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## Mathematical Logic and Scholasticism

The Introduction tells of my struggle with this chapter and the following, in the company of chapters 7 and 13. This chapter especially opened up the possibility of pushing into both the history of logic and the history of scholasticism in a broad sense that would even reach into Greek Drama and early Chinese formalisms. At least it required a swing into the work of Fr. Gerald McCool that would lift Lonergan's reflections on scholasticism and logic into a context of fantasy regarding a deeper Thomist revival. But my pages of pointers, now cut away, focused on a reach towards the central issues raised by Lonergan in the parallel chapter of *Phenomenology and Logic*: "...philosophy a *regina scientiarum* ... an effective monarch that exerts a real influence"<sup>1</sup> ... not "a solid block, with no give anywhere, then, when the sciences start moving, they move away from it"<sup>2</sup> ... "it has to be an open structure ... could philosophy as so conceived be presented in an axiomatic structure?"<sup>3</sup>

In the end I returned to my struggles of the *Cantowers* for the year 2004. Amazingly, for me, it was the struggle with what I call the Centennial *Cantower*, *Cantower XXXIII*, of December 2004, that the need for an open-structured symbolic stand against the solid blocking by description became a luminous possession.<sup>4</sup> But the drive had been darkly there from the late 1950s, and it came and comes gradually to operable lightsomeness in my struggle towards what I called more recently *metaphysical words* or *metagrams*.

So, finally this chapter became what it is now: a repeat of the first section of a single

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<sup>1</sup>PL, 126.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>4</sup>The *Cantower* is worth visiting: it repeats my reflections on Lonergan of 1984 - what is it to thus repeat? - and then climbs on to this, for me then for you, surely, now, quite radical shift.

*Cantower* of 2004, to which I lead by drawing your attention to the two metagrams W1 and W2 that conclude this chapter.<sup>5</sup> Effectively drawing your attention is, of course, the difficulty. “One aspect of that sheer leap comes into focus when one attends to problems of specifying accurately what one means by description, how one moves to explanation, what descriptive components survive in an explanatory account of the universe including universes of discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

The accurate specification of description is not attempted in this odd book: it is a matter of a post-scholastic new shaken-up genetic logic, and of new characters in both logic and philosophy.<sup>7</sup> That shake-up matter is symbolized in the present book by the spread of the four first sections of *Cantower XXIII* through my four problem chapters. But the shake-up matter is the matter of this whole book and of its incompletenesses: a later matter in all senses of that

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<sup>5</sup>The seven Metagrams are distributed through this book as follows: Chapter 2 contains W4k and Wo; the present chapter ends with W1 and W2; Chapter 7 ends with W3, W5, W6; Chapter 8 contains the other half of W4, labeled W4d. I would note that W4 is the pair of diagrams of knowing and doing that is included in appendix A of **PL**.

<sup>6</sup>I am quoting here from *Cantower 25*, section 2, “Psychic Differentiations and Systematic Heuristics”, a section that reflects on Doran’s work. The quotation is from pages 11-12 of the Website version. The immediate reference in the *Cantower* in this place is to *Insight* 490-7[514-20].

<sup>7</sup>It is useful to pull in a paragraph from *Insight*: “an adequate metaphysics must distinguish not only positions and counter-positions but also explanation and description .... a sheer leap into the void for the existential subject.” (, 538-9[565] . And for the subject interested in Logic. Have we not reached here, or are we not reaching for here, a massive transposition of the lectures on Logic and Existentialism? Pull in, for better measure, later comments in chapter 17 of *Insight*: on the problem of working out types of expression (*genera litteraria*) through a determining of operators (*Insight*, 572[595]), and that “a study of the various kinds of insight provides the ground for a logical theory of universals and particulars, experiential and explanatory conjugates, descriptive and explanatory genera and species of things.”(*Insight*, 576[599]. Then, perhaps, add in explicitly the problem of geometry raised in *Insight* chapter 5: “as long as men remain on the level of invariant expressions, they are not considering any concrete extensions and durations” (*Insight*, 171[195]). What, then, of the full logic of Schwartzchild searching for a metric, of stretching towards a logic of Husserl’s stretch towards the dynamics of the calculus of variation?

expression.<sup>8</sup> Let us, then, readout or readin the beginning of that odd *Cantower*.

### *Cantower XXIII*

#### **Redoubt Describing**

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2004**

#### **23.1 From Policy to Plodding**

I might claim and hope that, one fifth of the way through the adventure of these 117 *Cantowers*, we - some of us - are ready to reach towards that heart of darkness that yet is the “spark in our clod,”<sup>9</sup> our plod. With Ortega y Gasset and Lonergan, we may be lifted a little towards “*The Luminous Darkness of Circumstances*”<sup>10</sup> within our own corner - which is an anastomotic all - of galactic glory. The teaching and reaching take on now a new character and we become a class of new characters: but not yet.

Let me be prosaic about this, in a manner that repeats without being boring: for I am repeating a message learned in, by, from, teaching mathematical physics more than four decades ago. Had I taught it badly, the first 23 classes might well have resembled the first 23 of our *Cantowers*. But there was no need to teach it badly, at least in those days, in that university.

Each morning’s minions were breath-caught in the mastery of the thing<sup>11</sup>: the culture

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<sup>8</sup>Recall note2 of chapter 2 and notes 2 of chapter 3, and reach forward in an impossible dream to the explanatory contextualization of the meaning and activity of description that is the impossible dream of the end of chapter 13 and the four last sections of chapter 14.

<sup>9</sup>The precise reference in Lonergan escapes me at the moment. The spark is the *exigence* for the *field*. Both these words are key in Lonergan’s discussion of phenomenology. See the Introduction to the index of *Phenomenology and Logic*, and the entries under both those words.

<sup>10</sup>I am referring here to the article, available on the Website in English, but originally published in Spanish: “Towards a Luminous Darkness of Circumstances: *Insight* after Forty Years”.

<sup>11</sup>Why would I echo Hopkins’ rhyme of the wind-winging bird at the beginning of a searching of the subtle updrafts and downdrafts of description? Might it not be an image of “the achievement, the mastery” of a later humanity’s control of meaning, making the “plod down sillion shine”?

carried the best of us forward: not the humanly best of course, but simply the best there-bent. There was no need to justify “this basic enterprise of human intelligence”.<sup>12</sup> There was no need to battle with the students “to secure a firm orientation and a tendency that in the long run is efficacious”.<sup>13</sup> There was no need for an elaborate justification of the spirobic effort, certainly not 23 classes of it. We moved forward in a mix of doctrines, exercises, ecstasy.<sup>14</sup> Certainly there were drop-outs - it was encouraged<sup>15</sup> - but centuries of serious physics had made possible and actual an ethos that, at least in this elementary zone of human yearning and learning, left no room for a Gorgias.

But alas, when we move beyond such elementary yearning, even beyond classroom ethos in that elementary learning,<sup>16</sup> then Gorgias and Fontanelle reign and rain on the parade of human wonder. The depth of the long axial cycle of decline is measured by the gap between the heard call of linguistic imagings of meaning and the herd’s crawl in a trivial governing of the tongue. That crawling, cawing, is not just of those who cast news, but of those who graduate through

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<sup>12</sup>*Insight*, 514[537].

<sup>13</sup>*Insight*, 526[549].

<sup>14</sup>Ecstasy is a key ingredient in good class-work: a visionary lift, particularly glimpsing where we are going. Doctrines fix smaller destinations: whether Newton’s laws in certain circumstances, or a corner of the periodic table of chemistry, or of a garden or farm, or of the tale of the tribe. But the exercises: they were and are the journey of adventure in the being a physicist, or a botanist, or a biblical homebird. Doctrinal teaching without the exercises is indoctrination. Doctrinal reading without the exercises is also indoctrination.

<sup>15</sup>I have recalled before, and now call up for your musing, the advice to me of the chair of mathematics, when I puzzled over what to do with the class of over twenty students. “Talk over their heads for a couple of weeks: you’ll clear out the non-starters and then have a great year”. The same eccentric professor entered the second year honours lecture room that week. A few students, who had come through the previous year with what they took to be reasonable results, had gathered. One reported to me in astonishment later that the professor entered, looked at them and remarked in his delightful Ulster accent: “there’ll be no honours class this year. Is that all right?”, and walked out. Nothing like this would happen in the Canadian universities of my later life. Would it happen now in Dublin, I wonder?

<sup>16</sup>You will recall Lonergan’s comments on bad teaching in physics, and on *haute vulgarization*. See Volume 10: 145; Volume 6: 121,155.

comprehensives that are not comprehensions. Talk is a technique, and technical competence can guide both armed and unarmed forces, but with subtler destructiveness as one moves away from the dogs of war.

My packed paragraphs may point you to ecstasy, to encouragement, to effort that could tie your time and talent for years, glorious years of a suffering climb. But that does not help the immediate climb. The words may have the sweep of a song of songs, but they do not “catch the foxes, the little foxes, before they ruin our vine in bloom”.<sup>17</sup> I do not wish to plunge us into reflection on the varieties of foxings that distort finality, no more than Lonergan felt “any need to flog a row of dead horses” in the world of economic malice and stupidity.<sup>18</sup> My hope is to contextualize the efforts of some few of my readers who are eccentric enough to pursue the question, What is describing?, in a manner that conduces to the emergence of the new culture of luminous living.

There is first the need for a context within culture of tolerance and encouragement: something equivalent to the communal taken-for-grantedness of students not being insane in spending a year on Newton’s laws in order to get beyond describing the movements of the heavens. And then there is the deeper, personal, need, of cultivating one’s own eccentricity and courage, if the bent I am writing of is present in you. Of course, Lonergan readers will recognize that what I am “dealing with” is the problem of commonsense eclecticism and general bias, but the dealing with here seeks to be different, existential. I should pause over this double problem of context, an existential pause that we can share without you being threatened.

I suspect that there are people who are as daft as I was and am regarding the question,

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<sup>17</sup>The Song of Songs 2:15.

<sup>18</sup>The reference is to *For a New Political Economy*, 36. Nor is that reference anyway random. Immediately in the text Lonergan writes that “a flick at a particularly nauseating one is enough”. And there is a particularly nauseating aspect of Lonergan discipleship that I wish to flick: or positively there is a particular strategy of following up the central question of this *Cantower*, “what is description?” that I wish to recommend. In other words, if you wish to discover painfully the limitations of description, come to grips with Lonergan’s efforts to lift the present massively-destructive muddled descriptiveness into the realms of effective explanation. Lonergan claims that it will ground genuine democracy:

What is describing? There is, I would hold, a massive need to encourage such people: we will push for more light on that need as we struggle through these next sections. But are you sympathetic to the suggestion of spending a month or a year asking the question, What is describing?<sup>19</sup>

In the privacy of this present reading you can certainly reach for honesty. A large number of Lonergan disciples would consider it quite beside the point: don't we have those handy definitions in Lonergan, 'thing-to-thing', 'thing-to-us' stuff? From such a community there is no encouragement to ask about this fundamental aspect of human life, the agony and the ecstasy of daily linguistic meaning, reaching out, so often in vain, with words of understanding or distress, commitment, love, terror, ecstasy. Yet it is a core question in this transition phase of humanity, from Zen reachings and Ken searchings to Then luminosity regarding reachings and searchings. It is a core question on the long road to adequate differentiated enlightenment.

But we will twist round that issue in the following sections. Indeed, it is as well now to look forward through those sections to give you a sense of our limited enterprise. Perhaps the central limitation is the most important for you and I to attend to: I do not, cannot, tell you What describing is, in these few pages. Here, of course, I am again positioning myself: how do you position yourself?

And that, really, is the main pointing, positioning, of this first section: that there is a distinction between policy and plodding, between doctrine and system. Is this a precise and clear distinction? Only after much plodding.

The next two sections are brief reflections on the heights and horrors of describing. The titles of the two sections may remind you of a previous use of such phrases: 'the upper ground of loneliness', 'the lower ground of loneliness', and that reminding, or minding, does indeed add a larger context to our struggle.

In the fourth and central section we come to the simple key question. The answer, as you

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<sup>19</sup>You may recall here that there are schools of philosophy that seem to home in on this question, like the phenomenologists or the British analysts: but I would prefer you to keep a homely focus here, thinking rather of a sort of non-professional daftness that one might image in Cezanne's attending to Mt.St.Victoire or J.M.W.Turner attending to the sea.

no doubt already expect, is like the Zen master handing you a bow to bend, a flower to place.<sup>20</sup>

Or answering the question, What is it like to play a Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto?

In the fifth section, with its odd series of Whats, we pause over the problem, the difficulty, of finding the answer. Then the sixth section points towards the place of our reachings in the full context pointed to by the previous *Cantowers*. In the seventh section we are alone with ourselves, with you and me; or more truly you are alone with yourself, like Newman or Luther, taking what can only be either a tentative fresh stand - if what I have written is new to you - or an old stand for or against my position, if your mind has already been made up or down.

But please do make your mind, up or down. Describing is "all about" you, inviting you to flight or floor. On the world stage, if you are to strut and fret as a fool, 'twere better to be a self-luminous fool, even perhaps better to be a latter-day Dostoevski *Idiot*. So, the final section picks up the biographic question of the end of section 4 and invites us to pauses around the description of a little life-long Proustian moment in the childhood of Bernard Lonergan.

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<sup>20</sup>I have long since lost track of my two books, *Zen and Archery*, *Zen and the Art of Flower Design*, but perhaps such books are familiar to you? I recall the Zen education in Bow proceeding for years before an arrow was provided.