learned from the past and what stance to take in the yet unknown and unknowable future. The development of the subject is the key at such pivot points, making the difference between insights and oversights.

The Subject (entire work), pp. 1-33.

Week Five: The Development of the Subject in Community

Individuals are not monads; people develop through their interactions with others. One interesting example of this is the Benedictine monastic tradition based on the Desert Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries, fleshed out with over 1,500 years of development, enhancement, and adaptations to changing historical traditions.

The Comeback: Chapter 1: “History Is Upon Us”, pp. 1-14..

An Unexciting Life: “Community in the Benedictine Rule”, pp. 173-184.

The Home We Build Together: Chapter 10, “A Time to Build”, pp. 229-240.

Insight: “Tension of Community” + “The Dialectic of Community”, pp. 239-244.

Week Six: Community glue—love and friendship

Understand per se is often dry, the end point of a dispassionate desire to know what is real, what is true. Communities are grounded in personal relationships where love and friendship unite people in complex webs of human interactions. Living in a pivot point involves the recovery of the emotional part of the subject in community so that the person is set free to follow the good.

Love and Friendship: Introduction: “The Fall of Eros”, pp. 13-35.

Method: Chapter 3: “Meaning”

Week Seven: Lonergan’s Understanding of Human Development

Communal life is essential for the development for individual human development, but how is this individual human development to play itself out?

Insight: Thing, Section 6: Species as Explanatory, pp. 287-292.

Topics in Education, “The Human Good as Developing Subject”, pp. 79-106.

Week Eight: Recovering the Past

Individuals and communities have the roots in the past, the result of many people interacting with each other as they face their own pivotal points in history. What past do we have to recover when facing our own pivotal point, given that our civilization is essential “Western” in outlook?

Lonergan: Third Collection: Healing and Creating in History, pp. 100-109.

Method: Chapter 9, section 5: “Perspectivism”, pp. 214-220.

From Dawn to Decadence: The Great Illusion, pp. 683-712.

Week Nine: Understanding Global Pivotal Points

What challenges do we now face, that requires us to make choice of who we were and who we want to be? Geopolitics provides an interesting context for understanding the conditions of the pivotal point itself.

Comparative Studies in Society and History, “Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East”, pp. 418-446.
It’s Not the End of the World: Chapter 5: “Rings of Power and the Remnants of the West”, pp. 69-79.
Dynamics of World History: Chapter 5 of Part One: “Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilization”, pp. 57-70.
Method: Chapter 8: “History”, pp. 175-196.

Week Ten: Reality and Delusion in the Course of History

A case study in the way in which the rationalizations of a drive for power and control highlight the pivot point need to understand delusions in the course of human history that we might want to avoid carrying over into the future.

The Ends of the Earth: Chapter 7: “The Still Point of the Turning World”, pp. 129-141.

The Dragons of Expectation, Chapters 1 “Heads above Water and Vice Versa” & 2 “Lemming Lore”, pp. 3-21.

The March of Folly: Chapter 1: Pursuit of Policy Contrary to Self-Interest, pp. 4-33.

Week Eleven: Lonergan’s Quest; Our Quest?

Facing the need for providing a base for understanding human understanding, in the face of historical consciousness, the emergence of the empirical sciences, and the existential demand for a higher viewpoint on what it means to be human; the individual’s search for a sound world mediated by meaning; the intellectual demands of our pivotal point in history.

Lonergan’s Quest: Section 5: “Struggling with history and reality before the war”, pp. 65-85; Section 13: “The Vision of the first beginning”, pp. 211-220; Section 18: “Finally beginning in the middle: common sense”, pp. 287-309.

“On the Notion of Value, Autobiography and Central Form”, draft work in progress.

Psychoanalysis in Times of Distress: pp. 13-26.

Week Twelve: Back to the Subject

Return to The Subject as the creative agent in history, especially during historical periods of fundamental institutional change.

The Subject (repeat of the full reading from week 4)

Bibliography

Bloom, Allan. *Love & Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993)

Barzun, Jacques. *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).

Casey, Michael. *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality* (Petersham, Massachusetts: St. Bede’s Publications, 2005)

- Conquest, Robert. *The Dragons of Expectation: Reality and Delusion in the Course of History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005)
- Dawson, Christopher. *Dynamics of World History* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002)
- Kaplan, Robert D. *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996)
- Kristeva, Julia. "Psychoanalysis in Times of Distress" in *Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture*, edited by Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow (Routledge, 1994), pp. 13-26
- Lonergan, J. F. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: Volume 3 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, University of Toronto Press, 1992)
- "Healing and Creating in History" in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J.* (New York: edited by Frederick E. Crowe, Paulist Press, 1985).
- *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971)
- "The Subject" in *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 69-86. Originally the Aquinas Lecture, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968)
- Mahmood, Saba. "Religious Freedom, *The Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15(2):418-446.
- Mathews, William, S.J. "On the Notion of Value, Autobiography and Central Form", a paper given at the Lonergan Workshop, June 2015 (draft work in progress)
- Sacks, Jonathan. *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (New York: Continuum, 2007)
- Saul, John Ralston. *The Comeback: How Aboriginals Are Reclaiming Power and Influence* (Toronto: Viking, 2014)
- Spengler (David P. Goldman). *It's Not the End of the World, It's Just the End of You: The Great Extinction of the Nations* (New York: RVP Publishers, 2011)
- Tuchman, Barbara W. *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984)