

Background to the Proposal

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In 2006, a small team based at the Lonergan Center for Ethical Reflection undertook a long-term research project to actualize Lonergan's remedial notion of a Cosmopolis.¹ Such a project would counter contemporary problems where the social and political sphere has been fragmented. Meeting once a week for over ten years, this core team gradually developed the conceptual model necessary to actualize Lonergan's solution to the problem of long term decline. This specific and specialized goal allows us to pull together a wide range of interests around a common objective. So far we have produced an in-house handbook; a schematic that lays out the essential concepts, operations, and linkages concerning core areas of Lonergan's thought; a broad mission statement for a Cosmopolis Institute; and a variety of subprojects including the initial stages of an explanatory theory of what it means to be human that brings together the operations of the physical brain, the conceptual operations of a conscious mind, and the transcendent as a series of emergent properties.

Lonergan's notion of a Cosmopolis emerged as a possible solution to the problem of long term fragmentation and decline due not to individual egotism or group bias, but to the short-term expediency of common sense that tends to elevate itself to the position of a supreme authority. In order to understand the objectives of this proposed course-to-workshop, it is necessary to understand the essential ideas of a cosmopolis. Such a Cosmopolis Institute would be engaged in:

1. Promoting the idea that ideas come first; force is only instrumental when it comes to attaining sufficient agreement among a wide group of people. After all, "... cosmopolis is not concerned with the residual and incidental. It is concerned with the fundamental issue of the historical process. Its business is to prevent practically from being short-sightedly practical and so destroying itself."²
2. Avoiding the application of force, for in situations of decline it often seems that the application of force is the only way to get things done. "[The business of cosmopolis] is to break the vicious circle of an illusion: men will not venture on ideas that they grant to be correct, because they hold that such ideas will not work unless sustained by desires or fears; and inversely, men hold that such ideas will not work, because they will not

¹ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Volume 3 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 1992), pp. 263-267. While egotism and group bias eventually correct themselves, distortions due to the tendency of people of great common sense for expedient action without consideration of any overriding philosophical, theological, or any other outside authority that might override their need to get on with the business of the world builds up over time. The end result is the fragmentation of meaning within society, leaving islands of often conflicting intelligibility without any possibility of an overriding world mediated by meaning. Eventually, such a society will collapse in chaos, perhaps even entering a dark age where all that has been gained over centuries is left to fall away.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 263-4.

venture on them and so have no empirical evidence that such ideas can work and would work.”³

3. Refusing to become busybodies involved with correcting the results of egotism of group bias, or even the dialectic between shifting powers “It is the business of cosmopolis to prevent the formation of the screening memories by which an ascent to power hides its nastiness; it is its business to prevent the falsification of history with which the new group overstates its case; it is its business to satirize the catchwords and the claptrap and thereby to prevent the notions they express from coalescing with passions and resentments to engender obsessive nonsense for future generations; it is its business to encourage and support those that would speak the simple truth though simple truth has gone out of fashion.”⁴
4. Seeking out those blind spots within the cosmopolis team itself, for “. . . if cosmopolis itself suffers from the general bias of common sense in any of its manifestations, then the blind will be leading the blind and both will head for a ditch. There is needed . . . a critique of history before there can be any intelligent direction of history. There is needed an exploration of movements, the changes, the epochs of a civilization’s genesis, development, and vicissitudes. The opinions and attitudes of the present have to be traced to their origins, and the origins have to be criticized in the light of dialectic.”⁵

While this proposal for a course-to-workshop would seem to be excessively dense and convoluted, the nature of the underlying cosmopolis task demands it. As Lonergan points out at the end of his section on cosmopolis:

Finally, it would be unfair not to stress the chief characteristic of cosmopolis. It is not easy. It is not a dissemination of sweetness and light, where sweetness means sweet to me, and light means light to me. Were that so, cosmopolis would be superfluous. Every scotosis puts forth a plausible, ingenious, adaptive, untiring resistance. The general bias of common sense is no exception.⁶

The Cosmopolis Institute represents an attempt to operationalize Lonergan’s notion of a Cosmopolis. Such an institute is positioned in two ways. First it mediates between the theoretical concerns of a university and the practical common sense interests of a functioning society, providing the grounds for a clear distinction between the two within a broad understanding of multiple realms of meaning. Second, it mediates between both the theoretical and common sense realms and the authentic subject as engaged in ongoing intellectual, moral,

³ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265. This is a key task underlying this research proposal, for the analysis of contemporary fundamental institutional change sets the conditions for exactly this form of work.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

and religious conversion⁷ so essential for a free society by incorporating two additional realms of meaning: interiority and transcendence.

This proposed experimental course-to-workshop for adult education constitutes an entry level program of study and evaluation to identify and initially train people for Cosmopolis work. It provides a way for those interested in Lonergan's approach to understanding the basics of his methodology for individual and communal control over meaning, the appropriate of this basic understanding through a case study, and the eventual self-directed intentional team putting it all into practice. But the potential audience may be larger, as the proposal offers an opportunity for those interested in adult education to enter the realm of theory, of interiority, and of transcendence in a way that is both challenging and takes advantage of skills and aptitudes already developed to minds that are shifting from the application of intelligence to that of reflective understanding and true value. It gives expression to the complexity of emotions, feelings, aesthetic experiences, and the drama of encountering the lived reality of others in the search for liberty, personal relationships, and the appreciation and discernment of true value and worth.

This proposal draws upon the experience and traditions of open question discussion methods typical of the Thomas More Institute but adds two extensions: a common methodology capable of providing cumulative and progressive insights, and the opportunity for a participant to move beyond student status to becoming self-directing. From a Cosmopolis perspective, there are two primary objectives:

1. To lay sound foundations for mastering the kind of individual and group theory and practice required for an effective and efficient Cosmopolis team, and
2. Assess the capability of the individual for carrying out such work, both as an individual engaged in ongoing conversion through mutual self-mediation at the third reflective level of the human good and as a team member freely interacting at a personal level with other team members in an intentional Cosmopolis project.

The Thomas More Institute was founded by members closely associated with Lonergan's work. In fact, Lonergan was an early direct contributor to the formation of the Institute, especially in his "Healing and Creating in History"⁸ and "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer"⁹ with the latter

⁷ In this we follow Lonergan's approach where intellectual conversion is nothing more than understanding the limitations of naïve realism, empiricism, and conceptualism in favor of the transcendental method of critical realism; where moral conversion is shift to values over personal satisfactions when it comes to being responsible; and religious conversion is not specific to any one religion but is framed in the widest possible terms as falling in love with the Divine. In all three cases, there is a fundamental shift in the person's horizon that goes beyond either a horizontal or vertical expansion to establish a new self upon different principles. Cf. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 237-243.

⁸ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J. "Healing and Creating in History" (New York: Paulist Press, *A Third Collection*, Ed. By Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., 1985), pp. 100-109. A lecture in the series, Anniversary Lectures, The Thomas More Institute, Montreal, May 13, 1975.

⁹ *Ibid.* Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer" (*Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, March 1984), pp. 1-20. This was a lecture given by Lonergan at the Thomas More Institute in Montreal on September 24, 1963.

laying out the mutual self-mediation process that underlies TMI's discussion method. While this approach works extremely well for cases where multiple interpretations are involved, say in approaching a Shakespeare play or a contemporary novel, it fares less well when it comes to technical subjects or when it comes to taking full advantage of the discussion method itself in its role in actualizing individual potential for freedom and liberty through encounters with the orientation of others and the enhancement of one's own horizon.

Finally, we consider news as raw data for uncovering ongoing fundamental institutional change and the multiple orientations of those stakeholders and participants who are caught up in such interesting times. From this perspective, there is no such thing as false or deliberately fabricated news, only clues as to the intentions and affiliations of those laying the news out there in the world. It then becomes a task of evaluating the authenticity of those fundamental institutions and the people who represent them. How trustworthy are they? Are they open to experience, intelligent in understanding, reasonable in making judgments, and responsible when it comes to acting? What are the limits they put on their horizon? What have they decided is of fundamental importance, i.e., the terminal value within which all has meaning and significance? And how do we even begin to assess these qualities in others without first assessing the limits of our own authenticity?

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