Introduction

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[T]he Greek mediation of meaning resulted in classical culture and, by and large, classical culture has passed away. By and large, its canons of art, its literary forms, its rules of correct speech, its norms of interpretation, its ways of thought, its manner in philosophy, its notion of science, its concept of law, its moral standards, its methods of education, are no longer accepted. What breathed life and form into the civilization of Greece and Rome, what was born again in a European Renaissance, what provided the chrysalis whence issued modern languages and literatures, modern mathematics and science, modern philosophy and history, held its own right into the twentieth century; but today, nearly everywhere, it is dead and almost forgotten. Classical culture has given way to a modern culture, and, I would submit, the crisis of our age is in no small measure the fact that modern culture has not yet reached its maturity. The classical mediation of meaning has broken down; the breakdown has been effected by a whole array of new and more effective techniques; but their very multiplicity and complexity leave us bewildered, disoriented, confused, preyed upon by anxiety, dreading lest we fall victims to the up-to-date myth of ideology and the hypnotic, highly effective magic of thought control.

—Lonergan, Dimensions of Meaning

Contributors to this volume wrestle with elements of the philosophy of theologian-methodologist Bernard Lonergan (1904–84) vis-à-vis contemporary concerns in Continental philosophy and theology. “Continental” is a precarious term. It is usually invoked to earmark a particular mode of thought, largely of German and French origin. We use it in this typical
fashion. Foundational are the works of Kant and Hegel. As with Analytic philosophy, to which we will turn shortly, Continental philosophy has many shades. In 1987 Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy serviceably, and somewhat courageously, divided the field into radical, systematic, and hermeneutic trends. Grappled with in this volume are by and large the challenges of the radical stream. Its key instigators are the so-called masters of suspicion: Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. The dialogue tends to focus on the aftermath of their progeny, whose work has in many ways come to characterize contemporary forms, “postmodern” as they are often called. “Postphenomenological” and “poststructuralist” are probably better terms, especially if we are thinking of the philosophies of the masters’ sons: Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida (to name only a few).

Astute readers will immediately recognize that Lonergan’s discourse resembles the concerns of systematic and hermeneutic proposals. Incidentally, the systematic and hermeneutic seek to transform, not to overthrow or to bring an end to, Enlightenment thought. And so a more likely fit would be comparisons with, say, Karl-Otto Apel and Jurgen Habermas on the systematic side and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor on the hermeneutic side. No doubt. A number of our contributors make such connections. However, there is much in Lonergan that resonates with the concerns of poststructuralists like Derrida and Foucault, Levinas and Kristeva. It is here that more work is required. Our hope is that this volume will facilitate this development as it seeks to address the radical wing of Continental thought in the light of Lonergan’s systematic-and hermeneutic-like proposals.

Before developing this further, some things should be said about what is often assumed to be the nemesis of Continental thought: Analytic philosophy.²

Analytic means of reflection are carried out largely by English-speaking academics indebted historically to the empiricist philosophies of John Locke and David Hume, “Continents” of a different stripe. Now classic expressions of Analytic philosophy proper, in its nascent state, are identified with the works of Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and the early Ludwig Wittgenstein. They honed classical empiricist concerns through discourse on the precise nature of concepts and propositions. The concern there was to arrive at a language that lays bare, as much as humanly possible, the logical structure of reality; the school known as logical positivism developed as a result. The history and fate of logical positivism is well
known. Suffice it to say that analytic philosophy is not synonymous with positivism. In fact, it was philosophers identified as Analytic who contributed to the demise of logical positivism as an all-embracing theory of empiricism. The mere mention of Karl Popper and W. V. O. Quine suffices as examples.

A wide variety of Analytic philosophers exists today; their concerns tend to be as various. John Heil makes the significant observation that despite differences among them, Analytic philosophers have “an implicit respect for argument and clarity, an evolving though informal agreement as to what problems are and are not tractable, and a conviction that philosophy is in some sense continuous with science.” Logic as fundamental, its principles and formal explicitation (symbolic and otherwise), is deeply ingrained. It gives us a handle on things, it is presumed, without which, were Nietzsche right, we would be on a rudderless vessel, facing an expanse too frightening to contemplate. Of course, for many an Analytic philosopher Nietzsche’s logic, and that of those who appreciate it, is flawed because self-contradictory. One cannot impose a logic to destabilize logic and then pretend that the destabilizing logic is not simply an alternative, somehow more basic than the destabilized logic; both are logics, presupposing the principles of logic. It is difficult to speak about such matters in the abstract. To appreciate Nietzsche’s critique of logic, religion, and other issues requires an understanding of the proper object of his diagnosis. This object is as multifarious and dynamic as the history of thought itself. However, if we may be permitted to speak in the abstract, it is important to recognize a basic insight characteristic of this wing of Continental thought, of which Nietzsche is something of a patron saint. It is this: clarity and logic are important. But they are not fundamental, that is, if we appreciate our historicity and the all-pervasive nature of language. Fundamentality itself is a historical concern and the function of language. The thought often is that Continentals have no appreciation of logic and her principles. As a result, their thought degenerates into relativism due to sparse insights about existence, the art of living, interpreting, and so on. Not to dismiss this, but Continental thought is not a monolithic achievement. Each thinker pinpoints the relativity of thought in a way closely tied to the thinker’s presuppositions and alternatives. Those are as complex as they are idiosyncratic; they lead in different directions and even oppose each other. But the insight here, on a sympathetic reading, concerns not the eradication of logic or epistemology, but its destabilization. Nothing can serve as our ticket out of the flux.
Because Lonergan was not schooled in either approach, one finds flexibility in his philosophy to accommodate Analytic and Continental concerns. He shares with Continentals the concern that epistemology be given a central place in questioning; he does not share with many of them the belief that epistemology is corrupt through and through. Rather, he understands epistemology as secondary, cognitional theory, which grounds it, being the more basic task. Cognitional theory is Lonergan’s entry ticket into the discussion, however we might feel about it as in step with contemporary Continental concerns. That said, cognitional theory does give him the needed flexibility to accommodate insights that so many reduce to either way of thinking. By distinguishing cognitional theory from epistemology and the concerns of logic, Lonergan can situate Analytic and Continental concerns relative to differing patterns of experience (that is, artistic and intellectual) outlined in his theory of cognition. The short of it is that Continental thinking resembles what Lonergan describes as purely experiential. In its thinking, which experientially is artistic, this mode of thought attempts to think past, by destabilizing, instrumentalized meanings of society. Lonergan pinpoints Heidegger as an exemplar. What people like Heidegger try to effect are worlds of meaning that are “other, different, novel, strange, remote, intimate.” The objective is to get us past our accepted modes of thought into a place where we are totally and constantly surprised by the totally other.

The pattern that represents the analytic is easily identifiable with Lonergan’s intellectual pattern of experience. Someone who thinks according to this pattern is, in Lonergan’s terms, after a scientific-like explanation of observed data. We might think of it more generally in terms of any potentially theoretical disposition preoccupied with the nature or state of things. And so the attempt to lay bare the logical structure of reality easily lines up with this kind of pattern of experience. Structurally the operations of consciousness function identically in both patterns, artistic and intellectual. The mode by which things are thought, however, will determine how the concerns of each pattern function and how their respective insights are brought to expression. Often these insights are placed in critical tension, as evidenced by the impasse reached in both types of philosophizing, artistic (Continental) and intellectual (Analytic). Hints of a rapprochement in Lonergan can be traced to his concept of a differentiated consciousness. Briefly, a differentiated consciousness is one that is able to distinguish between patterns of experience and their spe-
cialized differentiations, to integrate them at levels in which one can spot the difference between them, and to adjust one’s aspirations accordingly. The concept is key to understanding why Lonergan scholars bother negotiating the differences, often irreconcilable.

The dynamic, brusquely stated here, is detailed elsewhere. It is offered as a means of understanding the orientation of Lonergan scholars in tackling a “crisis of our age.” We have come a long way since Lonergan penned the words in the epigraph, but we are of the opinion that a serviceable balance has yet to be reached. We agree with Lonergan that our “modern culture has not yet reached its maturity.” Offered in this volume are ways of thinking the differences briefly outlined above en route to some sort of rapprochement. The authors entertain different visions but they are united in the assumption that Lonergan has something important to contribute.

Nicholas Plants’s chapter, “Decentering Inwardness,” continues a project that seeks a critical integration of the thought of Lonergan and Charles Taylor. As Plants points out, both Lonergan and Taylor are committed to a notion of authenticity that avoids the slide into subjectivism. In his chapter Plants explores Taylor’s insight into the hermeneutic dimension of engaged subjectivity that rests on the self-transcending movement of the subject. Authentic subjectivity is a subjectivity engaged by sources other than the self. Hence the charge of an immanentist subjectivity is escaped. However, Taylor, in Plants’s opinion, does not offer a sufficient account of consciousness to justify his normative claims about authentic subjectivity. It is here that Plants turns to Lonergan.

Lonergan also wants to make use of the authenticity trope. However, his approach to authenticity is to identify the subject and its operations made available to us by consciousness. Plants’s analysis of Lonergan’s thought on this subject depends on a crucial distinction that Lonergan makes between understanding oneself as an object of perception and understanding oneself as a subject of experience. For Lonergan the goal of philosophy is to appropriate oneself as conscious and as a knower, engaged in the intentional and conscious operations of experiencing, understanding, judging, and choosing. Plants identifies a subtle trap that Lonergan’s analysis of consciousness is vulnerable to, namely, identifying the subject as the self that is appropriated rather than as the self that one is conscious of. He details the consequences of this trap being sprung. The prime consequence is that the self as conscious, as appropriated, is a centered self,
thus incapable of the radical decentering that Taylor identifies as the mark of self-transcendence.

Both Lonergan and Taylor have valuable insights to offer to the contemporary Continental debate about the human subject. Both want to situate authentic subjectivity as the point of departure for philosophical reflection without either succumbing to the flaws of modernity or despairing of a way forward from the deconstructive moment. Plants’s chapter provides a way of reading both thinkers as complementary to each other and as providing necessary astringents to each other’s work.

In his chapter “To Whom Do We Return in the Turn to the Subject? Lonergan, Derrida, and Foucault Revisited” Jim Kanaris analyzes a fundamental problem shared by thinkers generally identified as contemporary Continental thinkers. This group runs from Nietzsche thru Heidegger to Derrida and Foucault. The fundamental problem remains Kant. Although Nietzsche and Heidegger are prodigious in their destruction of the pretensions of Kant and Hegel, they are still beholden to the same metaphysical claims that Kant and Hegel espoused. Kanaris argues that for Lonergan the principle of immanence continues to haunt Nietzsche and Heidegger, thus necessitating a return to Kant, the modern thinker who brought the subject to its greatest prominence. Lonergan’s criticism is radical, in that he wants to get at the root of the problem, a problem that is clearly evident in Kant.

Kanaris turns to Derrida and Foucault as contemporary Continental thinkers who want to disengage themselves from modern narratives about the subject. For Derrida everything is text, so that a re-turn of the subject will negotiate the presence/absence dichotomy that characterizes any text. Derrida’s subject is nothing more than a trace that can be uncovered in the play of presence and absence. Foucault, on the other hand, finds Derrida’s analysis lacking. He prefers to speak of the subject via the institutional “technologies” that have formed the subject and that condition the kinds of questions that are raised. In both thinkers, in the end, one finds still the workings of the principle of immanence, such that the returning of the overturned Nietzschean/Heideggerian subject is essentially a return to Kant’s subject.

Kanaris argues that Lonergan does concern himself with the same problems that Derrida and Foucault have identified in the modern as well as the Nietzschean/Heideggerian subject. Kanaris shows that Lonergan’s attempt to articulate the structure of the human subject as knower and
chooser offers an unique account of subjectivity that overcomes the limitations of the Kantian account. However, in his self-avowed spirit of critical reciprocity, Kanaris also wants to recognize the vulnerability of Lonergan’s account of subjectivity to the very criticisms that both Derrida and Foucault have leveled at modern thinkers. There is a tendency in Lonergan scholarship, as well as in Lonergan himself, to put the structure of intentionality beyond question. This is dangerous. The structure must always be submitted to regular criticism. The return to the subject is always an ambiguous one and so a fertile field for ongoing challenges, criticisms, and questions.

In his autobiographical chapter entitled “Self-Appropriation: Lonergan’s Pearl of Great Price” James L. Marsh takes the reader on a quick march through his own self-appropriation. An examination of Lonergan’s invitation to self-appropriation is followed by a discussion of that invitation in the context of contemporary Continental philosophy. Marsh then looks at his own journey and intellectual achievements in tracing the path to his own self-appropriation. Ironically, his appropriating himself as a knower, a chooser, and a lover frees him from his tutelage to Lonergan. Having decisively chosen to be his own person, yet connected to universal humanity, Marsh finds that self-appropriation must lead to radical conversion and political action. For Marsh a radical conversion manifests itself in political action. Today the radically converted political actor must confront the excesses of both late capitalism and state socialism.

Most significant in Marsh’s essay is the insight that self-appropriation is the gateway to the philosophic life. Commentators on the thought of Lonergan can be successful without decisively choosing themselves in the way that Marsh indicates. The “pearl of great price” is precisely the insight that I am responsible for who I am and who I will become. People who identify themselves as intelligent, reasonable, and responsible step out from the shadow of their mentors. That is the final end, as it were, of Lonergan’s invitation to self-appropriation.

In her chapter “Subject for the Other: Lonergan and Levinas on Being Human in Postmodernity” Michele Saracino offers a reflection on the dialectical tension between these two thinkers. Her reflection begins with the recognition of the inattention that the Other has received from the Western Subject as it has pursued its own notion of the good life. The concern for the marginalized, the voiceless, the hidden and powerless peoples motivates much of contemporary Continental thought, particularly
that of Emmanuel Levinas. Saracino’s essay argues that Lonergan has a commitment to openness to the Other that provides an entry point for a dialogue between these two seemingly disparate thinkers.

Such a dialogue is necessary at this point in time because contemporary Continental thought has demonstrated its ability to pinpoint the problems of the contemporary world, but, to date, has had little that is constructive for moving beyond the problems. Christian theology, on the other hand, does offer a point of departure for decision and action in response to contemporary crises. By placing Lonergan and Levinas in dialogue in relation to their approaches to the Other, Saracino hopes to identify ways in which the thinking of these two people can be advanced.

Saracino begins with a discussion of Lonergan’s notion of the patterns of experience, his notion of the transcultural, and his notion of the subject as radically open to the Other. These three notions underpin an anthropology that can meet Levinas’s identification of the Other as the one to whom we are hostage. Rather than a subject that is self-sufficient, Lonergan’s subject is clearly not self-sufficient in any way that would exclude or devalue the Other.

Tracing his roots to Talmudic and Cartesian sources, Saracino discusses the metaphor of facing and the feminine as ways in which Levinas locates the obligation to the Other that is the starting point for any adequate anthropology. Both the metaphor of facing and the feminine make it clear that any relation to the Other must always make evident the asymmetrical character of that relation. The Other can never be just a subset of the Subject, a horror perpetrated through much of human history.

By placing these two thinkers in relation to each other, Saracino suggests a variety of ways in which both Lonergan and Levinas scholars can proceed to enrich their work and directions in which Christian theologians need to move in the new millennium. Two very different thinkers, in their openness to the alterity of each, provide a space for fruitful dialogue leading to important and necessary insights into possible solutions to the problems of contemporary society.

Christine E. Jamieson finds in Lonergan a way to make sense of Julia Kristeva’s analysis of the “split subject.” In “Kristeva’s Horror and Lonergan’s Insight: The Psychic Structure of the Human Person and the Move to a Higher Viewpoint” Jamieson presents Kristeva’s analysis of the person. Kristeva begins her reflection by noting the disturbing relation between the increasing presence of women in the public realm and the
increase in violence against women. Kristeva’s focus on the speaking subject leads her to identify a lacuna that exists in attempts to explain this tension “between humanity’s progress and decline in relation to women.” Kristeva is often criticized for presenting women as forever trapped in oppressive and deterministic situations. Jamieson argues that Lonergan provides a conceptual analysis that can account for what she argues is a liberating movement in Kristeva’s argument. That analysis depends on Lonergan’s notion of a higher viewpoint emerging from the limits of more restricted horizons.

Kristeva’s analysis of the split subject, the speaking subject constituted by the semiotic and symbolic realms, leads to a recognition of the threat that the semiotic represents to the symbolic. The semiotic is the maternal materiality of the subject that threatens the meaningful and ordered symbolic realm. Women become a threat, the object of violence. This threat is experienced as preconscious. The unforgiving analysis reveals a permanent split in our identities that is preconscious and fuels antagonism toward women. Birth is the originary and fundamental experience of separation between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva’s analysis is both deterministic and liberating. How can that be? Jamieson argues that Kristeva raises questions that cannot be answered in the horizon of questions that generated her project to begin with. A higher viewpoint is required.

Jamieson argues that Kristeva actually moves the feminist critique to a higher viewpoint by providing a framework for a discussion of women’s rights that can answer questions that arise but are beyond the horizons of either liberal or social constructivistic theories.

In his chapter “Lonergan’s Postmodern Subject: Neither Neoscholastic Substance nor Cartesian Ego,” Frederick Lawrence traces the emergence of naïve realist and idealist strategies from the medieval and modern worlds. The subject as object, as the “already out there now” substance and the subject as subject, as the “already in here now” consciousness, rests upon a subject/object split that gives rise to more common ground between idealist and naïve realist than is normally admitted. The criticisms of contemporary Continental thinkers are aimed at this subject that is hopelessly cut off from reality or naively holds onto sense perception as the really real.

Lawrence argues that Lonergan’s subject as self-transcending avoids the mistakes of both naïve realism and idealism. The subject as other, as
self-transcending, can be the centerpiece of a social and political discourse that is genuinely open to difference, yet able to distinguish between reality and illusion. This genuineness requires conversion on the part of human subjects: intellectual, moral, and religious. Lawrence indicates the necessity of religious conversion as the condition for the possibility of a self-transcending subject.

Mark J. Doorley’s “In Response to the Other: Postmodernity and Critical Realism” presents a response to the idea that ethics must be abandoned. Ethics always has a victim. Doorley suggests that a dialectical reading of thinkers like Levinas and Derrida can reveal positional moments that underlie the judgment about ethics. The importance of the Singular, the notion of obligation, and the process of clôutral reading are moments in contemporary Continental thought where Doorley finds important claims about ethics and the conditions for its possibility.10

The chapter turns to Lonergan’s thought and suggests two approaches to addressing the postmodern concern about ethics. The first approach is a positional account of metaphysics that answers the criticism about totalizing reason. Doorley examines the patterning of experience, the operation of judgment, and the notion of objectivity. This approach, however, does not quite answer all the questions raised by the contemporary Continental critique. In the second approach, then, he appeals to the role of conversion and the inbreaking of the Other in religious, moral, and intellectual conversion. This approach seems to meet the demands of the postmodern critique. Throughout, Doorley is quick to point out where Lonergan does not quite escape the postmodern critique.

In a very intriguing chapter “Lonergan and the Ambiguity of Postmodern Laughter,” Ronald H. McKinney, S.J. takes up the topic of humor and satire in Lonergan’s *Insight*. He argues that humor and satire may be the key to understanding the way in which Lonergan appreciates and attempts to address the concerns of contemporary Continental philosophy.

His argument begins with an examination of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, in which the role of humor and laughter is examined. McKinney then turns to Aristotle’s discussion of entrapelia and Kierkegaard’s three stages to begin to develop an understanding of humor that both admonishes us to develop virtue and reminds us of our finitude.

McKinney then examines Lonergan’s short reflection on satire and humor in *Insight*. Lonergan’s notion of development, and his “thick” understanding of the existential subject provide space for the use of satire.
and humor to serve the role that Aristotle most clearly articulates: to nudge a person toward greater genuineness and to keep the person in touch with the fragility of human achievement. The former encourages development toward greater and greater authenticity; the latter keeps in question all achievement. It is here that McKinney thinks Lonergan is most postmodern.

The objective of these chapters is not to decide whether Lonergan defines or defies the postmodern, a most precarious term anyway. To many he represents the epitome of that against which postmoderns rail. This contention is as precarious as the term “postmodern.” Different visions exist regarding what it means to be post-Cartesian or post-Hegelian. All these visions do not hinge on some essence relative to which postmoderns ironically define themselves. What exists rather is a tapestry of varying concerns oftentimes negotiated contrarily by family responses. Continentals have taught us that this is okay, something to be expected given our finitude. But none of the representatives of the radical wing discussed here propose their views as a license for chaotic thinking, for a relativistic free-for-all. That chaos, which seems to mark what appears as postmodern, may be the result of pop culture or muddled thinking. However, it is not necessarily the intention of those who have helped forge its tools.

Lonergan’s idiosyncratic thought, the depth of which has been plumbed seriously only recently with respect to this question, is dynamic and flexible. If we understand modernity and postmodernity in bipolar terms, the former involved in the art of argument, the latter in that of persuasion and narration, few will be swayed. But as Maurice Wiles has shrewdly argued, this kind of bipolarity is overstated. Proponents of narratival thinking, so to speak, are also involved in argument not totally unlike that employed by their nemesis. Moreover, modernists are not bereft of the inclination that draws some into the agonistics of out-narrating each other. Bipolar characterizations have their limits and should not dictate the rules of the game. In Lonergan an appreciation exists for both concerns, however different its intonation from the bipolarity mentioned. Those open to it and not predisposed to rule it out of court based on tenuous characterizations (which turn out finally to be unhelpful caricatures anyway) may find it refreshing. Doubtless they will find familiar elements in it. But should the familiar bewitch, the issues, which are new and discussed here, should predominate. This should serve to rebuff delusional comfort zones and to buff the apparent lackluster of the familiar.
Notes

2. It is interesting that Derrida has gone on record recently claiming that he is after the same sort of truth coveted by Analytic philosophers. Of course, we must always understand such public statements in the larger context of Derrida’s philosophy as a whole. See Derrida in Arguing with Derrida, ed. Simon Glendinning (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 83–4.
8. See chapter two of this book for a discussion of the term “re-turn.”
9. See Jamieson’s chapter 5 in this volume.
10. See chapter seven of this book for a discussion of the term clÔtural.
12. According to Wiles, Hyman, although on the same page with John Milbank’s postmodernity, is displeased with the latter’s narratival tactics. As a result, Hyman tries to “out-narrate” Milbank.