

Insight: Part II

Emergent Probability

Involvement with this series of workshops depends upon the completion of the workshops on *Insight: Elements*. Without this background much of these discussions will not make sense—or make sense only in a limited, constrained manner.

After the chapter on elements, Lonergan shifts to an investigation of the heuristic structure of the empirical sciences (chapters 2 through 5, and after exploring the intentionality of common sense intelligibility, 8). For our purposes, the key thing to direct our attention is Lonergan's shift to a higher perspective that combines the two primary streams of empirical investigations—classical and statistical—into one world view concerning world processes that incorporates the various elements laid out in chapter 1.

Although we will touch briefly on chapters 5 and 8 (space and time, things), our primary focus is on Lonergan's empirically verifiable understanding of world processes as emergent probability. In this we follow his presentation in *Insight*, now organized around a series of questions that hopefully will provide insights into the key elements leading to and grounding his proposed world view. These are:

1. The empirical sciences are highly dependent on mathematics to symbolize hard science theories. Why this should be so is a bit of a mystery, but still any understanding of the empirical sciences without an understanding of mathematics leaves the inquirer at the mercy of common sense distortions in their understanding. So the first question is: how do mathematical and empirical insights compare?
2. The next question has to do with clarifying the two basic heuristic structures used in the empirical sciences: classical and statistical. Since the world view of emergent probability combines both into a single higher perspective, we need to understand each as a separate form of investigation before we can combine them into a single unifying insight into world processes.
3. In chapter 3, Lonergan lays out the fundamental canons of any empirical method. We need to understand such canons for the simple reason that they set the boundaries for any acceptable empirical model of world processes. Lonergan's world view of emergent probability must fit within these canons.
4. Given these two streams of empirical inquiry, we need to ask the question: are they mutually opposed or in some way complementary? Knowing how in fact they complement each other leads us directly into Lonergan's notion of emergent probability that he clarifies by contrasting that with prior highly influential scientific world views.
5. There are two follow-up investigations that need to be carried out. The first is to clarify what is meant by a "thing" as opposed to a body (a new type of insight involving a gestalt). Unfortunately, any discussion concerning a "thing" involves a prior understanding of the realm of common sense, so our discussion will necessarily be incomplete. Yet we still need to gain a feel for such things, as such things are specific to different levels of intelligibility that are in themselves subject to conditioning and sublating effects from lower and higher levels.
6. Finally, any understanding of the world view of emergent probability depends on our concepts of space and time. In other words, we need a reference frame upon which the dynamics of world processes play out. This requires delving into chapter 5.

At the end of this series you should have a well-grounded insight into the world process Lonergan names emergent probability. Its primary use is to allow researchers to anticipate what there is to be known. For example, almost all political commentary is focused on one dramatic level of human interaction that doesn't take into consideration the possible sublating effects of a higher level or the conditioning effects of a lower one, e.g., the Divine Mystery "above" and energy-matters flows "below."

Should you survive this exploration of the way in which things relate to each other, we can shift to the familiar common sense world where everything relates to us (family, friends, the universe, the Divine Mystery). Note also that our primary interest is not at the intellectual level of mastering something external to ourselves but to the quite different arena of reflective intelligence that involves the transformation of the individual. It comes down to a question of being able to live in such a world, to use the world view of emergent probability to anticipate what there is to be known both within ourselves—for we are ourselves an example of such a world process—and in the socio-political world in which we are enmeshed.

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