

Proof as Sign, Conversion as Condition

A Lonerganian Meta-Apologetics After *Insight 19*

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ABSTRACT Lonergan’s chapter 19 “proof,” in *Insight*, for God is typically assessed as a putative demonstration whose success rises or falls with the minor premise that “the real is completely intelligible.” Yet both the structure of *Insight* (proof as a “set of signs” requiring the reader’s self-performance of rational judgment) and Lonergan’s later methodological turn (proof presupposes a horizon that cannot itself be proved) suggest that the apologetically decisive contribution of *Insight 19* is not a freestanding inference but a meta-apologetic, that is, an account of the normative conditions under which any natural-theological proof can function as evidence. This article argues that Lonergan offers a two-level model of apologetic rationality. On the first level, proofs function as instruments of clarification and as invitations to grasp a virtually unconditioned. On the second level, their cogency is conditioned immediately by intellectual conversion and, in the later Lonergan, within the fuller horizon shaped by moral and religious conversion. Interpreted this way, *Insight 19* is not discarded by later Lonergan but re-situated. It becomes a diagnostic and constructive tool within method, capable of exposing counterpositions and stabilizing conversion, without pretending to generate a horizon *ex nihilo*.

KEYWORDS Lonergan, Bernard; meta-apologetics; proof of God; rationality

INTRODUCTION

One can read chapter nineteen of *Insight* in two very different ways (Lonergan 1992, 657–708). The first way looks for a proof in the ordinary sense. It looks for premises that force a conclusion. It then asks whether the premises are true and whether the inference is valid. The second way looks for something more basic than a proof. It looks for a shift in the subject. It asks what happens in consciousness when one moves from understanding to judgment, from mere conception to reasonable affirmation. Lonergan wrote the chapter in the context of a much larger project, a project aimed at self-appropriation. St. Amour puts the latter criticism sharply, quoting Lonergan, who judged that the “trouble with chapter nineteen” lay in its failure to depart from the traditional line and in its tendency to treat God’s existence and attributes “in a purely objective fashion” (Lonergan 2004, 172).¹

Recent discussion of Lonergan’s chapter nineteen has tended to follow three broad paths. Reconstructive readers such as Bernard Tyrrell and Robert Spitzer seek to restate the proof in a more explicit argumentative form (Tyrrell 1974; Spitzer 2014). Critical readers such as Ronald Hepburn and Louis Dupré question either the warrant for the complete intelligibility premise or the transition from unrestricted inquiry to transcendent reality (Dupré 1972, 131–45). Mediating readers such as Luboš Rojka and Paul St. Amour do not deny the formal importance of the proof, but insist that its force depends upon the subject’s appropriation of Lonergan’s positions on knowing, being, and objectivity (Rojka 2008, 31–49).

This paper accepts the descriptive accuracy of these diagnoses, but it shifts the object of evaluation. It asks a different question. It asks what Lonergan offers apologetics when one takes seriously two claims that the tradition often holds apart. First, Lonergan insists that proof as printed argument does not itself yield judgment. The pages offer signs. The reader must perform the immanent act of rational consciousness. Second, Lonergan later insists that proof in any serious meaning presupposes a system, and that the system presupposes a horizon that belongs to a culture and a history. Hence, one cannot prove a horizon.

If both claims stand, then apologetics changes. It does not die. It changes its aim. It ceases to promise what it cannot deliver, namely, the production of a horizon through argument alone. It can still do something real. It can clarify meanings and it can uncover counterpositions. And we should not underplay its value in inviting the reader to test his or her own orientation

1. Also cited in St. Amour 2010, 10.

to inquiry. St. Amour makes this “wide-open” character explicit when saying that the argument may be valid, but existentially it remains open, since one’s judgment about the premises depends on who one is and on whether the minor premise becomes a matter of real assent (St. Amour 2010, 23).

That is the center of gravity of this article. I argue that Lonergan offers a meta-apologetic. By that I mean an account of the normative conditions under which any natural theological proof can function as evidence for a subject. That account has two levels. On the first, argument functions as a sign that points toward a virtually unconditioned judgment. On the second, the horizon of the subject conditions whether the sign can function as a sign, whether it can have meaning, and whether it can be valued as worth pursuing. Conversion enters here. But it does not enter as a cheap escape from criticism. Nor does it enter as an excuse to dismiss disagreement. Better yet, it enters as a name for the way in which the subject’s horizon changes, and with it the subject’s ability to grasp principles and not merely conclusions. For the purposes of chapter nineteen, the proximate issue is intellectual conversion. Moral and religious conversion become decisive when the later Lonergan broadens the question from formal proof to the concrete horizon within which proof acquires meaning and value.

The paper proceeds in six steps. I begin by showing why “Does the proof work?” is not the right first question in Lonerganian terms. I then anchor the argument in Lonergan’s own insistence that proof on paper supplies signs, and that judgment requires a grasp of the unconditioned. I then turn to the later Lonergan, largely through St. Amour’s careful synthesis, to show why Lonergan came to claim that proof is not fundamental and that one cannot prove a horizon. I then propose a constructive framework for a Lonerganian meta-apologetics that integrates the two claims. I follow this by then testing the framework by re-reading the famous minor premise, the claim that the real is completely intelligible, as a diagnostic for positions and counterpositions rather than as a premise to be defended in abstraction. I close by indicating what this contributes to apologetics and to Lonergan studies.

Throughout, I keep the argument close to the texts. I do not pretend to settle every metaphysical dispute about the complete intelligibility of reality. That dispute matters. It is not my primary object. I aim instead to show that Lonergan’s own methodological remarks shift the nature of what apologetics can responsibly claim.

PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

Before turning to the proof itself, several Lonerganian terms require clarification. By the heuristic notion of being, I mean not an image of some highest object, but the objective intended by the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. Hence, Lonergan defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and affirmed by reasonable judgment. This definition is heuristic because it specifies the relation between cognitional operations and their objective without pretending to picture being directly. For the same reason, the claim that the real is being is not an arbitrary stipulation. Instead, it is but a consequence of Lonergan's correlation of meaning with intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation.

Judgment, accordingly, is not the mere attachment of existence to a concept. Direct insight grasps intelligibility. Reflective insight grasps that the relevant conditions are fulfilled. Only then does judgment occur as assent grounded in the virtually unconditioned. The distinction matters throughout what follows, because the chapter nineteen proof is not a slide from concepts to existence but best read as a transition from understanding to reflective grasp and then to judgment.

A horizon, in Lonergan's later sense, is the historically and culturally formed field within which meanings are available, arguments are intelligible, and goals appear worth pursuing. It would therefore be erroneous to conceptualise these as a mere mood or as a merely private standpoint. It is part of the subject's equipment if the subject is to understand the terms, grasp the validity of the argument, and value the investigation. In the present context, the relevant horizon includes intellectual conversion and, ordinarily, a theoretical differentiation of consciousness, that is, the ability to operate in the intellectual pattern of experience with systematic control of meaning rather than remaining confined to common-sense imagery and spontaneous realism (Lonergan 2004, 172).

Conversion, in the later Lonergan, is a radical revision of horizon. Intellectual conversion concerns one's basic account of knowing and objectivity (2017, 223). Moral conversion concerns the shift from satisfactions to values (2017, 225–26). Religious conversion concerns being in love in an unrestricted fashion (2017, 226–27). In the vocabulary of *Insight*, the positions are affirmed when one accepts one's own intelligence and reasonableness and stands by that acceptance. Counterpositions arise when other desires interfere with the proper functioning of the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know (Lonergan 1992, 696). Their "reversal" is not an arbitrary change of mind but the recognition that a counterposition defeats itself once it is claimed to be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably.

“DOES THE PROOF WORK?” IS THE WRONG FIRST QUESTION

When one asks whether Lonergan’s proof works, one normally means something precise. One means whether the conclusion follows from the premises and whether the premises are true. That question matters. And, as such, it is not illegitimate to pose. Yet it is not the first question that Lonergan’s text demands. Lonergan’s project aims at self-appropriation. It aims at making explicit the operations by which we come to know anything at all. It also aims at showing how mistaken accounts of knowing lead to distorted metaphysics and distorted views of objectivity. In that context, a printed argument has a different status. It does not function as a tool that substitutes for the reader’s insight and judgment. Better yet, it functions as an invitation to perform them.

Do not mistake this as a rhetorical flourish. Lonergan states the point in chapter nineteen itself. Proof is not an automatic process like a physiological reaction or a mechanical computation. The page gives signs. The reader must grasp the virtually unconditioned and must judge. He says:

proof is not some automatic process that results in a judgment, as taking an aspirin relieves a headache, or as turning on a switch sets the digital computer on its unerring way. All that can be set down in these pages is a set of signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned. But grasping it and making the consequent judgment is an immanent act of rational consciousness that each has to perform for himself and no one else can perform for him. (Lonergan 1992, 695)

This claim has immediate consequences. It means that a critic who treats the proof as if it were a self-moving machine will misread it. It also means that a defender who treats it as a device that should compel assent, regardless of the reader’s horizon, will also misread it.

One sees one type of contemporary restatement in Robert Spitzer’s pedagogical reconstruction of a Lonerganian proof for God’s existence. My concern here is not to adjudicate Spitzer’s broader apologetic project in detail, but to note a methodological point. Once Lonergan’s argument is restated in compressed, publicly apologetic form, the distinctively cognitive route of chapter nineteen can recede from view unless its underlying presuppositions are kept explicit (Spitzer 2014).²

2. Spitzer’s fuller treatment is more nuanced than a short public summary can show and does explicitly discuss Lonergan’s notion of being. My point here is therefore not that Spitzer ignores that notion, but that compressed apologetic restatements can obscure Lonergan’s own cognitive route when detached from its underlying presuppositions. (see Spitzer 2010)

One sees the misreading also in some philosophical critiques. Dupré formalizes Lonergan's argument in much the same way that a defender would, then he grants the internal coherence of the conditional chain, and then he targets the crucial move (Dupré 1972, 143). He targets the attempt to answer Kant by appealing to the fact of an unlimited desire to know, and he denies that such a fact implies the ultimate intelligibility of the real. Dupré's objection presses hard. It deserves attention. Yet even here, one can ask whether the objection strikes Lonergan's decisive claim or whether it strikes one way of reading that claim. If one treats Lonergan as arguing from desire to a metaphysical fact about the world, then Dupré has a clear target. If one treats Lonergan as arguing about the conditions of reasonable affirmation and objectivity, then the target shifts. The question becomes whether our very practice of judgment and inquiry already commits us, not to a finished metaphysical system, but to a demand for intelligibility that cannot coherently be denied while one claims to know.

This points toward a more accurate first question. One should ask what the argument asks of the reader. One should ask what operations the argument presupposes. One should ask what positions the reader must accept and what counterpositions the reader must reject. Lonergan states this explicitly when he correlates "the real" with "being" and insists that this coincidence presupposes acceptance of positions and rejection of counterpositions, so he does not need to repeat the basic points at that stage (Lonergan 1992, 695). That leads to a further consequence, which is that if the proof presupposes positions, then it will not function for a reader who lives within the counterpositions. That does not mean the proof is false, of course. Still, it means that, for such a reader, it will not be a proof in the existential sense. St. Amour makes this point a bit clearer when he notes that the chapter never explicitly asks for whom it is a proof, yet it presses precisely that question by its demand for real assent to the minor premise, the claim about complete intelligibility (St. Amour 2010, 23).

This already reframes apologetics. In many apologetic contexts, one assumes that the task consists in producing premises that any rational agent must accept and in deriving conclusions that compel assent. Lonergan's remarks about proof as signs already qualify that assumption. His later remarks about horizon push this by further sharpening the qualification. The apologist may present reasons, yes. Yet, the apologist cannot substitute for the subject's responsible judgment. Likewise, the apologist also cannot presume a horizon that has not been formed.

Let me now state the thesis of this section, given what I have attempted to lay out thus far. The wrong first question asks whether the proof works

as an external device. The right first question asks what operations and what horizon make it possible for the proof to function as evidence. Lest one accuse me, or Lonergan for that matter, of evasion, it merits further clarifying that what we are doing is not, in fact, evasion, but a shift to what Lonergan calls method. Method's account of interpretation strengthens the same point from another angle. Texts are not understood by lexical decoding alone. Interpretation requires a movement from the interpreter's own horizon toward the horizon operative in the text, that is

The major texts, the classics, in religion, letters, philosophy, theology, not only are beyond the initial horizon of their interpreters but also may demand an intellectual, moral, religious conversion of the interpreter over and above the broadening of his horizon. (Lonergan 2017, 152–53)

Where that movement does not occur, a text may be flattened into categories foreign to it. Applied to chapter nineteen, this means that a reader may hear a methodical invitation to self-appropriation as if it were only a self-sufficient scholastic deduction. Because horizons are conditioned by conversion, interpretation itself may require conversion.

PROOF AS “SIGNS” AND THE VIRTUALLY UNCONDITIONED

Lonergan's chapter nineteen contains a short argument. It also contains many remarks about what argument can and cannot do. If we ignore those remarks, we lose the point. Let us begin from the center.

Lonergan states the main argument in a simple syllogistic form. St. Amour gives the formulation explicitly, and contemporary restatements often repeat it with slight modifications. The form runs as follows.

1. If the real is completely intelligible, then God exists.
2. The real is completely intelligible.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Lonergan then supports the minor premise by an ancillary argument. He defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and affirmed reasonably, and he states that being is completely intelligible because one knows being completely only when one answers all intelligent questions correctly. He then correlates the real with being, since the real is what is meant by the name “real,” and the meaning of the term must be correlated with the same operations.

St. Amour reproduces this structure, emphasizing how Lonergan's definitions arise from the unrestricted desire to know (St. Amour 2010, 7). Rojka notes that a crucial stage of the argument identifies the real with being,

then being with complete intelligibility, then complete intelligibility with an unrestricted act of understanding that possesses the properties of God (Rojka 2008, 37).

Lonergan then supports the major premise by a conditional chain. He argues that if the real is completely intelligible, then complete intelligibility exists. If complete intelligibility exists, then the idea of being exists. If the idea of being exists, then God exists. Dupré reproduces this conditional chain and reads it as Lonergan's answer to Kant (Dupré 1972, 143).

One might stop here and then ask whether each premise is true. Many interpreters do stop there, yet Lonergan does not. He inserts an epistemic warning. The argument on the page does not itself yield judgment. The page supplies signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned, but the reader must grasp it and must judge.

This claim rests on Lonergan's analysis of judgment. Judgment does not consist in adding an extra predicate called existence to an idea. Judgment consists in affirming that a condition has been fulfilled. The fulfillment yields what Lonergan calls the unconditioned. Now, that being said, it merits that we distinguish the formally unconditioned from the virtually unconditioned. A formally unconditioned proposition needs no conditions. A virtually unconditioned proposition has conditions, yet one knows that the conditions are fulfilled. St. Amour states this plainly in his account of Lonergan's opposition to the ontological argument (St. Amour 2010, 7). The ontological argument conflates understanding and judgment (Lonergan 1992, 692–95). Lonergan distinguishes them. He says that one must add, not an experience of God, but a grasp of the unconditioned, and more precisely a virtually unconditioned inference from true premises.

This yields two consequences that matter for apologetics.

First, Lonergan does not allow argument to bypass the subject. Argument functions within consciousness. It cannot replace consciousness. It cannot deliver the act of judgment as an external force. This may seem like a romantic claim. But it is not. It is actually an epistemic claim about what it is to judge, that is, we do not judge by coercion but rather that we judge by rational consciousness. Second, Lonergan does not allow the notion of God to verify itself. One may form the notion. One may work out the attributes by extrapolation from our restricted acts of understanding. One still must ask whether God is real, whether God exists. St. Amour emphasizes that Lonergan raises this question and that the question belongs to the province of judgment (St. Amour 2010, 6–9).

Now, bearing all of this inversion in mind, consider how apologetics usually proceeds. It offers reasons. It expects the reasons to compel assent, at

least in ideal circumstances. Lonergan breaks this expectation at the root. He says that even if one offers a perfectly valid argument, the argument still functions as sign, and the subject still must perform the act.

At first glance, this looks trivial. One might say that any proof requires that the reader understand it. That is obvious. But it is not merely this as Lonergan means more. He means that proof, as printed proposition and inference, remains abstract. It cannot guarantee the concrete act of affirming. This is on account of that act depending on the subject's self-transcendence. It depends on authenticity. Lonergan's own text hints at this dependence. When he identifies the real with being, he acknowledges that this coincidence presupposes acceptance of the positions and rejection of the counterpositions. He then states that every counterposition leads to its own reversal, since it becomes incoherent as soon as one claims to grasp it intelligently and affirm it reasonably.

That is not a purely formal remark but more precisely a remark concerning the subject's self-contradiction. A subject who denies intelligence while appealing to intelligent grasp performs a kind of incoherence.

At this point, one should now be able to see why the minor premise occupies the central role in debate. The claim that the real is completely intelligible does not function like an empirical premise. It functions like a claim about the unrestricted character of inquiry and about the meaning of being. That makes it vulnerable to critics who interpret it as a metaphysical dogma. It also makes it hard to accept for readers who have not appropriated Lonergan's account of knowing. St. Amour puts the issue with unusual directness. The question "Is the real completely intelligible" strikes at the root of one's deepest epistemological assumptions, and it cannot function as an unexamined premise but becomes affirmable only through the reader's appropriation of Lonergan's positions on knowing, being, and objectivity (St. Amour 2010, 23).

This is where apologetics often, if not always, stumbles. It is expected that one can set down a premise that any rational agent must accept. Lonergan's analysis, on the other hand, suggests that what the agent accepts depends on the agent's horizon and on the agent's moral and intellectual habits. It also suggests that the denial of the premise may itself reveal something. Not necessarily moral fault. It may reveal a counterposition. It may reveal a refusal of the unrestricted desire to know. It may reveal that the subject does not mean by "real" what Lonergan means by it.

Where does this leave us then? The next step then follows. If Lonergan's argument functions as sign, we must ask what makes a sign function. We must ask what makes a subject capable of grasping the sign as evidence. As such, we move from proof to horizon.

The first level of the argument must itself be parsed into distinct cognitional moments. The subject first encounters an argument as a set of signs. Those signs must be understood by direct insight. That understanding must then be submitted to reflective scrutiny until the subject grasps the relevant virtually unconditioned. Only then can judgment occur. The point is decisive. Chapter nineteen is not a shortcut from propositions to assent.

LATER LONERGAN AND THE DERIVATIVE STATUS OF PROOF

Lonerган did not repudiate the formal validity of chapter nineteen. He did, however, come to judge that its mode of presentation was inadequate. In *Philosophy of God and Theology*, the criticism is explicit. Chapter nineteen, he says, “treated God’s existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion” and “made no effort to deal with the subject’s religious horizon” (Lonerган 2004, 172). That judgment does not amount to a retraction of the argument. It shifts the issue. The question is no longer only whether the proof is valid in form, but whether the conditions under which such a proof can be understood, appropriated, and valued have themselves been made explicit. St. Amour is therefore right to insist that later Lonergan does not so much abandon the argument as resituate it within a broader methodological and anthropological context (St. Amour 2010, 10).

The first development is the resituation of logic within method. The point is not that logic becomes dispensable. It remains necessary for the clarity of terms, the coherence of propositions, and the rigor of inference. But it cannot carry the whole burden of philosophical and theological development. Later, Lonergan repeatedly contrasts a merely deductivist ideal with the concrete and cumulative movement of method. If one treats proof as basic, one is tempted to imagine that right reason can operate in abstraction from the historical, cultural, and intentional conditions of inquiry. If, by contrast, one treats method as basic, one begins from the recurrent operations of subjects who inquire, understand, reflect, and judge. Proof remains possible, but its place changes. It becomes derivative within a wider process of cognitional activity (St. Amour 2010, 10–12).

The second development is the transition from objectivism to conversion. Later, Lonergan’s point is exact. Objectivity is not secured by leaving the subject out of account. It is achieved through the subject’s self-transcendence. In *Method in Theology*, he writes that “objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject” and that the fundamental forms of such self-transcendence are intellectual, moral, and religious conversion (Lonerган 2017, 313). The implication for the present argument is plain. A philosophy of God that proceeds as though its

objectivity were independent of the subject who understands, reflects, judges, and decides will remain abstract at precisely the point where later Lonergan insists on concreteness. Hence, the defect of chapter nineteen was not that it reasoned about God, but that it did so without making the subject's horizon thematic.

The third development concerns anthropology. *Insight* had already carried out an extraordinary analysis of intelligence and judgment, and later Lonergan did not revoke that achievement. Yet he came to see more clearly that deliberation, evaluation, and decision must be thematized as a distinct level of intentional consciousness. St. Amour is right on this point. Once that level is made explicit, the reception of proof can no longer be treated as independent of the subject's existential and evaluative operations (St. Amour 2010, 14, 18). What the subject attends to, what the subject is willing to ask, what the subject counts as worth affirming, all of this is conditioned by the subject's operative horizon. The consequence for chapter nineteen is decisive. Its proof cannot be treated as though it addressed an abstract knower untouched by value, decision, and existential orientation.

The fourth development concerns the constitutive significance of religious experience and of the religious horizon. That is why the later criticism names not simply objectivism in general but specifically the failure to deal with the subject's religious horizon (St. Amour 2010, 10; see also Lonergan 2004, 172). The issue here is not that argument must yield to private feeling. It is that the question of God cannot be fully isolated from the horizon within which the subject's unrestricted desire, moral striving, and religious openness are concretely lived. St. Amour therefore argues, rightly, that later Lonergan gives due priority to religious experience without thereby rendering chapter nineteen worthless (St. Amour 2010, 18–20). Rather, he relocates it. The proof is no longer basic. It operates within a horizon shaped by conversion.

At this point the later Lonergan's methodological remarks acquire their full force. "Proof is never the fundamental thing" (Lonergan 2004, 195). That claim is easy to misread. It does not mean that proofs are invalid, nor that reason is powerless. It means that proof, in any serious sense, presupposes a system in which terms and relations have determinate meaning, and that such a system in turn presupposes a horizon. The horizon is not a premise from which one deduces conclusions. It is part of the subject's equipment if the subject is to understand the meaning of the terms, grasp the cogency of the argument, and value the goal of the inquiry. Hence the further claim follows with full necessity. "You can never prove a horizon" (Lonergan 2004, 195). One can clarify a horizon, test it, and perhaps invite its revision. One cannot derive it as though it were itself the conclusion of an earlier proof.

Method in Theology sharpens the same point from another angle in its account of interpretation. Understanding a text does not consist in lexical decoding alone. The interpreter must move from his or her own horizon toward the horizon operative in the text. Where that movement does not occur, the text may be flattened into categories foreign to its meaning. Applied to *Insight* chapter nineteen, this means that one may read a methodical invitation to self-appropriation as though it were nothing more than a self-sufficient scholastic deduction. The failure, in such a case, lies not only in assent but in interpretation (Lonergan 2017, 145–63).

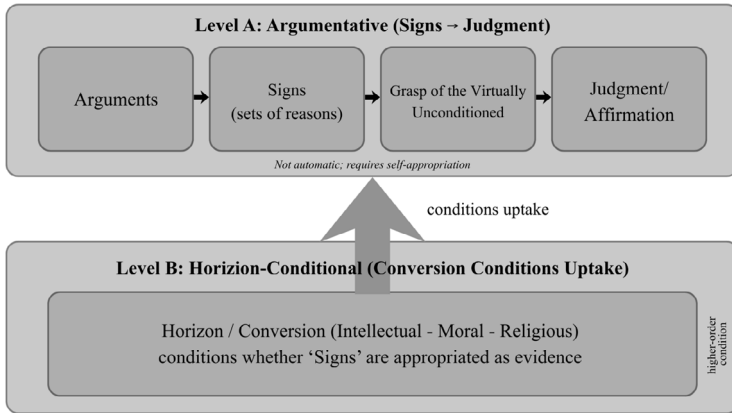
The paradox, then, is only apparent. Later Lonergan devalues proof relative to conversion, yet he does not repudiate the proof of chapter nineteen. St. Amour captures the ambiguity well when he notes that Lonergan could describe chapter nineteen as a survival from an earlier phase and yet still refuse to revoke it (St. Amour 2010, 20–21). The proper conclusion is neither that Lonergan abandoned rational apologetics nor that he dissolved rational warrant into historicist relativism. The issue is the relation between proof, method, and horizon. Once that relation is made explicit, one can integrate chapter nineteen with the later Lonergan rather than oppose them. The proof remains. But it remains as derivative. It functions within method, as sign rather than as a self-sufficient mechanism, and within a horizon whose revision belongs to conversion rather than to demonstration.

A LONERGANIAN META-APOLOGETICS

When one speaks of apologetics, one usually means argument. One means reason offered in defense of a claim. One may also mean persuasion. Yet persuasion is not identical with proof. Lonergan's later method pushes us to distinguish them. It also pushes us to ask what apologetics can claim without falling into absentmindedness.

I propose a two-level framework. It is simple in form, but difficult in execution.

Figure 1: Proof as sign and conversion as condition. The first level includes understanding of signs, reflective grasp of the virtually unconditioned, and judgment.



On the first level, apologetic proofs function as rational instruments within consciousness. More exactly, they are received as signs, understood by direct insight, submitted to reflective grasp, and only then judged. They clarify terms. They distinguish understanding from judgment. They expose what Lonergan calls counterpositions, as clarified above. They invite the subject to grasp a virtually unconditioned judgment. This sequence must be kept explicit, because the proof does not move directly from propositions to assent but unfolds through the subject’s own cognitional operations. St. Amour’s account of Lonergan’s critique of the ontological argument provides a paradigmatic instance. The ontological argument conflates understanding and judgment. Lonergan insists that a notion of God does not verify itself. As such, one must necessarily add a grasp of the unconditioned. This gives apologetics a rule rather than merely a critique of Anselm. Similarly, it gives apologetics a rule, that is, do not treat conceptual clarity as sufficient for affirmation, and do not substitute a notion for a judgment. On the second level, apologetic proofs presuppose horizons. That is to say, they presuppose a differentiation of consciousness and orientation to inquiry. Proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon. Conversion modifies horizons and is basic. Proof can invite. It can clarify. What it cannot do by itself is generate the horizon within which it becomes meaningful and valued.

This framework might look like a concession to subjectivism. It is not. Lonergan’s claim that objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity denies subjectivism. It also denies naive objectivism. It insists that we

reach objectivity by self-transcendence. St. Amour quotes the relevant line, “objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the fundamental forms of self-transcendence” involve conversion (Lonergan 2017, 313; see also St. Amour 2010, 13). If one tries to ensure objectivity apart from self-transcendence, one produces illusions. What does that entail, though? That line yields a methodological demand for apologetics. Apologetics must attend to the subject. It must attend to the subject’s horizon, not as an external psychological accident, but as a condition of meaning and value. It requires apologetics to avoid abstraction that forgets what it presupposes. Let me make the framework more explicit by articulating two normative rules. I state them as rules, lest I be accused of proffering mere slogans.

The first rule concerns what proofs can do. Proofs can function as signs of a virtually unconditioned judgment. They can represent a conclusion that the subject may responsibly affirm, but only if the subject performs the act. Proof offers signs, yes, but the onus is on the reader to grasp and judge them. The second rule concerns what proofs cannot do. Proofs cannot prove a horizon, nor can they provide the differentiation of consciousness that makes their terms meaningful. And they certainly cannot substitute for conversion. In a word, one can “never prove a horizon” (Lonergan 2004, 195).

These two rules have immediate apologetic consequences. Firstly, they change how we interpret failure to convince. If a reader does not find a proof convincing, that may signal that the proof contains a flaw. It may also signal that the reader does not accept the positions presupposed by the proof. Similarly, it may signal that the reader’s horizon does not allow the terms to have the intended meaning, or does not allow the goal of inquiry to be valued. There is a sort of existential openness of the proof. The argument may be valid, but whether the reader judges it sound depends on judgment of the premises, and that depends on who the reader is, including the reader’s attainment of intellectual conversion. Beyond this, they also change how we interpret the task of apologetics. A common apologetic expectation assumes that one can reason a person into conversion. The later Lonergan actually claims that the apologist’s task is neither to produce in others nor to justify for them God’s gift of love, and that people in love have not reasoned themselves into being in love (Lonergan 2017, 333).

That line can sound like a dismissal of rational apologetics, whereas it is actually a delimitation. It says that apologetics should not pretend to do what only God does. It says that apologetics should focus on what rational argument can do, which is to clarify and to invite. One might still ask why we should keep chapter nineteen at all. St. Amour gives a persuasive

answer. He argues that chapter nineteen “calls into question the subject’s intellectual horizon” (St. Amour 2010, 22). It demands genuineness in the acceptance of inquiry and reflection. It therefore functions as a test of the ultimate ramifications of critical realism. I contend that this suggests a new apologetic use. One can use the proof diagnostically. One can use it to test whether the subject will accept the unrestricted desire to know or whether the subject will appeal to obscurantism. This use fits the two-level framework. On the first level, the proof offers a structured set of signs. On the second level, the proof forces the subject to confront the horizon in which the subject lives. It does not prove the horizon. It reveals it.

This approach also addresses a criticism that Dupré presses. Dupré warns that philosophers often identify a system-required ultimate principle with the God of faith, as such, what he identifies is actually a content gap. The metaphysical conclusion remains thin whereas the religious intentionality supplies content. I argue that one can respond to this within the present framework without collapsing into fideism. One can accept that proof yields a metaphysical conclusion about God, and one can also accept that the personal content of faith arises within religious experience and conversion. (Spitzer 2014) One can locate the transition from metaphysical talk to religious talk not within an illicit inference but within a horizon. Doing so actually places the proof rather than trivializing it.

At this point, one might object by saying something akin to “Does this reduce the God-argument to a mere articulation of a horizon, as Dupré suggests horizon arguments tend to do?” It might, if one reads it poorly. A Lonerganian meta-apologetics does not say that God exists because I have a horizon. It says that proofs function only within horizons. It also says that some horizons are authentic and others are not. As such, we must take authenticity as a norm. One can evaluate horizons by their coherence, by their openness to questioning, by their capacity to avoid reversal under critique. In fact, Rojka cites Lonergan’s claim that untrue theories call for reversal and that method takes its stand on the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to understand correctly (Rojka 2008, 34; see also Lonergan 1992, 708). Does this mean we fall into relativism? No. That conclusion would follow only if one treated horizon as an arbitrary standpoint. In Lonergan, however, horizon names a historically conditioned yet norm-governed field of meaning and value.

As such, if all this obtains, then we can now articulate the claim that constitutes the original contribution of this article. Lonerganian apologetics should not aim first at producing demonstrations that compel assent across horizons. Rather, it should aim at disclosing the norms implicit in inquiry

and at inviting the subject into self-appropriation, by which the subject may come to perform the judgments that the proofs signify. Proofs then function as diagnostic and constructive tools within method. They can expose counterpositions and support conversion. They can stabilize the subject's movement toward authenticity. They should not claim to generate the horizon that makes them meaningful. For this reason, the next section tests this claim by revisiting the most contested element in the chapter nineteen proof.

RE-READING *INSIGHT* 19'S MINOR PREMISE AS A DIAGNOSTIC

The claim that the real is completely intelligible occupies a strange place in Lonergan's argument. It is not an empirical observation, and it is not a mere definitional truth. It functions as a premise that forces a decision about what one means by real, by being, and, naturally, by inquiry. That is why it draws criticism. That is also why it can function as diagnostic. We can see its structure in Lonergan's own words. He defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and says that being is completely intelligible because one knows it completely only when one answers all intelligent questions correctly. He then says that the real is being.

This seems at first to be a simple definitional move. Yet it is not. It presupposes acceptance of the positions and rejection of the counterpositions. Lonergan says so. If a reader rejects the premise, what does the rejection mean? It can mean different things. Sometimes it means that the reader rejects a strong metaphysical thesis, perhaps a version of the principle of sufficient reason. Rojka notes that one may interpret Lonergan's "all questions have answers" as parallel to Leibniz's principle that everything has a reason, and he notes that this leads to affirming complete intelligibility. (Rojka 2008, 47) Critics then argue that we can do science and common sense without such a premise. Hepburn, as Rojka reports, treats complete intelligibility as a regulative ideal that extrapolates from limited successes, not as a condition of having any knowledge at all. If that is right, then the minor premise seems too strong (Rojka 2008, 47; see also Hepburn 1973, 50).

Here the key terms must be kept exact. To accept the positions is, for Lonergan, to accept one's own intelligence and reasonableness and to stand by that acceptance. To reject the counterpositions is to reject the interference of other desire with the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. Their "reversal" occurs because a counterposition becomes incoherent the moment it is claimed to be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably.

Sometimes the rejection means that the reader reads “complete intelligibility” in the wrong register. The phrase can suggest that we, as finite knowers, must be able to answer all questions. Lonergan does not claim that. He correlates being with what is to be known if every question were answered correctly. The phrase refers to the objective of the unrestricted desire to know. It need not imply that finite subjects can attain it. The affirmation of complete intelligibility is conditioned neither by its actual fulfillment nor by the real possibility of its fulfillment (Lonergan 1992, 696; see also Jaramillo 2007, 221–67). This does not settle the issue, but it does clarify the claim.

Sometimes the rejection reveals a more basic counterposition. It reveals that the reader does not accept the unrestricted character of inquiry. The reader may accept inquiry in some domains but refuse it at the limit. As such, the reader may accept obscurantism. Lonergan calls obscurantism a counterposition. As such, it would be mistaken to conceptualize it as mere silence, but better to understand it as a refusal of the unrestricted demand of inquiry at the very point where inquiry presses toward ultimate intelligibility. He insists that one cannot brush aside questions without assigning a reason and that questions keep coming. Rojka quotes Lonergan’s claim that obscurantism is reprobated (Lonergan 2004, 8; see also Rojka 2008, 39). The diagnostic use of the minor premise depends on distinguishing these possibilities. One does not accuse the critic of bad faith. One asks what the critic means. One asks what is being denied. It is precisely here, I contend, that St. Amour supplies a fruitful interpretive key. He argues that the proof is existentially wide-open and that one key issue is whether the minor premise becomes a matter of real assent. The premise strikes at the root of one’s deepest epistemological assumptions. This suggests that the apologetic function of the premise may lie less in its role as a premise to be defended in abstraction and more in its role as a demand for self-clarification.

Let us test this with an example. A reader might say, “Reality is not completely intelligible. Some facts are brute.” That claim may mean, “I cannot explain everything.” That is a modest epistemic claim. Or it may mean, “Reality itself includes brute facts that admit no explanation.” That is a stronger metaphysical claim. Lonergan’s own text rejects the second claim sharply. He insists that to talk about “mere matters of fact” that admit no explanation is to talk about nothing, and that if existence is a mere matter of fact it is nothing (Lonergan 1992, 700). Rojka quotes this as Lonergan’s “rude and harsh” statement and ties it to Lonergan’s identification of being with reasonably affirmed intelligibility (Rojka 2008, 40). The apologetic task

here does not consist first in producing an external proof that brute facts are impossible. It consists in asking what the subject means by “real,” what the subject means by “nothing,” and how the subject can reasonably affirm brute facts while claiming to know. One brings the issue back to judgment. One asks how the subject distinguishes correct understanding from fantasy and how the subject grounds the claim that something is the case. One can then show that the assertion “There are brute facts” functions as a refusal of inquiry at the limit, and that such a refusal may conflict with the subject’s own practice of explanation in other domains.

This diagnostic function also clarifies a common charge of circularity. Rojka reports Bernard Tyrrell’s position that one must commit oneself to complete intelligibility and then affirm it, which makes the procedure look circular (Rojka 2008, 45; see also Tyrrell 1974, 121). Tyrrell sharpens the point by insisting that validation of Lonergan’s formal proof presupposes wholehearted commitment to the positions and, indeed, an unrestricted commitment to complete intelligibility (Tyrrell 1974, 121). Read crudely, that formulation sounds viciously circular, as though one had first to assume what the proof is meant to establish. Read within Lonergan’s method, however, the point is not that one arbitrarily stipulates complete intelligibility, but that one cannot sever chapter nineteen from the preceding work of self-appropriation and reversal of counterpositions. What looks like circularity at the level of isolated propositions is better understood as reflexivity at the level of cognitional performance.

Rojka himself notes that one would normally expect a good reason to believe reality is completely intelligible and then make a commitment. A Lonerganian meta-apologetics responds by distinguishing logical circularity from methodical reflexivity. Lonergan does not ask the reader to assume complete intelligibility as a premise without reason. He asks the reader to appropriate the meaning of being and the meaning of real as correlated with cognitional operations. He then asks the reader to judge whether the counterpositions can sustain themselves without reversal. That does not remove every concern, but it does reframe the concern. The argument proceeds by uncovering what the subject already performs in acts of understanding and judgment. As such, it does not proceed by begging the question.

This is why the minor premise works as a diagnostic. It forces the subject to decide whether to stand by the unrestricted desire to know or to qualify it at the limit. That is an existential decision about what one will permit oneself to ask, and not the naïve reading as a mere logical decision. Contemporary reformulations may foreground ontological or cosmological

entry-points for pedagogical reasons, but my concern here is Lonergan's own cognitional presentation and the horizon it presupposes.

In a similar way, the diagnostic reading also helps address Dupré's key objection that we mentioned above. Dupré argues that the unlimited desire to know does not entail ultimate intelligibility. A defender might respond by trying to prove ultimate intelligibility as a metaphysical fact. The meta-apologetic approach responds by asking a different question. What does the denial of intelligibility do to the meaning of judgment? What does it do to the meaning of "real"? If the subject can deny intelligibility while still claiming to know, perhaps the subject uses "real" in a different way than Lonergan. The apologetic task then shifts to clarifying meaning and exposing the costs of alternative meanings. One may still need to address Dupré's metaphysical concern. Yet one will address it at the right place, which is the subject's account of knowing and affirming.

Finally, the diagnostic reading makes explicit what St. Amour says chapter nineteen implicitly asks. For whom is this a proof? (St. Amour 2010, 23) The meta-apologetic answer runs as follows. It is a proof for the subject who accepts the positions, rejects the counterpositions, and lives within a horizon that values the unrestricted desire to know. It is not a proof for the subject who treats inquiry as a tool for local success but denies its unrestricted aim, or for the subject who treats "complete intelligibility" as a regulative ideal with no ontological import. In those cases, chapter nineteen functions differently. It functions as a sign that reveals a difference of horizon. This grounds apologetics in method and, thus, does not reduce it to a sociology of belief, as some critics are wont to charge.

WHAT THE FIELD GAINS

Lonergan's chapter nineteen argument invites an old response. People ask whether it works. What they actually mean is whether the syllogism compels assent. That question matters, but it is not the first question Lonergan's method raises. Lonergan insists that proof on paper supplies signs and that the reader must perform the act of judgment by grasping a virtually unconditioned. St. Amour shows that Lonergan later insisted that proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon and that conversion, not proof, is basic, since one cannot prove a horizon. This paper has argued that these claims yield a Lonerganian meta-apologetics. Proof functions as sign and conversion functions as condition. On the first level, apologetic proofs clarify meaning, expose counterpositions, and invite the subject to responsible judgment. On the second level, the subject's horizon conditions whether those signs can function as evidence. One cannot

reason a horizon into existence. One can, however, invite self-appropriation. One can invite a subject to test whether his or her account of knowing can withstand its own implications.

When one reads chapter nineteen in this way, one can integrate it with the later Lonergan rather than opposing them. One need not treat chapter nineteen as a mere survival. One need not treat it as a device that should compel assent across horizons. Yet, one can certainly treat it as a methodical instrument. One can also make a specific apologetic move that the current literature often lacks, that is, one can read the famous minor premise about complete intelligibility as a diagnostic, a way of revealing whether a subject accepts the unrestricted desire to know or retreats into a counterposition.

This integration reshapes several debates in apologetics and philosophy of religion. It reshapes debates about the Kantian critique by shifting attention from an external inference from phenomena to noumena to the subject's own norms of judgment and objectivity. It reshapes debates about the "effectiveness" of proofs by showing that effectiveness depends on horizon and that proof cannot supply what horizon supplies. It also reshapes debates about the content gap between metaphysical conclusions and the God of faith by locating the transition to religious concreteness in horizon and conversion, not in illicit inference. The originality of this proposal lies not in offering a new proof of God's existence, but in specifying the methodological conditions under which Lonergan's proof can count as evidence, and in showing that the minor premise functions diagnostically as a test of intellectual conversion rather than as a premise detachable from the work of self-appropriation.

The result does not satisfy every critic. It does not aim to silence Dupré's doubts about ultimate intelligibility by sheer assertion. It does not aim to replace philosophical argument with appeals to private feeling. What it aims to do is set apologetics on a firmer basis, one that takes seriously what Lonergan called method. It aims to remain faithful to Lonergan's own insistence that objectivity comes through authentic subjectivity. As such, this proposal does not answer every objection. It does, however, relocate the debate. It asks whether a proof can be assessed apart from the horizon within which its terms are understood, its premises are assented to, and its conclusion is valued as worth affirming.

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