

## A Directed Workshop on *Insight*, Chapter 1: Elements

Eleventh Session—November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018—Loneragan Center, TS Department, Concordia: *Empirical Residue, Cont.*

*Why does Lonergan draw our attention to the empirical residue as part of the fundamental elements of his intentionality analysis project? Like the other four sections, it is there for a reason. The reason? This category sheds light on the nature of abstraction not as reduction, in the sense that abstraction is a removal of significant information, but intelligibility. Without the notion of an empirical residue, abstraction or generalization could only be reductive in nature, fail to account for scientific universals, and leave humankind in the position of having to explain everything—including the difference between one atom and another. In fact, the empirical theoretical realm would not be possible; neither would the different levels of intelligibility in the world view of emergent probability allow for the fact that things cannot consist of other things at a lower level.*

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EMPIRICAL RESIDUE

1. Positive data (describable, sensate)
2. No intelligibility in the data itself
3. Associated with a higher intelligibility (abstraction, universals)

**The name “empirical residue”** not only suggests something left over after the main process has been concluded but that what is left over is empirical data capable of being observed and described. To state that a set of concrete data has no intelligibility in itself is to affirm an insight into a higher level of intelligibility that draws upon the *potential* of the concrete to arrive at a *form* that provides the reason for the existence of the empirical residue. An *act* of judgment affirms the connection between the higher order generalizations or abstractions and the sensate world from which significance is drawn. For example, in Darwin’s *Origin of Species* the existence of different variations of finches on the Galapagos islands is a matter of description both in terms of the shape of the finches and the ecosystem of which they are a part. But Darwin could have drawn upon any such collection of species. The Galapagos finches become insignificant in themselves as did the kind of fruit that dropped on Newton’s head. In the end, neither matters when compared to the insight grounding a higher intelligibility of evolution or gravitational attraction.

The same holds true for other realms of meaning. Virtually all possible mathematical systems can be derived from a high level form of mathematical analysis. The rules and operations of arithmetic are a subset of algebra; the rules and operations of algebra are a subset of calculus; and all these are a subset of group theory; etc. The point is that any high level of intelligibility does not depend on the intelligibility of a lower set that can be varied at will.

The same holds true for the realm of interiority. The highest level of intentionality analysis is that of the cognitive operations of the human mind. These operations are arranged in an emergent probability scheme of successive higher levels of intelligibility. At the lowest is that of experiencing. But what we experience varies over time and space as the necessary insights operative at the level of understanding kick into place. Once something is understood, the experiences themselves are set aside, a “residue” of the insight. The same holds true for insights that become a “dime a dozen” when it comes to the higher perspective of being a dispassionate judge. And when one shifts to the level of deciding, these judgments become part of the “residue” that holds no significance given the higher perspective over values (truth itself becomes one of the values).

The same pattern holds true for common sense. Although the generalizations sought by intelligent people of common sense are not scientific universals nor the transcendental method of the realm of interiority nor the abstract systems of mathematics, there are still generalizations or abstractions being made. These take the form of proverbs, fables, sayings, adages, or aphorisms that in no way are meant to be either exhaustive or consistent as scientific or mathematical heuristic structures would have them. Instead, one or more may provide that extra bit of intelligibility to an otherwise confusing situation. So “a bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush” may apply to a particular situation while “carpus diem” best fits the bill in another. Again, the concrete situation at hand is part of the empirical residue when it comes to the higher common sense perspective of this body of ill-coordinate and mismatched generalizations.

*The factual contention is more complex. It is not an assertion that there exist different sets of data similar in all respects. It is not a denial of unique instances, that is, of instances that are to be explained in a manner in which no other instance in the universe is to be explained. It is not even a denial that every individual in the universe is a unique instance. On the contrary, the relevant fact lies in the nature of the explanations that are applicable to our universe. It is to the effect that all such explanations are made up of general or universal elements and that, while these general or universal elements may be combined in such a manner that every individual is explained by a different combination of elements, still such a combination is an explanation of a singular combination of common properties and not an explanation of individuality. For if the individuality of the individual were explained, it would be meaningless to suppose that some of the individual might be understood in exactly the same fashion (pp. 53-4).*

Let’s take two circles, one over here and the other over there. Both are unique, in the sense that this circle is different from that one (perhaps one has been drawn in ink, the other in crayon; or perhaps one circle is a wagon wheel while the other is a mark left by a wet glass on a table). Now both can be described as concrete objects, comparisons made, and opinions ventured. But in neither case can we talk about the immanent intelligibility of the circle itself regardless of its physical existence. In order to do that we have to assume that identity is something “left over” when it comes to generalizing the immanent explanation of a ‘circle.’

*Properly, then, abstraction is not a matter of apprehending a sensible or imaginative gestalt; it is not a matter of employing common names just as it is not a matter of using other tools; finally, it is not even a matter of attending to one question at a time and meanwhile holding other questions in abeyance. Properly, to abstract is to grasp the essential and to disregard the incidental, to see what is significant and set aside the irrelevant, to recognize the important as important and the negligible as negligible. Moreover, when it is asked what is essential or significant or important and what is incidental, irrelevant, negligible, the answer must be twofold. For abstraction is the selectivity of intelligence, and intelligence may be considered either in some given stage of development or at the term of development when some science or group of sciences has been mastered completely.*

*Hence, relative to any given insight or cluster of insights the essential, significant, important consists (1) in the set of aspects in the data necessary for the occurrence of the insight or insights, or (2) in the set of related concepts necessary for the expression of the insight or insights. On the other hand the incidental, irrelevant, negligible consists (1) in other concomitant aspects of the data that do not fall under the insight or insights, or (2) in the set of concepts that correspond to the merely concomitant aspects of the data. Again, relative to the full development of a science or group of allied sciences, the essential, significant, important consists (1) in the aspects of the data that are necessary for the occurrence of all insights in the appropriate range, or (2) in the set of related concepts that express all the insights of the science or sciences. On the other hand, the incidental, irrelevant, negligible consists in the empirical residue that, since it possesses no immanent intelligibility of its own, is left over without explanation even when a science or group of sciences reaches full development (p. 55).*

Remember that insights emerge only with the tension to know combined with interior conditions. This means that any resulting science is first of all a matter of intentions. In other words, abstraction and generalizations are intentional at their very core reflecting the interests, objectives, and values of each person. In this lies the emergence of different realms of meaning as well as the methodologies appropriate to each realm, where scholars and intelligent people of common sense may have very little in common to discuss other than the most banal topics such as the weather. It is important to keep in mind that all of Lonergan’s methodological reflections are grounded in one or more forms of intentionality analysis, which is why paying attention to one’s foundational stance is probable the most important form of personal actualization ever.