

On Lonergan and John Stuart Mill

One of the challenges for interpreters of Lonergan is that of articulating significant influences on his thought. Who precisely influenced him? When did the influences emerge, how formative were they and how did they direct and shape his project as a whole? For instance it is clear that Erik Rothaker's *Logik und Systematik der Geisteswissenschaften*, which he read towards the end of 1961, profoundly influenced the transition in his thought from the natural sciences, which permeated *Insight*, to meaning and the human sciences which are the background for *Method in Theology*. In responding to the question a single name stands out above all others, that of Aquinas. Lonergan only began to take him seriously when he was in his thirties, comparatively late in his career. Once convinced that Aquinas had something to offer he spent over a decade plumbing the riches of his thought on grace and *verbum*, and later on the Trinity and Christology. In comparison with other names that come to mind such as Newman, Gadamer, Rothaker, even Aristotle the influence of Aquinas on his thought was in a sense almost dominant despite the fact that in *Insight* and *Method in Theology* he moved beyond it.

In the present brief article I want to pose the question, what was the influence of John Stuart Mill on Lonergan? It is a question that is rarely raised simply because it is not clear to most interpreters that Mill had any influence on him at all. Against this I will suggest that at a highly crucial and formative point in his unfolding intellectual journey when his interests in methodology were beginning to focus Lonergan had a significant encounter with the thought of Mill. The resulting influence did not so much shape his answers as his questions. From this standpoint the later engagement with Aquinas can be understood in part as an attempt to work out answers to questions which Mill, along with others, had helped him to bring into focus. The article will outline how and when Lonergan encountered Mill and comment on the possible implications of that encounter for his life project as a whole.

I

In a letter written from Heythrop College in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, to Henry Smeaton on June 20th 1927 at the end of the first year of his study of philosophy Lonergan remarked:

I am afraid I must lapse into philosophy. I have been stung with that monomania now and then but am little scholastic though as far as I know a Good Catholic. Still modern

logic is fair. The theory of knowledge is what is going to interest me most of all. I have read Aristotle his *peri psuches* and am of strong nominalist tendency.

Every sentence in the excerpt has its interest and significance, his fascination with and resistance to philosophy at the time, his nominalism, and information on when he first read the text of Aristotle. In the following analysis I would like to explore the meaning and significance of the phrase "modern logic." It is in his study of it that the encounter with the works of John Stuart Mill and a variety of related authors takes place.

It is well known that Lonergan's BA degree in London University, awarded in 1930, was in Classics embracing Latin, Greek, French, and Mathematics. It is also known that what he really wanted to study at the time was methodology. Related is the generally unknown fact, only revealed by a casual sentence on page three of *Caring About Meaning*, that for the Intermediate part of the Degree he took, not mathematics, as we might expect, but rather logic.¹ The logic syllabus contained the core methodology programme of the University of London. Its headings are as follows:

Scope of Logic Laws of Thought
Terms. Formal Division and Definition. Predicables
Propositions and their Import. Forms of Immediate Inference.
Syllogisms and other varieties of Deductive Reasoning. Trains of Reasoning. Functions of Syllogism.
Inductive Inference. Postulates of Induction. Induction and Analogy. The Relation of Induction to Deduction.
Theory of Scientific Method. Observation and Experiment.
Hypotheses. Empirical and Causal Laws. Methods of Scientific explanation. Elimination of Chance.²

Almost all of the headings derive, in one way or another, from the table of contents of Mill's *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation). The book was first published in 1843, the 8th edition in 1872. Newman, according to Ian Ker, was invited to review the early edition. With Archbishop Whately's *The Elements of Logic*, it was a core text book of the 19th century in England. Following Bacon, it introduced a distinction between formal logic on the one hand and applied logic or methodology on the other. The range of its interest in methodology was vast, spanning not just the then known natural sciences, but also the sciences of the mind, personality, economics, sociology and history. Although some of the details of Mill's reflections on scientific methods are now dated, what is enduring is the enormous methodological agenda of the work and the context it establishes for the meaning of the word, method.

The name of John Stuart Mill occurs rarely in Lonergan's writings, unlike for instance those of Aristotle or Aquinas. He is mentioned twice in *Method in Theology*, once in a Blandyke paper, once in notes taken at his course "Thought and Reality" in 1946, once in *Understanding and Being*, and once in *Caring About Meaning*.³ There, in response to a question about starting out with Joseph in order to prepare for the study of *Insight*, he replied:

That's an old book. Joseph didn't have much science -- all he had was Mill's methods. The publisher's reader of *Insight*, the one who really knew his stuff, said, "The only thing on scientific method is Mill, and no one pays any attention to that."⁴

Although Lonergan does not ever seem to have quoted directly from Mill, the comment suggests some familiarity with the text and also recommends it as background for *Insight*. But the fact that the syllabus of an examination he would have to sit twice was defined by Mill's work establishes the connection beyond doubt. At a time when despite the fact that he was studying classics he was trying to gain an entry into methodological questions he encountered Mill. It could also be argued that it was at a crucially formative and influential stage of his unfolding quest. So the question arises, how important was his study of Mill at the time and of his sitting for two examinations largely structured by his work? Did it result in his work being in part a response to the methodological agenda inaugurated by Bacon and sharpened by Mill?

In preparing for those examinations and studying Logic and Epistemology in his first year Lonergan read a group of authors, Frick, *Logica* (1893, 6th edition 1924),⁵ Joseph, *An Introduction to Logic* (1906),⁶ Joyce, *Principles of Logic* (1908),⁷ and Coffey, *The Science of Logic* (1912).⁸ All of these authors are quoted in the first two Blandyke papers he wrote, "Forms of Mathematical Inference," in January 1928, and "The Syllogism," in March 1928. The contents of the books by Joseph, Coffey and Joyce were largely defined by Mill's *Logic*. The books of both Joyce and Coffey were text books for the London and other examinations on Logic at the time. The range of their interests is somewhat narrower than Mill, but they are usually sharper on details. Mill and those authors, with the addition of Bradley, shaped the methodological horizon of philosophy in London University at the time. So when Lonergan wrote to his Provincial requesting that his degree be changed from Classics to General Methodology, that would be the environment he was addressing.⁹ The request was also indicative of his dominant interests at the time. Before going to explore their possible significance for Lonergan's work it

will be helpful to describe his encounter with them in the Intermediate Logic Examination.

Loneragan sat his Intermediate Logic Examination in London for the first time in November of 1927. The story goes that he knew the answers that were expected but felt they were wrong. Being too stubborn to compromise he gave the examiner his own views, probably coloured by his then nominalism, his criticism of conceptualism and his concern for the empirical origins of knowledge. The result was a referral on the logic paper. Although John Foley remembers him almost boasting about the way he had challenged the ideas of the examiners there was also a certain amount of humiliation involved in the experience. This I believe is a possible reason why he is so silent about his encounter with Mill. The outcome was that he had to resit the examination, which he did July 4th 1928. The two three hour papers he took in the morning and afternoon on both occasions are extant.¹⁰ The first paper seems usually devoted to general questions about logic, the science of the sciences, the second to questions about scientific method. The following are questions from the papers he sat on July 4th 1928:

1. "All truth and error lie in propositions." - Mill. Explain. Distinguish carefully between the validity and the truth of propositions. Is it true that logic is indifferent to the latter? (Paper 1)
2. How are the classificatory sciences supposed to be distinguished from the explanatory? Is the distinction just? Employ illustrations from both to explain and justify your answer. (Paper 2)
4. From phenomena alone, it has been said, we can infer only negative conclusions, never a positive. Illustrate this critically, taking examples from the application of each of Mill's methods in turn. (Paper 2)
6. In making an experiment we are undoubtedly finding the effect of a cause: does it follow that laws established by experiment are laws stating a causal sequence? Use illustrations in your answer. (Paper 2)
7. "The laws of Chance are not applicable to individual cases." Discuss this sentence. (Paper 2) (See *Insight* 55/6, 68)

The first question is concerned with logic or philosophy in general. In the other questions there can be identified some elements of classical and

statistical inquiry, of description and explanation, and of Mill's methods or canons, one of which is termed the method of residues. In studying for these examinations on two occasions Lonergan had to read the works of Mill, Joseph, Joyce and Coffey. Even a casual study of the examination questions suggest that they influenced Lonergan's thought in such realms as logic and methodology, description and explanation, classical and statistical methods of science, and the relation between the "what-is-it" question, definition and things.

II

That Lonergan encountered Mill and a related school of authors in his study and in these examinations is then an established fact. The further question now arises, how did these authors understand logic and methodology and did that understanding influence Lonergan in the short or long term? Mill's work opens with the problem of defining logic. Is it the art and science of reasoning or of the pursuit of truth? It does not meddle in the work of other sciences but is rather, as Bacon held, the science of science itself. He goes on to define it as:

Logic, then, is the science of the operations of the understanding which are subservient to the estimations of evidence: both the process itself of advancing from known truths to unknown, and all other intellectual operations in so far as auxiliary to this.¹¹

For Joyce philosophy, following Aristotle, is the science which treats of the whole of knowledge. Logic for him:

is the science which directs the operations of the mind in the attainment of truth.... It would be erroneous to term it, 'the science of the operations of the mind': for it does not in fact consider the actual operations - the process of conceiving, judging, and reasoning...Logic is a science which treats of things as they exist in the conceptual order...¹²

For Coffey psychology is the science of all our mental activities, logic is concerned with directing our mental operations in the discovery and proof of truth, metaphysics with all of being.

Logic is sometimes called the "science of the sciences," because, although it does not deal with the special methods

and rules of procedure peculiar to any particular science, it brings to light general laws and canons to which reason must conform in all; and because, furthermore, its scope embraces the principles that underlie the classification of all the other sciences and the unification - as far as this is possible - of all human knowledge.

He goes on:

But since *being* is the object of our *knowledge*, while logic aims at knowing *the process by which all being is known*, it is manifest that logic also has a sort of indirect interest in all being.¹³

In the books of Joyce and Coffey a distinction is drawn between formal and applied logic or methodology. The origins of the distinction are to be discovered in Bacon's break with Aristotle and its later expansion in Mill. Joyce has a brief comment on the history adding;

... For although, as Professor Minto has well said, it was by Mill that the attempt was first made "to incorporate scientific method with Logic, and add it as a new wing to the Aristotelian building, yet it was in the *Novum Organum* of Bacon that this undertaking was suggested.¹⁴

According to both Joyce and Coffey, Mill's *Logic* was a break with Aristotle. It put scientific method, under the title - applied logic or methodology - firmly on the logical map. In this it was developing a trend opened up by Bacon.

In Mill's work there are extensive discussions of the methods of the natural and the human sciences. Given the diversity of methods and fields of inquiry it posed the question, what is the general definition of a method? Joseph prefaces his remarks on methodology with the comment, 'Now different enquiries have their own peculiar difficulties, arising out of the nature of their subject-matter, and of the problems which they set.' and goes on to define methodology as:

And any rules for dealing with these peculiar difficulties will constitute rules of method, instructing us how to set about the task of singling out the laws or causal connexions from amidst the particular tangle in which the facts are presented in such science. The consideration of such rules, as distinct from the use of them, is *Methodology*; and so far as herein we consider how certain

general logical requirements are to be satisfied in a particular case, it is sometimes called applied logic.¹⁵

The Chapter goes on to consider, in rather vague terms, such realms as cause and effect, multiple causes, human laws and history (515, 522), statistics- very briefly (521), "historical or comparative method"(522), and finally on the last page, Natural Selection.

Joyce offers two different definitions of method. A first is 'the different ways in which scientific knowledge can be attained and presented to the mind.' The second is 'the general rules which should guide us in the arrangement of our arguments.' Method is also defined as "a systematic manner of carrying on the search for truth."¹⁶ The observations of Descartes (universal doubt etc) and Leibnitz on method are discussed. Coffey completes the series with his account:

After having separately examined each of the three mental operations, of conception, judgment, and inference, our next concern is to inquire how we reach *true* judgments, especially those true *universal* judgments which constitute *scientific* knowledge: how, in other words, we are to exercise those three mental operations on the data of knowledge to the best advantage for the acquiring of truth: how we are to regulate and co-ordinate those mental acts, conception, judgment, and reasoning, in exploring the various departments of the knowable universe. This portion of logical doctrine is variously described as applied logic, methodology, or the science of logical method.¹⁷

It is clear that Mill's work contained a vast agenda for methodology. In certain ways it was developed by Joseph, Joyce and Coffey. Formal logic was concerned with the manner the human mind attained the truth in every discipline. Applied logic or methodology was concerned with particular departments of knowledge. How precisely Lonergan is drawing on these authors in *Insight* and *Method in Theology* is a significant research project. As with other sources no doubt he will retain what he finds valuable, transform what needs to be developed, and reject what he considers to be erroneous. But that these works influenced his thinking in *Insight* and *Method in Theology* seems beyond dispute. The time has come to make explicit what has been tacit.

A further term on the syllabus of the examination is "predicables." In Mill *et al* the corresponding chapters deal with categories. The central category is substance. In his treatment of substance Mill also discusses the term, body.¹⁸ In notes taken at his course on "Thought and Reality" in

1946, pages 11 and 23; and notes he made for his course "Intelligence and Reality" in 1951 page 10, Lonergan made it clear that the Aristotelian analysis of substance is behind his analysis of the thing. So the question arises, did his thinking about things originate with his reading of the authors for the examination. In his Blandyke Paper on "The Syllogism" he refers to Porphyry's tree. In that context consider the remarks of Joyce:

Before explaining these terms (Species, Genus, Differentia, Property and Accident) it is important to point out that the Porphyrian account of the Predicables, depends on a fact strongly emphasized by Aristotle (*Categories* 2,5) that the ultimate subject of all predication is the individual.¹⁹

Discussing species Joyce remarks:

The concept which thus expresses the constitutive notes by which the individual is what he is, is said to represent the essence (*ousia*) of the individual. Two other terms were also employed to signify the essence. It was called the quiddity (*to ti en einai*), because it is by the term which declares the essential nature, that we reply to the question, What is it? (*quid sit*), in regard to any object. For, as we have said, we conceive the class-nature as being that which makes the thing the kind of thing it is. It was also called the species (*eidos*), i.e. characterizing form.²⁰

Joseph, following Aristotle rather than Porphyry, replaces the term species with definition. In him the relation of the question, "what is it?", with the definition and substance or species is made clear:

We may ask the question *ti esti*; - what is it? - of an attribute (like momentum) as well as a substance (like a man or a lobster); and the answer will be a definition.²¹

The treatment of definition in those authors establishes part of the context for Lonergan's work in the first of the *Verbum* articles and Chapter I of *Insight*. Mill's account of the definition of the circle echoes that of Lonergan. Their divergence becomes apparent in their respective treatments of explanatory or real definitions, and can be traced to Lonergan's unique contribution of underlining the mediating role of insight in defining.²² Add Shull's transposition of the question, "What is a species?" into the modern evolutionary context with its emphasis on heredity, genetics and statistics, to those classical treatments above and you have the background for Chapter VIII of *Insight*.²³ That study cannot be included here but I would like to suggest that Shull also has much to

offer in illuminating the movement of Lonergan's thought on species.

It is clear from the syllabus and examination questions that under applied logic or methodology the themes of scientific explanation, causality, chance, and probability were involved. In his work Lonergan would replace causality with verifiable correlations among variables or conjugate forms, a term that has affinities with Dewey. The discovery of those correlations amounted to an explanation of a systematic process. The discussion of chance and probability in Mill, Joyce and Coffey again contains echoes of Lonergan's later work on the topic in *Insight*. For Joyce, chance is defined as the negation of causality, for Lonergan randomness as the absence of system.²⁴ The outcome of a throw of a dice, although in a sense "caused" by the thrower, is also governed by chance. In tossing the dice one causes the movement but not the outcome. Having introduced the notion of chance and coincidence, Joyce then goes on to consider firstly mathematical probability, and secondly philosophical probability which is a property of propositions.

An unplanned meeting with someone in a City for Joyce is casual, for Coffey, a coincidence.

...I attribute the meeting to chance. In doing so, I do not regard Chance as a positive entity, to whose causality the meeting was due. I simply signify that the event was a coincidence, that it was outside the scope of either of the two causal series needed to bring it about.²⁵

Joyce goes on to remark that what seems to happen by chance, coincidentally, from one standpoint, could be planned from a higher viewpoint.

This point has been illustrated by the case of a master, who despatches two servants on different errands, each without the knowledge of the other, to the same place. Their meeting is, as far as they are concerned, casual. But to the master, it is the result in view of which the action was planned, and to which its various stages were all directed. This suggests how in our lives coincidences may, if considered in relation to an overruling Providence, be directly intended, and constitute the true term in a chain of causality.²⁶

In *Insight* on pages 649-51 and 665 Lonergan discusses the manner in which events in world order with are coincidental from our standpoint are systematic from the viewpoint of God. The resonances with the passage in

Joyce are striking.

I could continue and discuss the four known occurrences of the word "insight" in those authors, Mill's canons,²⁷ nominalism, and an account of common sense.²⁸ But perhaps enough has been presented to suggest significant parallel interests in Mill, Joseph, Joyce and Coffey, and in Lonergan's work. Although the details of the manner in which those authors influenced Lonergan is problematic, what is clear is that they did influence him. If that is the case, when we read him we need to take into account the fact of that influence. For too long the book *Insight* has stood in lonely isolation from much philosophical thought. There is a need to understand the contexts which it presupposes and transforms. One of those is the philosophical tradition in logic initiated by Aristotle, and enlarged by Bacon and Mill. Another is the epistemological tradition established by Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas. There is also the input from Newman and modern science. It is only by understanding those presupposed contexts and their transformation that the true significance of *Insight* will be reached. The present study has drawn attention to one significant influence, John Stuart Mill.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Caring About Meaning, Patterns in the Life of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by Pierre Lambert, Charlotte Tansey and Cathleen Going, Thomas More Institute Papers, Montreal 1982.
2. The topics are given in the syllabus for the intermediate examination in Arts in *The Prospectus for External Degrees*, 1926, Senate House Library, University of London, 1926, p 42. The headings are the same for the following four years.
3. Students at Heythrop where Lonergan studied philosophy wrote papers which were privately published in volumes known as Blandyke papers. The texts of Lonergan's three Blandyke papers are available for consultation at the Lonergan Research Institute, Toronto, as are notes taken at his course on "Thought and Reality."
4. *Caring About Meaning*, Thomas More Institute, Montreal 1982, p 211. In his personal bibliography files held in the Archives of the Lonergan Research Institute, Toronto, there is a card listing the titles of seven works of Mill, *System of Logic, Auguste Comte and Positivism, Examination of the Philosophy of Sir W. Hamilton, Principles of Political Economy, Essay on Liberty, Considerations on Representative Gov't*, and *Autobiography*.
5. Frick, Carlo, *Logica*, Friburgh, Herder and Co, 1893, 1924.
6. Oxford, Clarendon Press 1906.
7. *Principles of Logic*, London, Longmans and Green and Co, 1908.

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8. *The Science of Logic, An Inquiry into the Principles of Accurate Thought and Scientific Method: Volume I Concepts, Judgments and Inference; Volume II Method, Science and Certitude*, London, Longmans and Green 1912. It is interesting that the works of Joyce and Coffey were published by the same publishing company who would later publish *Insight*. Wittgenstein wrote a typically strident review of this work, the only book review he ever published. (See Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Duty of Genius*, London, Jonathan Cape 1990, pps 74-5. It seems doubtful whether he grasped the points about to be made about scientific method, which these authors considered a part of logic, in his critique.
 9. *The Question as Commitment*, Thomas More Institute, Montreal 1979, p 10.
 10. They can be found in bound volumes of examination papers kept in the Library at the Senate House, University of London.
 11. *A System of Logic, Collected Works Volume VII*, University of Toronto Press 1973, p 12.
 12. *Principles of Logic*, Longmans, Green and Co, London 1908, pps 291, 298.
 13. *The Science of Logic, An Inquiry into the Principles of Accurate Thought and Scientific Method*, Volume I: Conception, Judgement, and Inference, Longmans and Green, London 1912, pps 30-3. His definition of Logic is on p 38. The sub-title of volume II is "Method, Science and Certitude".
 14. *Principles of Logic*, p 303.
 15. *An Introduction to Logic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1905, p 514.
 16. *The Principles of Logic*, pps 394, 398.
 17. *The Science of Logic*, Volume II, page 1.
 18. *A System of Logic, Vol 1*, 56. On Categories in general consult Chapters 3 and 7. Mill seems one of the few authors to discuss body, a term used by Lonergan in *Insight*.
 19. *Principles of Logic*, p 121.
 20. *ibid.*, p 123.
 21. *An Introduction to Logic*, p .
 22. Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book I, Chapter viii, para. 5, p 143. 145. Lonergan, *Insight*, 7, 10. Recall that initially Lonergan was a nominalist and would probably have agreed with Mill that definitions only deal with words. I suspect his discovery, through Stewart of the mediating role of insights in definitions in 1933 changed his stance. His approach to definition differs from all of the Heythrop authors in drawing out this mediating role of insight in defining. Once he had worked out this he had ceased to be a nominalist.
 23. The reference is to Shull, *Evolution*, N.Y. 1936. It is mentioned in note 67 of

"Finality, Love and Marriage", *Collection*, Darton, Longmans and Todd, London 1967, p 44. Lonergan made some notes on the text which are extant.

24. *Principles of Logic*, p 370; *Insight*, pps 48, 51.
25. Joyce, *Principles of Logic* p 370; see also Coffey *The Science of Logic*, Vol II, p 268f.
26. *Principles of Logic*, 371.
27. Mill's "method" of similarities and differences is mentioned in the notes for the 1945-6 course, page 7 where Lonergan is dealing with the dynamism of scientific method. Mill is not mentioned in the notes for the 1950/1 course. In the notes from his 1952/3 course on *Insight*, "The Canons of Empirical Method" appear for the first time. But it appears there is no mention of Mill. Can this reticence be traced to his experience of the Logic examination in London?
28. Common sense is defined on p 12 of Volume I of Coffey's *The Science of Logic* as "These plain truths, accepted if not acted on by all, are what people usually call sound common sense. ... But this common sense is of itself far from infallible."