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Richard M Liddy, Seton Hall University



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Msgr. Richard M. Liddy Seton Hall University South Orange, NJ

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In this book we have focused on a generalized empirical method (GEM) underlying the various disciplines: history, art, economics, science, mathematics, theology, etc. We have emphasized the fact that GEM, lucidly articulated by Bernard Lonergan, is an invariant method underlying all other methods.

In brief, underpinning special methods there is what I have named generalized empirical method. Its operations are the operations we can verify each in his own consciousness. And the normative pattern that relates these operations to one another is the conscious dynamism of sensitive spontaneity, of intelligence raising questions and demanding satisfactory answers, of reasonableness insisting on sufficient evidence before it can assent yet compelled to assent when sufficient evidence is forthcoming, of conscience presiding over all and revealing to the subject his authenticity or his unauthenticity as he observes or violates the immanent norms of his own sensitivity, his own intelligence, his own reasonableness, his own freedom and responsibility.¹

To realize this dynamic structure is to come to understand the nature of our own minds. It is what Lonergan in his *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* calls "self-appropriation." In this article I would like to emphasize the fact that such a process of self-appropriation has the character of a "conversion." It is a dimension of that basic human process of coming out of the darkness into the light: in Cardinal Newman's words, *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* – from the shadows and images into the truth.

Conversion is a fundamental term in Lonergan's **Method in Theology.** There he distinguishes the three levels of intellectual, moral and religious conversion. Religious conversion is a basic "falling in love with God." It is illustrated by St. Paul being knocked off his horse as well as by other more gradual transformations of the saints in history. Moral conversion is a transformation from living one's life on the basis of pleasures and pains to living on the basis of values. It is a movement to doing the good that previously one did not want to do. Finally, intellectual conversion is a basic break from a naïve view of oneself and of reality. It is the transition to understanding oneself as a source of meaning and of knowledge as attained by the intellectual acts of understanding and true judgment. In this article we will: 1) give a general description of intellectual conversion; 2) give an example of it in the life of Saint Augustine; 3) show its relevance to understanding modern science; 4) show its connection to understanding belief and human dignity; and 5) conclude with some comments on facilitating intellectual conversion in our day.

1. What is intellectual conversion?

So why would the process of self-appropriation, of getting in touch with and coming to know the structure of our own consciousness – the general empirical method -be a process of conversion? What is it a conversion "from?" and what is it "to?"

Basically, coming to know the generalized empirical method is a conversion because it is a process of cutting through long ingrained habits of thinking, habits that cut us off from our true selves and from reality. Self-appropriation is a process of making a radical break with a spontaneous and implicit understanding of who we are and how our minds relate to reality. Lonergan describes the general character of this implicit but inadequate vision of our own minds and their relationship to reality in his description of intellectual conversion in *Method in Theology*.

Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is out there now to be looked at.³

In the introduction to his *Insight* Lonergan speaks of this persistent myth as a "psychological problem." Without this problem, he avers, he could set out quite clearly what human knowing is. Nevertheless, the fact is that people begin their quest to know their own minds burdened with the basic misconception that there is only one type of knowing while there are really two. These two different types of knowing coexist confusedly in the human person and the aim of Lonergan's *Insight* is to help people to come to identify and explicitly distinguish between these two types of knowing.

This confusion between two types of knowing leads easily to an empiricist or materialist philosophy that knowing consists in "taking a good look," that objectivity means "seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there," and reality is "already out there now" - often designated with gestures toward the world "out there." To put it briefly, we think of ourselves as "a blob," "a bump on a log," and we pay no attention to the wonder of our own thinking. If thinking is anything, it is just another instance of the "already out there now real." We often reduce ourselves and our thinking to the status of the material objects around us. And we are not alone. Many of our contemporaries, including philosophers, do likewise.

So what is the alternative? What is the world toward which intellectual conversion brings one? Well, for one, it is the world mediated by acts of "meaning:" that is, acts beyond the sensitive acts of looking, touching, tasting, imagining, etc.: acts such as questioning, understanding, reflecting, weighing the evidence, judging, evaluating, deciding, believing. All these latter acts introduce one into what Lonergan calls "the world mediated by meaning." It is a world of relationality beyond the empirical world of immediacy. Continuing the quote from, Lonergan notes:

Now this myth overlooks the distinction between the world of immediacy, say, the world of the infant and, on the other hand, the world mediated by meaning. The world of immediacy is the sum of what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, smelt, felt. It conforms well enough to the myth's view of reality, objectivity,

knowledge. But it is but a tiny fragment of the world mediated by meaning. For the world mediated by meaning is a world known not by the sense experience of an individual but by the external and internal experience of the cultural community, and by the continuously checked and rechecked judgments of the community. Knowing, accordingly, is not just seeing; it is experiencing, understanding, judging and believing. The criteria of objectivity are not just the criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging, and of believing. The reality known is not just looked at; it is given in experience, organized and extrapolated by understanding, posited by judgment and belief.⁴

I remember once waiting outside a bank while a friend went inside to deposit some checks and to conduct some other business. As I sat there waiting, I reflected on what a bank is in its relationship to the whole banking system, a system of mutual understandings – we take these pieces of paper to be worth such and such and hopefully they are accepted as such by others. The whole financial system is a network of understandings, judgments and beliefs stretching out beyond the immediate bank, which I could see with my eyes, to a financial system that spans the globe.

And so there is the negative side of intellectual conversion which Plato sought to communicate through his image of prisoners chained in a cave, locked into a world of images projected by the light of a fire on the opposite wall. Today we would speak of these prisoners as "couchpotatoes," experts in TV and video games, experts in the images flashing on the wall in front of them, but oblivious to the real world beyond the cave. That is what intellectual conversion is *from*.

But what is it *to*? What is the positive side to the painful process of self-appropriation and becoming free of the cave? Just as the person forced out of the cave begins to see the world as it is, so intellectual conversion opens one up to a whole new notion of who we are, of what our objective knowledge is, and what reality is. Instead of conceiving of ourselves as bumps on a log, and our minds as just "a black box" with in-put through the senses and output in speech, intellectual conversion introduces us to ourselves as headed for "being," for all that is. Being is the "x" that we seek through our acts of questioning, understanding and accurate judging. Of course, we only partially reach being, but we come to know what we know within the horizon of all that we are seeking to know, the universe in all its concreteness – the fullness of being.

An appreciation for such a world of meaning and being includes an appreciation for the "long chains of reasoning" that lead us beyond what is merely apparent to what is so. It leads us to appreciate the worlds that the scientist and historian discover and that the philosopher slowly comes to realize. Intellectual conversion moves us from a philosophy that is materialist – fixated on the "already out there now real" – through an idealism or "spiritualist" philosophy that tends to conceive reality in material terms – to a critical realism that conceives human knowing in its own spiritual terms and reality as attained by such knowing. We will illustrate this in our next section through the example of Augustine.

Lonergan once wrote of the various ways in which we can miss the reality of our very self. There is, for example, "the neglected subject" who is so fascinated by the transcendence of truth as to forget that truth exists in minds. Or "the truncated subject," for whom the reality of one's self can be beyond the horizon of one's self. For such a person there can be a major disconnect between what one thinks one is and what one truly is. The elimination of such inadequate positions is not easy.

The transition from the neglected and truncated subject to self-appropriation is not a simple matter. It is not just a matter of finding out and assenting to a number of true propositions. More basically, it is a matter of conversion, of a personal philosophic experience, of moving out of a world of sense and of arriving, dazed and disoriented for a while, into a universe of being.⁵

2. Augustine

Such was Augustine's experience as he recounts in the *Confessions*. Becoming a member of the cult of the Manichees as a young adult, he bought into their materialist spirituality and could only think of immaterial realities such as "God" in a bodily way.

Though I did not even then think of You under the shape of a human body, yet I could not but think of You as some corporeal substance, occupying all space, whether infused in the world, or else diffused through infinite space beyond the world (VII, 1, 1).⁶

When I desired to think of my God, I could not think of him save as a bodily magnitude - for it seemed to me that what was not such was nothing at all: this indeed was the principal and practically the sole cause of my inevitable error (V, 10, 19).

Under the influence of the Manichees, Augustine even imagined evil as a type of bodily substance, another principle opposed to the good God.

I did not know that evil has no being of its own but is only an absence of good, so that it simply is not. How indeed should I see this, when the sight of my eyes saw no deeper than bodies and the sight of my soul no deeper than the images of bodies? (III, 7, 12)

In my ignorance I thought of evil not simply as some kind of substance, but actually as a bodily substance, because I had not learned to think of mind save as a more subtle body, extended in space (V, 10, 20).

The philosophical issue, as he slowly began to realize, was the character of his own mind.

My mind was in search of such images as the forms of my eye was accustomed to see; and I did not realize that the mental act by which I formed these images, was not itself a bodily image (VII, 1, 2).

Slowly Augustine began to believe not only in the unseen, but in the totally different character of such reality, which he identified as *veritas*, truth. He came to that position through a struggle of a

number of years during which he tried one philosophy or life-view after another. Yet through it all there was a power at work in him leading him to desire and seek and search for *veritas*, no matter where it might be found. Thus, at the age of nineteen, he tells us, he happened upon Cicero's *Hortensius*, where he discovered a new dimension of desire.

Quite definitely it changed the direction of my mind...Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after inward wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You...The one thing that delighted me in Cicero's exhortation was that I should love, and seek, and win, and hold, and embrace, not this or that philosophical school but Wisdom itself, whatever it might be. (III, 4, 7-8)

What the *Hortensius* represented for Augustine was a disinterested search for the truth, a desire beyond party spirit that remained with him through the years as he moved from one philosophy to another. Eventually becoming disillusioned with the fantastic myths of the Manichees, Augustine was of a more or less skeptical frame of mind when, in the spring of 386, an acquaintance lent him "some books of the Platonists." These books were "packed with thought," (*libri quidem pleni*), and they produced in him a "conflagration." What these books did for Augustine was twofold: First, they explicitly "turned him inward" toward his own conscious self. "Being admonished by all this to return to myself, I entered into my own depths..." (VII, 10, 16). Secondly, under the influence of this reading he began to think of "spirit" in its own terms and not in bodily ways. He came to realize that his chief intellectual obstacle had been his need to imaginatively "picture" things which cannot be pictured – whether his own mind, his own being, reality, evil or God. In this Augustine represents for us the priority of "coming home" to our own minds. As Lonergan points out:

The problem is not having people repeat with Augustine that "The real is not a body, it is what you know when you know something true." The problem is to get people to *mean* as much as Augustine meant when Augustine spoke about truth. And that is a transformation of the subject. It is bringing the subject up to the level of thought of a Plato and an Aristotle and an Augustine and an Aquinas. And that is a terrific development in the subject. 8

Of course, Augustine experienced his great religious conversion later in that summer of 386. But our point here is that that religious conversion was at least partially prepared for by his long years of searching, his wrestling with his own mind and the breakthrough to *veritas* he had that summer of 386 when he read "a few books of the Platonists."

3. Science

Our contemporary world is peopled by numerous "pundits" pontificating from the right and from the left on every conceivable cultural topic. Among them generally there is one authority that is constantly invoked, and that is "science." Thus, "the new atheists," who recently have aggressively attacked all religion, invariably invoke science in defense of their positions. But the question can be asked whether they have "science" right? Is science just a materialist enterprise based on a materialist vision of human knowing and reality? Is their invocation of quantum-physical or neurobiological processes haunted by "imaginable entities moving through

imaginable processes in an imaginable space-time?" Or is science something more "spiritual," more rooted in the ceaseless questioning of the human spirit and in that spirit's ability to transcend the imagined?

St Augustine of Hippo narrates that it took him years to make the discovery that the name "real" might have a different connotation from the name "body." Or, to bring the point nearer home, one might say that it has taken modern science four centuries to make the discovery that the objects of its inquiry need not be imaginable entities moving through imaginable processes in an imaginable spacetime. The fact that a Plato attempted to communicate through his dialogues, the fact that an Augustine eventually learnt from the writers whom, rather generically, he refers to as Platonists, has lost its antique flavor and its apparent irrelevance to the modern mind. Even before Einstein and Heisenberg it was clear enough that the world described by scientists was strangely different from the world depicted by artists and inhabited by men of common sense. But it was left to twentieth-century physicists to envisage the possibility that the objects of their science were to be reached only by severing the umbilical cord that tied them to the maternal imagination of man. ¹⁰

Has not every scientific breakthrough involved some conversion from imagined reality? "Every scientific or philosophic breakthrough is the elimination of some myth in the pejorative sense; the flat earth, right on..." Genuine science, then, involves an implicit intellectual conversion, the movement from an imagined way of looking at things to a truer, more accurate, intellectual apprehension of things – often expressed in mathematical notations and theoretical language. Such notations and language have the effect of moving us away from the world as related to our senses toward an apprehension of the world in which things are related to each other in a universal perspective. ¹²

Since science involves this implicit intellectual conversion, why can there not be a conversion in one's understanding of science itself? That is, in our understanding of our human mind as functioning scientifically? This is the point of Lonergan's *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* with its extended examples and explanations of scientific understanding as distinct from what people – even scientists – imagine science to be.

The problem set by the two types of knowing is, then, not a problem of elimination but a problem of critical distinction. For the difficulty lies, not in either type of knowing by itself, but in the confusion that arises when one shifts unconsciously from one type to the other. Animals have no epistemological problems. Neither do scientists as long as they stick to their task of observing, forming hypotheses, and verifying. The perennial source of nonsense is that, after the scientist has verified his hypothesis, he is likely to go a little further and tell the layman what, approximately, scientific reality looks like!¹³

The physicist, Freeman Dyson, once described the process involved in his students learning quantum mechanics. It involves three stages.

The student begins by learning the tricks of the trade. He learns how to make calculations in quantum mechanics and get the right answers...To learn the mathematics of the subject and to learn how to use it takes about six months. This is the first stage in learning quantum mechanics, and it is comparatively easy and painless. The second stage comes when the student begins to worry because he does not understand what he has been doing. *He worries because he has no clear physical picture in his head.* He gets confused in trying to arrive at a physical explanation for each of the mathematical tricks he has been taught. He works very hard and gets discouraged because he does not seem able to think clearly. This second stage often lasts six months or longer, and it is strenuous and unpleasant. Then, quite unexpectedly, the third stage begins. The student suddenly says to himself, "I understand quantum mechanics," or rather he says, "I understand now that there really isn't anything to be understood." 14

In other words, the student comes to understand that there really isn't anything to be understood in the "clear physical pictures" she had been seeking. Certainly the student has been learning something — quantum mechanics — but at the same time she comes to understand that that learning involves "unlearning something," that is, one's spontaneous anticipations about reality. And that can be a painful process. In a more contemporary language, one ceases to consider knowing to be merely experiencing or having representative images and one comes to realize that genuine knowledge consists in accurate understanding, true judgment and tested belief.

So self-appropriation, the appropriation of generalized empirical method, involves a conversion from thinking of human knowing as modeled on human sensitive knowing and, on the other hand, human knowing as properly human: as completing human sensitive experience through such acts of meaning as questioning, understanding, judging, deciding, believing. In *Insight* Lonergan notes that one has not yet made this breakthrough if one has no clear memory of its "startling strangeness." ¹⁵

4. Human dignity

I began to consider the countless things I believed which I had not seen, or which had happened with me not there - so many things in the history of nations, so many facts about places and cities, which I had never seen, so many things told me by friends, by doctors, by this man, by that man; and unless we accepted these things, we should do nothing at all in this life. Most strongly of all it struck me how firmly and unshakably I believed that I was born of a particular father and mother, which I could not possibly know unless I believed it on the word of others (VI, 5, 7).

The suppression of an accurate understanding of human understanding leads easily to a distortion in scholars' and scientists' understanding of what they are doing when they are doing it. Such distortion can easily lead to down-playing the spiritual acts of the human person – among which the simple act of believing.

Human knowledge results from a vast collaboration of many peoples over uncounted millennia. The necessary condition of that collaboration is belief. What any of us knows, only slightly results from personal experience, personal discovery, personally conducted verification; for the most part it results from believing. But the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was not content to attack religious belief. It prided itself on its philosophers. It set up a rationalist individualism that asked people to prove their assumptions or else regard them as arbitrary. In effect it was out to destroy not only the religious tradition but all tradition.¹⁶

Such disregard for the major role of belief in our coming to know seems also to have had its effect on our modern theories of education.

Such rationalist individualism in the twentieth century seems to have infected our educationalists. Students are encouraged to find things out for themselves, to develop originality, to be creative, to criticize, but it does not seem that they are instructed in the enormous role of belief in the acquisition and the expansion of knowledge. Many do not seem to be aware that what they know of science is not immanently generated but for the most part simply belief.¹⁷

So the intellectual conversion to understanding oneself can open one up to understanding all that one does not know, but that one can penetrate into through believing others who we reasonably judge to be credible.

So also, intellectual conversion can open one up to the great dignity that is the human person. Without intellectual conversion, we can consider ourselves to be just "a bump on a log," some "body."

Positivists, naturalists, behaviorists insist that human sciences have to be conducted on the same lines as the natural sciences. But the resultant apprehension of man, if not mechanistic, is theriomorphic ["like an animal"]. Nor is this view of man as a machine or as an animal confined to some rarefied academic realm. It is applied. The applications reach out into all departments of thought and into all walks of life. They have the common feature of omitting advertence to human dignity and respect for human morality.

So there are vast and important implications of intellectual conversion, of arriving at an adequate understanding of who we are as human beings.

5. The Process

This process of intellectual conversion is not an easy one and it is not something that happens overnight. Indeed Lonergan says...

...the labor of self-appropriation cannot occur at a single leap. Essentially, it is a development of the subject and in the subject, and like all development it can be solid and fruitful only by being painstaking and slow.¹⁸

That this process involves a significant "mental wrestling," is evident from what Lonergan would write some years later in *Method in Theology*:

Our purpose is to bring to light the pattern within which these operations occur and, it happens, we cannot succeed without an exceptional amount of exertion and activity on the part of the reader. He will have to familiarize himself with our terminology. He will have to evoke the relevant operations in his own consciousness. He will have to discover in his own experience the dynamic relationships leading from one operation to the next. Otherwise he will find not merely this chapter but the whole book about as illuminating as a blind man finds a lecture on color. ¹⁹

It took me a good year to work my own way through *Insight* and I documented that effort in *Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan's Insight*. But it was worth the effort. It was worth working through all the "exercises" he sets out there in mathematics, physical science, the relationships between the sciences and common sense, etc. For it introduced me to myself.

In brief, for intellectual self-transcendence a price must be paid. My little book *Insight* provides a set of exercises for those who wish to find out what goes on in their own black boxes. But it is only a set of exercises. What counts is doing them. Should one attempt to do them? As long as one is content to be guided by one's common sense, to disregard the pundits of every class whether scientific or cultural or religious, one need not learn what goes on in one's own black box. But when one moves beyond the limits of commonsense competence, when one wishes to have an opinion of one's own on larger issues, then one had best know just what one is doing. Otherwise, one too easily will be duped and too readily be exploited. Then explicit intellectual self-transcendence can become a real need.²⁰

Of course, just as moral conversion is not moral perfection, so also intellection conversion does not necessarily mean that that conversion has penetrated into all one's ways of thinking. There can be vast areas of one's mentality that have yet to be transformed. There can be real areas of inconsistency. In one area intellectual conversion might have penetrated, but in another area one can be a naïve realist, or an idealist or even a materialist. All of the above implicit or explicit philosophies are derivatives of a primitive materialism that adheres to one's thinking until one makes an explicit break from it. As Lonergan puts it,

...[T]he problems in philosophy at least at the present time are not problems of exploitation. They are problems of getting people to the starting point, problems of opening up people's minds and bringing them to fundamental truths on which the system would rest. When you have got them there, you have practically got them the whole way...²¹

In this, intellectual or philosophical conversion parallels religious conversion. Lonergan uses the example of Cardinal Newman's conversion to illustrate the point.

Conversion involves something of a leap. There is a pivot on which the movement turns, but for the person to find just where the pivot is and to turn upon it is not a simple matter. It will be hard to find as honest and sincere and direct a soul as that of Cardinal Newman, but it took something like from eleven to

fourteen years between the time when he first saw that Catholicism was perhaps the truth and the time at which he was converted. It was sometime between 1831 and 1833, as I vaguely remember, that he first saw the light, and it was in 1844 or 1845 that he entered the Catholic Church. We cannot expect religious conversion to occur overnight. Psychologically the same type of problem is involved in philosophic conversion.²²

In other words, when you undergo an intellectual conversion, when you get to know the generalized empirical method underlying all other methods, when you get to know your own mind, then you are almost all the way "home."

> We shall not cease from exploration And the end of all our exploring Will be to arrive where we started And know the place for the first time.

(T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*)

Bernard Lonergan, A Third Collection, Papers by Bernard Lonergan, SJ, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 150.

² See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972; reprinted by University of Toronto Press, 1990) 238-242. Elsewhere Lonergan, following the work of Robert Doran, speaks of a fourth level of "affective" or "psychic" conversion. See Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (hereafter CWL), 17, Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980, eds. Robert Doran and Robert Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 390.

Method in Theology, 238.

⁴ Method in Theology, 238.

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, A Second Collection (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974; reprinted by University of Toronto Press, 1996) 79.

⁶ The quotes from the *Confessions* are from the translation by Frank Sheed recently republished with an introduction by Peter Brown., ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 2006). The citations such as VII, 1, 1 means Book VII, Chapter 1, numbered paragraph 1.

Augustine, Contra Academicos 2, 2, 5. See Peter Brown on the contribution of the Neo-platonic philosophers to Augustine's self-knowledge: "The Neo-Platonists provided him with the one, essential tool for any serious autobiography: they had given him a theory of the dynamics of the soul that made sense of his experiences." Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969) 168.

⁸ Bernard Lonergan, CWL 18, Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic, ed. Philip McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 131-132.

⁹ See John Haught, God and the New Atheists: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens (Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Bernard Lonergan, CWL 3, Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, eds. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 15.

11. See *A Second Collection*, 229: "Being critical means eliminating the ordinary nonsense, the systematically

misleading images and so on."

¹² See chapter two of CWL 3, Insight on the classical and statistical heuristic structures of modern science. On the significance of mathematics in science, see Herbert Butterfield, The Origins of Modern Science (NY: The Free Press, 1957).

¹³ CWL 3, Insight, 278.

¹⁴ Freeman Dyson, "Innovation in Physics," *Physics*, eds. Rapport and Wright (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965) 259-260 (my emphases).

¹⁵ CWL 3, Insight, 22. See also, Richard Liddy, Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan's Insight (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2006).

¹⁶ A Second Collection, 185.

A Second Collection, 185-186.

CWL 3, Insight, 17.

Method in Theology, 7. In a footnote Lonergan distinguishes between a presentation of his theory "in the abstract" and the slow process of self-appropriation. "Please observe that I am offering only a summary, that the summary can do no more than present a general idea, that the process of self-appropriation occurs only slowly, and usually, only through the struggle with some such book as Insight."

CWL 17, Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980, 414.
 CWL 18, Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic, 131-132.

²² CWL 18, Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic, 291.