

*Cantower XXXIV***A Few Elementary Pointers Regarding Interpretation¹**January 1st 2005

I cannot expect that many, or even any, of you, reading this, be up-to-date on my efforts to introduce the new ethical culture and the new humane strategy of teaching, educating, elevating, that belongs in the home of the third stage of meaning. The *Cantowers* since *Cantower XXIII* represent that change of pace, one that extends, both literally and culturally, the efforts of Richard Feynman to teach physics. What is emerging, indeed, is the beginnings of a solution to the problem foisted on Europe and the present world by such people as Fontenelle, the problem of a popularization that

¹It is as well to give a chronological account of the writing of *Cantowers XXXIV - XXXVIII*. The present *Cantower* was written at the end of 2002, before my tackling of the effort to deal with the early chapters of *Insight* in *Cantowers XXVII - XXXII*. The reason for the venture then was the possibility of collaboration in the practice of functional interpretation offered by Michael Shute: a group of younger scholars were willing to risk the effort, the results to appear in the *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* 4(2004). I followed this *Cantower*'s writing with the writing of *Cantower XXXVIII*, which is also on the topic of functional interpretation. Next was *Cantower XXXVIII* dealing with functional history, completed as far as almost the end of section 38.5 (the break is noted there). The *Cantowers* dealing with *Insight* (and Feynman's first five chapters of volume I of his *Lectures in Physics*) emerged through the middle months of 2003, followed in the autumn by the writing - in the order listed - of *Cantowers XXXV, XXXIII, XXXVI*. All these next *Cantowers* up to 38 deal with **function**. Finally, I draw attention to the concluding section 6 of *Cantower XXXVIII*. In that section I pull together - at present, end of November, 2003 - in a doctrinal or policy fashion some suggestions regarding the implementation of the first three specialties. You might find that a good place to start your thinking about the venture of specialization in this context. It is of interest, perhaps, to know that the three key challenging *Cantowers XXXIX - XLI* are then put on hold until May, 2005. The intervening months are required to begin the further climb towards a richer perspective on Quantum Mechanics (towards *Cantowers XXXII-XXXV*) and a beginning of the climb, through astronomy, towards elements of a contemporary eschatology (the final *Cantowers*, 2011).

lacks a harmonious culture, core, context.² The harmony I speak of is the cajoling, by teachers and trees, poets and preachers, towards some level of understanding. If that level is not - as it should be with a better statistics than one might expect - some level of serious theoretic life and love, then it should be at least a level of admiring bone-mysteriousness. The new culture, the new control of character-meaning, is to change the statistics of these levels. But here I am a pointer towards a further foundational struggle, symbolized perhaps by inviting you to think of the merging of a previous *Cantower* efforts, the merging of mystery, metaphysics and Manhattan.³

This effort of mine to change pace began at the end of the first fifth of the *Cantower* enterprise, and perhaps it is no harm to recall, repeat, a piece of the quotation with which I began that effort in *Cantower XXIV*. For one thing, it draws attention to Feynman at his pedagogical best in his little book *QED. The Strange Theory of Light and Matter*.⁴ The third chapter begins, "This is the third of four lectures on a rather difficult subject - the theory of quantum electrodynamics - and since there are obviously more people here tonight than there were before, some of you haven't heard the other two lectures and will find this lecture almost incomprehensible."⁵ He goes to note that those who have been present will also find it incomprehensible!

Now it is important to take those last few word seriously, heartily, in a new strategy of reading. Otherwise, at worst, you will be like those erudites to whom Lonergan replied in the Epilogue to the Verbum articles, nudging them to humane

²Fontenelle (1657-1757) is a key figure in the emergence of popularization, though by age thirty his fame was related to operatic librettos. He held the influential position of permanent secretary to the Academe des Sciences from 1697. For an enlightening context see the final chapter of Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*.

³See the final section of *Cantower XIV*.

⁴Princeton University Press pb, 1988. Referred to below as QED.

⁵QED, 77.

reading. “Find it incomprehensible”? Recall the old Latin tag, “*quidquid recipitur...*”. What might be meant by *find* if not a finder’s response or failure to respond? We are back to a desperate problem of our axial culture.

But let us airlift ourselves out of this murky sea into a shallow swallow-view of the task on hand.

The first two sections here may seem too broad and too lengthy, too much simply a recalling the challenge of self-appropriation. But they have a function in recalling and calling that challenge in a new context, a context of personal and interpersonal narrative that I wrote of when I pointed to the sublation of Proust’s biographical reflections into the task of page 250 of *Method in Theology*, the task of saying positional (I use the term in a broad non-normative sense) ‘hellos’, sometimes in quite discomfiting fashions.

Section 3 gets the show on the road, or at least gives my notion on the road to take. But, as you shall find, the fourth section is the real get-going, when you begin to write to yourself and to talk to (yes: but do it privately to avoid curious looks) the author you are interpreting. That fourth section brings out the strategy of dividing the educational or exercise process into two stages: reading and stating the author’s basis, reading and stating the author’s context within the current context of H2. So, the fifth section emerges as a reflection on “Contexts”. The sixth section, “Interpreting Lonergan-works”, picks up on that particular context primarily in order to muse over the manner in which “interpreting Lonergan” can block the development of the specialty of interpretation.

34.1 Topic and Title

Our topic in this *Cantower* is **interpretation** in the sense that it is to take slowly through the efforts we make at operating in the second functional speciality, H2. But our topic too is “Your Fitting Survival” in the introductory sense I gave it in *Lack in the Beingstalk*, chapter 1, section 5. There I gave a simple distinction that I thought could be

helpful in tackling the general problem of **interpreting Lonergan**. I made a rough distinction that is equivalent to the distinction between talking and listening: *Insight's* treatment of interpretation is in the main concerned with talking, *Method's* discussion is concerned with listening. But now we have to tackle that problem both more subtly and more simply.

But first note the muddiedness of our topic. Are we working in a functional specialty here, and are we aiming at working in the functional specialty Interpretation? The question, raised freshly and in general in *Cantower XXIV*, has a special twist here which will gradually emerge. In general we are in the zone of foundational education, H_{5j} , where j may run from 1 to 9: the ninth division is the zone of common sense, to which this culture must be communicated, explained.⁶ Perhaps it is useful to say that the one-sided conversation here is accurately specified by the non-symmetric matrix element, H_{52} , but with the characters of an immaturity that belongs to this stage of meaning, and we are thinking of you as a potential member of the specialist group H2.

Does this already sound too complicated? Not to worry: there is method in the madness. If you like and are able, think of the analogy with chemistry to which I keep appealing. I'm sure that you, somewhere sometime, got a glimpse of the periodic table: usually on the inside cover of grade 11 or 12 chemistry textbooks. It is meant to tell the unfortunate teenager, This is what you are at. And there is a culture and a cultural acceptance to back this up. We are here working towards a cultural acceptance, and it is hard work: our bones do not accept it, and the cultural community is deeply reluctant to accept it.

So, I am talking foundations in an elementary and transitional manner to those who seeks to know how to go about the functional specialty Interpretation. And a key part of my communication to you - please do not be discouraged, but wait and see! - is

⁶This last word was given a fresh technical meaning in the final section of Chapter 3 of *Lack in the Beingstalk*.

that operating in the functional specialty of Interpretation is not for beginners or even for undergraduates. Again I appeal to the analogy with the relatively-successful science of physics, as portrayed by Feynman: “there is a set of problems associated with the theory of quantum electrodynamics that has to do with improving the method.... that takes graduate students three or four years to master”.⁷ And, sadly, I am talking here about future graduate students in theology, etc, not graduates that are around at present. You in a year or ten?!

What, then, is it to work in the functional specialty Interpretation in that full remote sense that parallels serious work in physics? Most evidently, it means that you are up-to-date to a serious degree. You have served your time and climbed up through the various branches of classical and quantum physics. Your up-to-dateness is taken realistically in your graduate work or in your junior teaching years. You are not expected to be at the frontline of GUTS, grand unification theories. But you are expected to be right on the ball in the area you tackle: if you are working in quantum chromodynamics, then you are at home in its present theoretic of the Standard Model.⁸ And: you have a sufficient heuristic of where the problems are, what the present directions are. But a doctorate work in the area is rarely an Einsteinian or Feynman leap: it can be terribly humdrum, merely filling out in a particular area or instance what is a common theoretic.

Functional specialization in physics is another related ballpark, but let me swing back into that problem as it occurs in philosophy and theology, and indeed right into our topic. I am trying to get you to read better the account of the functional specialty of interpretation as it is described with such deceptive simplicity in *Method in Theology*, pages 155-62.

So, let us take it that you are interested in interpreting an author. What author?

⁷QED, 124-5.

⁸We shall get to that topic in *Cantowers LX - LXII*.

We will reflect on that later, but let me take the same illustration that I took in chapter 1, section 3, of *Lack in the Beingstalk*. You are trying to figure out better than previous interpreters what John Damascene meant when he used the Greek equivalent of *deliberation*. Immediately Lonergan throws in the discomfiting problem: knowing the object to which the word refers. This is a key and humbling discomfort. What does *knowing* mean here? It simply means, being as up-to-date as possible. Forgive me if I go back to physics. What does Dirac mean by *electron*? If you are not up with where the meaning went in the decades after Dirac, you are liable to stumble around uselessly, destructively. Perhaps a biological parallel may help. What does the tadpole “mean” by adjusting its swimming tail? If you know that it is heading for frog-swim you are a much better reader of the tadpole. Gawking and talking around a sunflower seed without ever meeting the plant does not glow in the glimpse of the sunflower’s final smile.

I am getting at a very deep and shocking problem here, a problem of shabby standards. Association of ideas here trips me back to a remark Lonergan made in that first week of meeting him in Dublin, Easter 1961. He was speaking of theology isolated after Trent, when professors became just “big frogs in little ponds”. We can bring that into the context of our focus here by halting over the neat and threatening little statement “the use of the general theological categories occurs in any of the eight functional specialties”.⁹ By the *here* I am suggesting that he means the best available categories.

Let us take this slowly. I am trying to give you a foundational orientation. I am doing so by referring to Lonergan and referring you to Lonergan. This is not an unusual procedure in normal science. It is like referring to Schrödinger’s basic equation of quantum theory: Schrödinger is a convenient identification of a major theoretic shift. Depending on the size of the shift, there is a lag of expertise in moving into and living

⁹*Method in Theology*, 292.

in the shift. Lonergan names - with extraordinary cunning - the best available opinion of general categories in his list of pages 286-7 of *Method in Theology*. If you were really up-to-date you would be in reasonable control of, and be controlled by, the object to which that list refers. This should give you something to think about, especially since you are one of the objects referred to, so there is here a matter of self-control. Perhaps it is useful to follow out illustrations of self-control: the self-control of the Williams sisters powering through their various grand slam finals. How do either of them interpret the other's serving dynamic?

It should be sadly obvious to you that the analogies with tennis and physics bring out the shabby nature of the game of interpretation, at least in some level of the meaning of *obvious*. Increasing that obviousness, personally and communally, will be a start on the climb towards doing the functional specialty Interpretation badly, and you surely agree with me that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

And now, a little conversation with yourself! How did you interpret the title of this section? Were you thinking of the problem of a linguistic feedback that would fight false axial objectivities and lift us to a new presence, subject to subject with subject?¹⁰

Are you and I not pointers in history, elementary in a terrible beauty of exigence for beauty, unity, efficiency, ultimacy, intimacy? How few are we that are mad enough to envisage "going all the way"¹¹? Note that here I do not say "try to go all the way", but "envisage". I am inviting you to the realm of non-threatening fantasy and admiration. Still, I have the hope that a percentage of the few, "perhaps a not numerous

¹⁰This peculiar sequence is related to the push in the phrase 'about about about' that I introduced in the *Cantowers* on physics (see, e.g. note 20 of *Cantower XXVII*), the mood, too, of Lonergan's reflections on the subject in *Phenomenology and Logic*, a mood that I have tried to catch in nudging you to consider yourself as *Whatas, Whereas, Whenas*.

¹¹Lonergan, reflecting on Aristotle's challenge, in "Mission and Spirit", *A Third Collection*, 27.

center ... painstaking enough to refuse half-measures"¹² would go beyond admiration to humble and luminous practice. What do I mean by *luminous*? I mean a self-luminosity about not being a Williams sister, but still willing to take up a racket in a manner that would expose the racketeers and sustain the rickety. So, you and I are regarding the specialty Interpretation, but the regarding must blossom in and into guarding for some if we are to move into the third stage of meaning where *praxis*¹³ becomes bloodstreamed.

34.2 Finders, Keepers

You would find your pace in tennis pretty easily, if discouragingly, by going a game or two with an expert. Sadly, this is not true of categorial competence. The problem can be connected with Lonergan's "making conversion a topic"¹⁴, a problem that was spoken off with a new "popularity" in *Cantower XXV*. The problem is to somehow "make obvious" in such a manner that the statistics of a new communal realism of collaboration shift towards a Bell-curve optimism, or at least a distance away, in this century, from the probability-curve associated with deaths by mule kicks in the German army! The long discussion of the *Cantower* project have been inviting such a reflection as would glimpse that the hodic vortex process is a process of "making obvious" and I can go back helpfully to an early metaphor¹⁵ that appealed to the founders of the Vorticist movement of the 1920s: the image of iron filings - you are

¹²The conclusion of "Dimensions of Meaning" at the end of *Collection*.

¹³Don't get bogged down in reading up on *Praxis*: think rather of the "lean-forward" attitude in thinking out life, the 'where to' bent that I catch in the title "Getting the Show on the Roll" (*Cantower XXXIII*, section 1), that belongs in functional history in various ways.

¹⁴*Method in Theology*, 253.

¹⁵Used in *Cantower I*.

familiar with this I am sure - lining up on a page when you put a magnet underneath. There is a line-up of pointers: if one piece doesn't line up than you tend to conclude that it is just a piece of painted wood.

But here we are, a few pointers regarding the problem of having a shot at the functional specialty Interpretation, H2. And the homely problem, raised initially with heavy complexity in *Cantower IX*, spelled out in more homely fashion in *Cantower XXV*, is to take stock, with some degree of luminosity, of where we stand categorially. This "taking stock" has been increasingly a topic in our project: when the "taking stock" becomes integral to culture we will be in the third stage of meaning. (as my gay friend, Nick Graham would say, Not in your life, Honey!) That is the pointing of Lonergan's late principle of generalized empirical method.¹⁶ It is my more popular pointing in the principle, "When teaching children geometry one is teaching children children".¹⁷ **That** is a distantly-future school culture. Is a crossing of the Rubicon so strangely neglected, or avoided, by Lonergan scholarship. It is the skipping, lamb-like or mafia-like, of the challenge of the "scientific moment"¹⁸ of page 250 of *Method in Theology*.

What is this "taking stock", this "scientific moment", this pause I would wish upon you as a limen¹⁹ to your exercises in H2? It is not a simple matter, and I cannot venture back, in some silly summary, to earlier suggestions or to the recent exercises in interpretation of *Cantowers XXVII-XXXIII*. But it is of value to come at the challenge from another angle in this context.

First I must note that the angle may not please you, in that you may not have the

¹⁶Referred to regularly in recent Cantowers as GEMb

¹⁷Discussed in the concluding section of *Cantower VII*.

¹⁸I introduced this notion on p. 25 of *Cantower IX*.

¹⁹A threshold. I would recall here the reflections related to Proust on transitions in *Cantower XXI*,

bones and bloodstream of a searcher, an outsider. "Where and how do I stand?", is the invited quest. "I stand comfortably", may be the reply: you may be happily busy doing academic work within the standard model of such a life. Well then, at least become a little luminous about that stand, even if you cannot admit its deficiencies in public: admitting it to oneself may be a painful enough process. But my interest now is in the discomforted few **pointers**, Herman Hesse's *Hermine* or his *Siddhartha*. The issue has the character of crossing the Rubicon. "By 'crossing the Rubicon,' I mean this: however important occasional excursions into sequence analysis may have been, they left the main body of ...theory on the 'static' bank of the river; the thing to do is not to supplement static theory by the booty brought back from these excursions but to replace it by a system of general dynamics".²⁰

Here you can enjoy a strategic misinterpretation of Schumpeter's contention about the massive block in economics, but - like Thomas' *sicut* - it should help us along. What 'sequence analysis'? Well, we can all list Lonergan's "conversions" and even the normal or desired sequence of their occurrence, still standing the static bank, the standard bank, of our academic culture, living the type of unlife criticized by oddbods like the two Georges²¹ of the 19th centuries or, over the axial span, by a Plotinus or a Proust. The issue is, not listing the listings of the biographic boat. The issue is finding your Rhumb, your room, your homing device.²² The issue is, perhaps, wanting to find a Ferryman. How does that want sit with you, in you? In my own odd outsiderish struggle, Herman Hesse comes to mind. You may cry inside, like *Hermine*, "we have

²⁰Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 1160.

²¹I am referring to those two wonderful ladies, George Eliot and George Sand.

²²Section 4 of *Cantower XXII* is titled "A Rhumb with a Few". A rhumb is any of the 32 points of a mariner's compass.

no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness".²³ Or, since you are reading this, you may echo Siddhartha in your finding of the Ferryman, the Feynman version of Lonergan. "I will remain by this river, thought Siddhartha. A friendly ferryman took me across. I will go to him. My path once led from his hut to a new life May my present path, my new life, start from here!"²⁴

Now this direction of reflection you may find strange, discomfoting. But I see no reason, in our present crisis of culture and Lonerganism, for compromising talk. Socrates and Jesus, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas, were pointers to a new pointing life.²⁵ The pointings and the pointers were, in the main, picked up and paralyzed as Isms: a Christianity where Christ is substance not subject, a Thomism which is not soulful agony but solely axioms. The problem of interpretation, or of hermeneutic, or of rhetoric, is the interpretor, the hermeneutik, the rhetor. The answer is a new personal and communal embarrassing effort to face one's ordinariness in a sick psychothymic culture. "And now, it seemed that he had indeed become an ordinary person. Siddhartha reflected on his state. He found it difficult to think; he really had no desire to, but he forced himself."²⁶ Could this be any way related to Lonergan's "forcing attention",²⁷ forcing a tension, "a law of tension"²⁸ in your living?

So, I throw you back to the task spelled out in *Cantower XXV*, but now in this new context, a context perhaps freshened the occasional exercise of interpretation of the

²³Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, Penguin, 179.

²⁴Herman Hess, *Siddhartha*, Peter Owen, London, 1971, 113.

²⁵I stress especially their common pointing to a new reflective living. See *Cantower XXI*: "Epilodge".

²⁶*Siddhartha*, 106.

²⁷*Insight*, 397[422].

²⁸*Insight*, 474 [497].

Cantowers in between: think of our efforts to interpret the principle of displacement in *Cantower XXVII*.

So, I can conclude briefly. The first strategic step in struggling towards a feel for H2 is doing some version - at least commonsensical - of identification.²⁹ It could well rise to some of the heights described in *Cantower IX*. But more than likely it is to be a humble biographic-laden account - and it should be an account, even to yourself, hidden away in a diary - of your versions in life and of life (conversions, diversions, reversions, perversions, etc).³⁰ What do I really bring, biographically, to interpreting? Perhaps this little ramble of mine could become a Proustian taste of tea? Perhaps, at the end of the recommended effort, with its trials and horrors, you will echo the endnotes of Proust, ready to begin the interpretation that is humanity in you, pointing, *In Search of Lost Time?* readied to tentatively read "the hundred different masks which ought properly to be attached to a single face",³¹ the masks of authors here and there attached to the face of history?

34.3 Trials and Horrors

I presume that you have not broken off for a day or a month to write to yourself about your categories? But you will, wont you? You can start, Reader's Digest style, like scoring an intelligence test. You open up pages 286-7 of *Method in Theology* and face

²⁹The problem of identification is raised in section 17.2.5 of *Insight* (558[581]) on "The Appropriation of Truth" . I have a lengthy reflection on that discussion in section 3.3 of *Cantower III*. In relation to functional specialization.

³⁰In chapter 4 of *Lack in the Beingstalk* I suggested changing the usual terminology of "conversion" to "displacement". The alternate word is both broader and free from the connotation of religious orientation.

³¹My reference to Proust is missing here in my notes. Is it to that final section of the final volume, quite a suitable context? Or does the quote belong to that wonderful passage early in "Within a Budding Grove" where Proust writes of Beethoven's quartets creating an audience for the quartets? I trust you to find it!

your first trial and horror. Do it with a friend or a friendly bottle. I used regularly talk to my philosophy students about having a “serious concept”. I gave them two criteria: (1) you will be able to remember the months you spent getting it; (2) You will be able to speak coherently and expansively on the topic for ten hours. Well? Read the list on those pages with those criteria in mind, adding the missing functional specializations in a number (10).³² And if you are really game for depression, read the next paragraph where Lonergan (?tongue in cheek) writes about rewriting the first half of *Method* in the context of a full explanatory heuristic: “ one can go on...”. Are you such a one? Certainly, there is need here for humour and satire.

But we have been round that cycle before, so let’s leave it, supposing that you will do a little honestly articulated self-assessment. You do, I hope, share somewhat my sense of core crisis? The important element of elemental luminosity here is, not climbing the ladder towards the third stage of meaning, but sensing that we are blocked from the bottom rung by Ismized axioms in a necrophiliac culture. The problem of significant interpretation is “a problem of a development in the subject, in the student of philosophy, in one’s raising oneself up from whatever level one happens to be on to the level of a Plato, and then an Aristotle, and then an Augustine, and then an Aquinas. You have to do an awful lot of stretching to get up that ladder. You are not there already by the mere fact that you are baptized!”³³

O.K. Even without taking the month off, you find yourself agreeing with me and yourself that you are hanging in there with some competence in naming the elements of your meaning and their modest complexification in you. Now, we are into the gritty of trying H2, and I return to the other point from which I began. When you tackle the interpretation of anyone you are meeting a biography in history. That, perhaps, helps

³²See chapter 3 of *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economic. A Fresh Pragmatism* on this topic, and on the minimalist interpretation of categorial orientation.

³³*Phenomenology and Logic*, 138.

to reinforce the appeal, force the tension towards luminosity, to concretely struggle towards some ecstasy in the case of your own biography. There is nothing new in this: metaphysics is simply a concrete luminosity within concrete living: it is not in any way abstract. When it is presented correctly, even though inadequately, it takes on the smell of abstraction because it is beyond the reading, outside the so-far biography of the reader. Still, everyone has a metaphysics, and it shows better in the writing than in the reading - unless the reading is out loud and a friend is listening, poised to echo. And this is a key to what I wrote in the first sentence, or at the end of the previous section.

Lying round the house here there is a book, *Computers for Dummies*, which I would probably benefit from reading. Here, perhaps, you may be relieved in finding me writing about *Interpretation for Dummies*. I spoke about it first in what became the appendix to *Music That Is Soundless: "Bible, Meaning, Metaphysics"*, which concludes with the words, "we need to put down better flagstones and put out fewer flags".³⁴ There I wrote of reading scripture with an eye out for question-marks - perhaps I might now write question-masks. Later I drew attention to the benefit and complexity of this in-road into interpretation as part of a first (rejected) Appendix A to *Phenomenology and Logic*.³⁵ But let us keep it simple: the short Appendix A in the published version contains diagrams that can be a starting place. Even if you are a border-line beginner, the diagrams are not strange to you. And of course, if you took a month off to do that position-search, you are a tad or a tadpole clearer on where you swim in regard to the pieces of the diagram, the five causes, the five levels of present human desperation.

Now let us not get complicated. I began that section, "Elementary Grammatology" of the original Appendix A with a quotation from Derrida which ends

³⁴The new edition, *Music That Is Soundless. A Fine Tuning for the Lonely Bud A*, is available from Axial Press (2004).

³⁵The Appendix was published as chapter five of *Lack in the Beingstalk. A Giants Causeway*. "Elementary Grammatology" is section 5.

“before being its object, writing is the condition of the *episteme*”.³⁶ Whether you are reading Derrida or Damascene or Dewart, biography meets, however inadequately, biography, in that reading. And, however much the reader is a beginner, the writing of the hand betrays the I, reveals the author. So, you may not be able to pin down Dewart’s view of doctrines in a universal spectrum of viewpoints, but you might get as far as Lonergan, and make available with more detailed luminosity, the flags in Dewart’s inner citadel. “So eager has he been to impugn what he considered the Thomist theory of knowledge that he overlooked the fact that he needed a correspondence view of truth to mean what he said. Let me stress this point. Dewart has written a book on the future of belief. Does he mean the future of belief, or something else, or nothing at all?”

Is a wink as good as a nod to you here?

34.4 Stating the Meaning of the Text

We might think now of Thomas’ commentaries on Aristotle. How much of a pause, of re-reading, was there, before he stated the meaning of the text? And you are not Thomas. Why, then, do I jump to stating the meaning? Because the beginner “exegete *qua* exegete”³⁷ is first addressing self. And, as Lonergan remarked once, writing down is a new self-communication.³⁸

³⁶Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 27.

³⁷*Method in Theology*, 167. The reference is just a convenient way of reminding you about reading relevant sections on the topic.

³⁸Curiously enough, it was in a interview in which I had the opportunity of getting the great three, Gadamer, Voegelin and Lonergan, to do elementary grammatology. I began from the Plato text about Socrates and the slave, and asked them about reading the question-marks. Lonergan gradually got round to his reading and interpretation of Aquinas. He had no copy of the texts, so he hand-wrote a stack (his hand gesture was six inches). He spoke of the benefit of that exercise, of which

There is a host of distracting but relevant features of the enterprise that can bubble up in our minds here, but let us stick with the problem of stating the meaning of the text to and for oneself. What are you to aim at? You are to aim at a new control of meaning that eventually will generate in the community a new set of differentiations of consciousness. You are in conversation with the author about the author's envisagement of being, in the context of your own pointings in being. In the approach of 'elementary grammatology' you are 'asking' both of you about what you can recognize, in our reflections here, as basic positions and their development on six levels. The approach keeps your nose to the grammar. Only gradually, as we note at the end of this section and in the next, can the exercise be extended to disciplinary and cultural content. You work from your own humble categories but also - it is important to dwell on this other 'control structure', but we leave that also to the next section - as a believer in the 'best available categories' of the time. So, as I say, stick with the stating, and in that sticking is the challenge of holding to the specialized focus, sentence by sentence. You are trying to state someone else's stance in all or some of the six zones of beauty, understanding, truth, adventure, ultimacy, intimacy. You are not trying to make statements e.g. about the source or validity of the text; about the authors position in history either as an influence on ongoing meaning or on on-going events; about the value of the work or your taste in its regard; about its place as a source of future progress. And, as you will gradually come to appreciate, you are stating it with a purpose, a function, with realistic adequacy.

You certainly will be thinking such things as relevance, historical significance, whatever, and that contextualizing thinking helps the interpretative effort. But the primary drive is towards a self-helped self-correction, a process of writing to yourself which may in fact redeem, enlarge, your own perspective and redeem in the hodic re-

photocopying has deprived us. Pardon my reintroduction of a slower saner scholarly activity! The video of the question session, in York University, 1978 or so, is still available.

cycling sense. You might find it useful here to return to section 1.3, “Angling for Implementation”, in *Lack in the Beingstalk*, and read the short selection from Damascene’s *On Orthodox Faith*. It is better, of course - this is the question of context we postpone till the next section - to have the whole book in hand and the fullest perspective in head. But even in the short readings you may meet the strange Arab with his odd bent on being and being a Trinitarian disciple. The translation of the Greek (or Latin) can still hold the resonances of an integral consciousness, amazingly sharp in its perceptiveness. “... the second sense is *hearing*. This is capable of discerning voices and sounds, of which it distinguishes the high and the low pitch, the degree of smoothness, and the volume. Its organs are the soft nerves leading from the brain and the apparatus of the ears. Moreover, only man and the monkey move their ears...” Listen carefully and hear a man bent forward in each of his six-layer capacity-for- performance. Write to yourself about your suspicions of his positions, his learnings and yearnings: for instance, does he not have that theoretic tone which would resonate with Lonergan’s view of description as a beginning: “study of the organism begins...”³⁹.

This process of expressing for oneself elemental meanings of an author is a not an easy beginning, and it will push you in regard to larger contexts. Two quotations from Lonergan’s treatment of interpretation, placed together, should help, if taken with pedagogical slowness. The first is the conclusion of the section of *Method* on “understanding oneself”.

“At this point one moves from the functional specialty, interpretation, to the functional specialties, history, dialectic, and foundations. If the interpreter is to know, not merely what his author meant, but also what is so, then he has to be critical not merely of his author but also of the tradition that has formed his own mind. With that step he is propelled beyond writing history to making history.”⁴⁰

³⁹*Insight*, 464[489].

⁴⁰*Method in Theology*, 162.

Here I am inviting you to a twisted reading of this paragraph. The step I have invited you to take in these last four sections is a step towards making history. It is a break with tradition. I ask you to be critical, but critical precisely in not moving from the functional specialty interpretation. The challenge here is to stick with the task of pushing for the author's basic meaning, even arriving at a hypothetical expression of his or her answers to your basic questions: like the question, "John Mc (John Bin, for the non-Irish), what is your stand on pushing for *theoria*?"⁴¹ And what do you think John would say of objectivity, or of deliberative planning, or of evaluation, or beauty ancient or created? Notice the slippery slope that you are working on. Can you control it? A whole mess of points need to be made here, and they all point towards the next section. But let me first give you the other quotation worth brooding over: this is from that brutally compact section on Interpretation in chapter 17 of *Insight, The Sketch*, with which I have had trouble now for 45 years (so, patience!). The first sentence gives you the basic exercise, without distinguishing the modes of understanding and judgment. The second sentence points to the slope. The third sentence, as we shall see, brings you up against the complexity of the basic exercise and leads us to some fresh precision with regard to the slope. "Q" is, in our case, John.

"The upper blade forces out into the open the fact that the proximate sources of meaning lie in the interpreter's own experience, understanding, and judgment. It involves an explicit acknowledgment of the dangers of merely relative interpretation and a systematic procedure for circumventing such relativity by ascending to the universal viewpoint. It calls for a clear distinction between the interpreter's account of Q's context, his account of Q's content, his assumptions regarding Q's resources of expression, his inferred account of the manner in which Q would express his content in

⁴¹My odd address here is a nudge towards realizing that you are in conversation. The issue takes on a new edge when you check in the mirror! What your stand on concept is helped, not by reading the authors, but by doing such a simple exercise as the 'principle of displacement' exercise that I developed in *Cantower XXVII*.

the light of his context through his resources of expression, and finally Q's actual expression."⁴²

34.5 Contexts

Perhaps it is best here to recall first my lengthy introduction of the first two sections. There the problem, really, was "being critical of the tradition that formed your mind", getting a sense of what you are up against. I can hang the problem on the word *slope*. First, you have the problem of sliding around in the specialties. But then - that final sentence of the last quotation sets the tone - you seem to have to move around a great deal to end up with John's answer e.g. to the question, "What, John, do you think of *theoria*?" And John Mc's answer, in his best Irish accent, ending with a question, might well be "Sure and haven't I been reading himself, Aristotle, for years now... isn't it the real life?"⁴³ But how do you and I come up with that hypothetical expression? The answer involves *slope* again, *slope* as it came under consideration in *Cantower VIII*: "Slopes: An Encounter". There certainly is no point in an summary indication of stuff dealt with then in doctrinal density: and even worse is the parallel that I drew with the slope of the 19th century climb of "The Calculus of Variation", now central in 21st century physics.⁴⁴ Still, there is a way in which the parallel with the semi-successful science of physics can help along, even though you may be pretty vague about it.

In the final quotation of the last section, from *Insight*, there was mention of "ascending to the universal viewpoint". In earlier *Cantowers* I worked out a parallel between UV, the universal viewpoint, and GUTS, grand unification theories. UV is not

⁴²*Insight*, 581[603].

⁴³I think that Damascene would read with relish a Greek translation of Lonergan's reflection on Aristotle's view of the "excellent way" and of Greek *theoria* in "Mission and Spirit", *A Third Collection*, 27. Now there's a hypothetical expression!

⁴⁴Chapter 4 of *Lack in the Beingstalk* deals with this topic.

some unattainable magic perspective. It is, or would be in a maturing science, an acceptable strategic perspective on method and goal. We are back at the problem of methodological discontinuity aired in the earlier sections. Lonergan's final sentence in the section "General Theological Categories" reads "The problems of interpretation bring to light the notion of a potential universal viewpoint that moves over different levels and sequences of expression".⁴⁵

It moves over? **You** move over: for you are a potential universal viewpoint just as a beginner physicist is a potential GUT viewpoint. But, whereas the beginner physicist moves into a seriously developed tradition and battles up through four or seven years to an actual respectable GUT view, there is, for you, no community operating with any respectable UV.⁴⁶

This is altogether too large a question to tackle as elementary pointers. Still, you may profitably follow up the general push of the first 21 *Cantowers* towards the plausibility and the acceptability of the four words of Metaphysics, W1, W2, W3, W0. W0, the most difficulty word to cope with, is the word that is central to the elementary exercise; the other three relate to various contexts. W3, the most complex, has a regular repetition of the symbol UV, and if you check you will see that UV is in there in the operation of the second functional specialty as it is in all. The UV of present muddled division of labour is equally muddled, not only slimly potential but massively warped by present conventions of interpretation. But my point is that, like the printed Periodic Table inside the cover of an elementary chemistry text-book, the presence, as nudging image, of W3, can tune you up to respecting and cultivating the slope and vortex of hodic method.

⁴⁵*Method in Theology*, 288.

⁴⁶I raise the question in *Cantower XIV* of bringing the two sets of canons in *Insight* together and then sublating them into the full hodic context. The achievement will be the result of a posteriori efforts to do serious functional work.

Rather than continuing with this dense doctrinal invitation regarding contexts and distant hopes, it seems as well to wind down this section with an illustration. Since that illustration is a question of interpreting Lonergan, it leads into the next section but, as we shall see, by way of contrast.

The illustrating text is a short text from *For a New Political Economy*, p. 216, with facsimile on p. 224, "The Outlay Page". The first thing the text does for us here is illustrate the context of Research. Lonergan has only a few pages on that topic in *Method*: there is his later view that he should have given it fuller treatment, since he had devoted a large part of his life to it. Here the research is my own, and it involved a major effort, UV and all, and *theoria*, picking out, in the context of editing fragmentary typescripts, a few representative samples of Lonergan's scribbled searchings. Notice that significant research is a tricky business of contexts, benefitting sometimes through strange contexts overlapping. The final effort, from scribble to typescript, was a minor effort.

The text comes into the hands of the interpreter, in this case Tom McCallion.⁴⁷ How is it selected? It certainly isn't very "noticeable", this half page of scribble rescued from the back of a typescript page. But McCallion's "noticing potential" is informed: "you have to know the game to know what moves to make".⁴⁸ Obviously, we cannot get into the topic here, though the article is certainly worth taking up as a sort of paradigm exercise. The piece is about the number of turnovers in a period of Outlay and the rate of Outlay: how many times, if you like, you go right through the process from metal to machine in a month: 4 times? 4 2/3 times?. Why is Lonergan doing this? The exercise, as presented by McCallion, shows that it is time-consuming, tricky. Lonergan is trying to understand and, indeed, at the slow pace that only genius

⁴⁷"The Outlay Page. An Exercise in Interpretation", *Journal of Macrodynamical Economic Analysis*, 2004.

⁴⁸*Phenomenology and Logic*, 30; a relevant context on technique.

appreciates. But what is at stake here? Mark Blaug, a reputable philosopher of economics, asks “Why is the quantity theory of money the oldest theory in economics?”⁴⁹ It survives, I would say, in various shabby and faulty forms, because no one has tackled it patiently, adequately, holding non-abstractively to the relevant data.

But sticking with the relevant data is not much use if one lacks the context, the equivalent of UV or GUTS. And when it is tackled in that fashion, with luck there can be a break-through to a hierarchy of hypothetical expressions. But those expressions have to be mediated. No point in getting into that here: but it gives you a chance to read with fresh eyes (and awes!) the paragraph in *The Sketch* beginning “Fourthly, there are the hypothetical expressions.” McCallion operates from a control of meaning, his intussusception of Lonergan’s economic theory. He has, perhaps, sufficient of the larger control - a genetic systematics of economic thinking, that would enable him to “work out a hypothetical pure formulation of Q’s context”, and so on. But then he has to tackle the larger challenge, going beyond our elementary self-address, of “stating the meaning of the text” in any one of the conversations H_{2j} , where j ranges through the 1 ... 8 of the specialties and perhaps beyond, to common sense, to an interested ordinary business person.

But certainly, within the specialties, his primary function is to pass the baton on to the historian. And here I should definitely cut off our effort, at the edge of this complex topic. You’ll get a sense of the process if you think of the vortex of method operating as what Kuhn called ‘normal science’. If all were well, in economics or theology or physics, then an interpreter is handing on a slight improvement or addition and the cycling sorts out the components in that addition, distributing them through the forward specialties, lifting the life-styles of humanity in the unified, efficient and beautiful manner that gives hodology its health. But even in this case the interpreter

⁴⁹The title of his article in Mark Blaug et al., *The Quantity Theory of Money from Locke to Keynes and Friedman*, (Brookfield, Vt: Edgar Elgar Publishers, 1995).

functions smoothly by locating the particular effort in the “Standard Model”, the acceptable general context of the day. I use the words “standard model” to remind us - possible only a few of us! - of the parallel with physics.

The parallel is obscure but it is worth a paragraph, since physics has been our main focus in the past seven Cantowers. I have to hand a graduate text on Chromodynamics, which deals with the complexities of inner nuclear conjugates (quarks, and all that). The text centers attention on the “Standard Model”, as it is called. But there is another small disputed ‘stream of work’ around, of which this text says “the validity of a possible alternative, the so-called ‘string model’, is still heavily disputed”.⁵⁰ Now an interpreter of some experimental data from the strings perspective has to contextualize the work much more and better if it is to “circulate”, attain vortex plausibility. Similarly in the general case. And this is illustrated by McCallion’s work. “The Standard Model” in Economics in this area is some modification of the old quantity theory of money; in the broader zone of economics it is some brand of Keynesianism.

I have rambled enough in this difficult zone to give you at least an impression of the **functioning** of interpretation: McCallion’s article can help further.

What of the functioning of your elementary exercising: what might be called positional identification? You can think of it in the context of Lonergan’s various asides on “positions” of others in *Insight, Phenomenology and Logic, The Incarnate Word*, etc etc etc. You might even go on (in elementary foundational fantasy) to envisage such stuff slip-sloping a way (in fifty different ways to loose a lover!) into history and dialectic, so that the dialectic community would be nudged into a sublation of what would have been Lonergan’s dialectic of positions, grounded in a thematic of the “Secondly” of *The*

⁵⁰Walter Greiner, Stefan Schramm, Eckhart Stein, *Quantum Chromodynamics*, Springer pb, 2002, 153. I delight in coincidences: *Method in Theology* p. 153 points, in a footnote, to a non-standard model that would sublimate both the present standard model and the model suggested in *Insight*. It is, alas, not heavily disputed.

Sketch, contextualized by the meshing of the two sets of canons. Enough for the present!

34.6 Interpreting Lonergan-works

What I mean here by Lonergan-works is the entire complex of the “Lonergan tradition”, articles, books, classes, theses, conferences, etc etc etc: including Lonergan’s own writings.

So - to be annoying or at least provocative - I might say that we have now returned to the problem of the racketeers and the rickety left dangling at the end of section 1. One might mesh into this Lonergan’s reflections on two classes, the clever and wicked, the righteous and stupid,⁵¹ and try to sort out the range of people between. But that is quite a task, belonging to a development of dialectic that was vaguely identified in *Cantower XXII*.

Yet there is need for some continuity with other discomfoting suggestions of that *Cantower*, suggestions about bringing mayhem to Lonergan studies. So I pick up on a point I made at the end of the humorous *Cantower XI*: if you have not worked something out to some reasonable clarity, don’t inflict it on the community. Of course, such a norm, for you, is subject to the brutal realism of thesis writing or the “publish or perish” ethos. But I pick up the point here mainly to bring out the difference between learning and interpreting. I recall Lonergan talking about interpreters and historian that really cut through difficulties, cleared up some mess in a definitive fashion. That is the stuff of interpretation and history - and indeed, dialectic - in their differentiated maturity. And certainly such mature work will stretch the scholar and involve “a process of learning and even at times conversion.”⁵² But interpretation as a functional specialty is an effort to fit within a particular zone of hodic recycling, *per se*

⁵¹I am recalling the beginning of his article “Healing and Creating in History”, reprinted in *Collected Works*, vol 15.

⁵²*Method in Theology*, 155.

seeking to pin down and point up a hither-to unintegrated contribution of an author to the genesis of meaning. The interpreter is to come to the job with a context, self-tastefully constituted by a set of answers and questions.⁵³

Now I would say that this generation of interpreters - none of whom, moreover, even attempt to work seriously within the specialty - are, in the main, not constituted by the context named by Lonergan. People like McCallion are the exceptions. He tackles an interpretation of a text of Lonergan, "understanding the object". But I would suggest that, in general, Lonergan is not a suitable subject, or object, of that specialty, and that treating his work thus is not an efficient searching for the development of the specialty. My suggestion holds more certainly for undergraduates or even graduate-workings, for two reasons (among many): Lonergan is too easy to interpret, Lonergan is too difficult to interpret. Too easy? Well, take our exercise above: it does not take much nominal control of a list and description of 'conversions' or whatever to identify their occurrence in Lonergan. What does Lonergan mean by "?"? Apply the diagrams of Appendix A of *Phenomenology and Logic*. This also applies in a range of topics that turn up regularly in theses: topics in Lonergan that certainly complexified in his life - think even of the complexification of the word *implementation* - but that are not really bothersome, and can be talked about with a nominal control of meaning. Too hard? Think of Lonergan's view on economic justice, or on systematics or on the ongoing genesis of method that is a reach for "the field" of and in third-order consciousness. These are topics that are out of the reach even of present experts: though a gutsy doctorate candidate could try the dangerous operation of educating a thesis director.

But my interest here is in the specialty H2, and I wish only to re-state in this context the point made in *Cantower XI*: H2 is not *per se* a learning but a creating. Don't confuse such learning, or muddling, with H2. Here, again, recalling successful

⁵³Two short sections of *Method* are relevant here: chapter 14, section 1; chapter 3, section 6.

paradigms is useful. The undergraduate, even the normal doctorate candidate, in physics is trained to humbly repeat: the undergraduate may verify Newton's gravitational constant; the graduate may get a doctorate by checking out a standard perturbation theory in a particular experimental set-up. In undergraduate and graduate humanities, ambitions and illusions fly higher, and hard thinking is just not par for the course. So, one becomes the standard model for professing philosophy, theology, literature. One becomes, in the happy phrase of an earlier work, a serial killer.

Still, if I say that Lonergan is in general not a suitable topic for H2, I am also saying that Lonergan is a suitable instrument for H2. That is the whole point of the exercising recommended here. Lonergan as guide guides you away from Lonergan towards being luminous about your own presuppositions. And as guide he also grounds the four words of metaphysics that nudge you out of the standard model of the humanities, of philosophy and theology. And as guide he is an incomprehensible pointer to the way to do H2.

Here my topic cried out for broadening beyond my chosen task of cultivating functional specialization in physics. In the first *Cantower*, of Easter Monday 2002, I drew on the analogy with the Easter Monday rising in Dublin in 1916, and later I drew on the analogy of the Warsaw ghetto of the forties. Certain strategic locations were occupied: an empire, a standard model of oppression, was challenged. So, in the present case, strategic locations need to be sniffed out with methodological cunning and occupied with embarrassing success⁵⁴: at Mount St. Bridge in 1916 a few riflemen could scatter a British column.

What I find sadly amusing about Lonerganism, apparently committed to

⁵⁴A position occupied by the revolutionaries during the revolution of 1916 was a centre-town park. Apparently the leaders were impressed by trench-positioning of the current war. But the park was surrounded by five-story buildings, and had to be abandoned. The point of the story is, of course, the possibility of analogues in the selection of interpretation-topics etc.

sophistications of method, is the absence of methodological cunning. So there is the ugly inefficiency of conferences, journals, institutes, whatever. But my topic here is H2, and I would simply draw attention to one strategic location: Thomas' view of the Trinity and of Christ needs to be occupied.⁵⁵ If one reaches for the mind of Aquinas on that central topic, place, Epilogue, "once that mind is reached, then it is difficult not to import his compelling genius to the problems of this latter day".⁵⁶ Lonergan's Latin works, now emerging in English, make possible, and his hodic structure make probable, the importation of that rich minding into global culture. The importation can be in H2, but that importation must be efficient enough to swing into H3 and H4, pressing on contemporary theology the embarrassment of a doctrine of understanding, of hard hard-thinking, that is taken for granted in undergraduate physics.

⁵⁵It needs to be occupied, of course, and preoccupy, if one is to live as a contemporary Christian in the intellectual pattern of loving. But that was a topic earlier, especially in *Cantowers II, X, XX, XXI*. It is not just "an occupation for the saint / No occupation either, but something given / And taken ... lost in a shaft of sunlight" (T.S.Elliot, *Four Quartets*, "The Dry Salvages", quoted more fully and relevantly in *Music That is Soundless. A Fine Way for the Lonely Bud A*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2003, p. x. The book focuses on this occupation.

⁵⁶The last sentence of the Epilogue of *Insight*.