

## THE METAPHYSICS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

I could well leave the matter there: a puzzle surely to anyone who has misread Lonergan's definition of metaphysics: "Now let us say that explicit metaphysics is the conception, affirmation and implementation of the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being."<sup>1</sup>

It seems best that I do not stop, but add some further nudges that might help you to read the project of *Insight* differently. Shake off, for instance, the moving viewpoint attitude of the work, and build into your attitude, as best you initially can,<sup>2</sup> the search for a successful science of global life that dominates *Method in Theology*. There the search is the core of the first page, and it climbs twistingly to the reach for real unity, "a fully-conscious process of self-constitution,"<sup>3</sup> a prayerful desire, "may they all be one."<sup>4</sup>

I journeyed through Northern California this past week, back-tracking and side-tracking with all this in mind, in mibox.<sup>5</sup> I have given accounts of such journeying before: a journeying of Manhattan,<sup>6</sup> a journeying of my native Dublin,<sup>7</sup> but not with the present growing W<sub>3</sub>-

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<sup>1</sup> *Insight*, 416. It occurs at the bottom of a page which, indeed, does allow the unwary reader to focus on positional unification. But the word implementation sits there, quite disturbingly. On the general failure to notice the disturbance, see Patrick Brown, "Assembling Meanings of Implementation," *Divyadaan: A Journal of Philosophy and Education*, **28/2** (2017).

<sup>2</sup> See note 26 below.

<sup>3</sup> *Method in Theology*, 364.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>5</sup> The diagram on which this naming is based is repeated in previous essays. It is loaded with positional pointings, but take it initially to mean your horizon, meshed now I would hope, with "Dread" (see *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 284–97).

<sup>6</sup> A brief account of my meta-reflective wandering up and down New York, from the Bronx to Coney Island, is give in section 3 (27–38) of [Cantover 14](#), "Communications and Ever-ready Founders." That *Cantover* of May 2003 is very relevant to our next project, grappling with Interpretation. Page 10 contains a structured comparison of the two sets of canons in *Insight*, and page 8 gives the key to shifting from description to explanation. You can talk descriptively of blue, but if you wish to get into the world of explanation you need to line it up with orange, red, and violet.

<sup>7</sup> The very relevant experience and challenge to you is expressed in [Quodlibet 8](#), "The Dialectic of My Town, Ma Vlast."

crispness of 60 years cherishing the definition of metaphysics. My focus now—“Now let us say ...”<sup>8</sup>—is a saying to you, in the present crisis of a needed unique jump in “*Levels and Sequences of Expression*,”<sup>9</sup> in your possibility of a pause, a “trip-up”<sup>10</sup> on the bottom of page 595 of *Insight*. “A little learning is a dangerous thing, and the adage has, perhaps its ...” Its? Don’t turn the page. Pause there. Its: realization in me, in mibox? Is *Insight* a dangerously little learned page-turner, so that there has been little come-about<sup>11</sup> in my grip on mibox’s central reach of intelligence. “Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities.”<sup>12</sup> Is such a reach in “character”<sup>13</sup> for you “that may emanate from the whole personality”<sup>14</sup> as you travel your local shop, town, county, or has that character become an academic character, subtly devoured by the neurodynamic surround of “the meaningless, the vacant, the empty, the vapid, the insipid, the dull”?<sup>15</sup>

My own patterned neurodynamics sniffed nature’s longings as I passed through the human vacancies and dullnesses of northern California. I saw the Napa valley line-ups of grape-shot soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder with North Korea’s troops. “Such is the monster that has stood forth in our time.”<sup>16</sup>

At this stage in my writing I have the same sense as when I ended the previous essay. My heuristic response to the aggregate of situations that is northern California is a matter of bringing to bear on the complex my abundant ramblings on the matter. What do I mean by the complex of situations? You might start with my little chapter “The Situation Room: The Stupid View of Wolf Blitzer”<sup>17</sup> and from there move back to the broader perspective offered

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<sup>8</sup> *Insight*, 426.

<sup>9</sup> The title of section 3.3 of *Insight*, chapter 17: page 592.

<sup>10</sup> Again I recall Paul’s trip up the Damascus road, a trip-up of consequence.

<sup>11</sup> *Insight*, 537.

<sup>12</sup> *Method in Theology*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Method in Theology*, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 12 of Philip McShane, *Profit: The Stupid View of President Donald Trump*, Axial Publishing, 2016.

in *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*.<sup>18</sup> You might come to grips with the presence or absence of that perspective on California by opening *Method in Theology* 286–87 with the fresh poise of having northern California in mind, in mind as it is in you and as it is described in those two pages. You are being paged there into the challenge of finding personally and privately “The Existential Gap.”<sup>19</sup> You might like, in this million dollar want-shot in the dark, to phone a friend. Then together you could do a simple stumbling through what I call the *1833 Overture*. In that simple version, alone or with friends, you need to meet the Lonergan that was too tired to write the “far larger”<sup>20</sup> work that would have spread out the list of those two pages of *Method* into the shocking new context mentioned, with powerful content and intention, at the parallel places in *Insight*. So, for example you must read “the integral heuristic structure which is what I mean by a metaphysics”<sup>21</sup> with a sense of its beyondness in containing now way more than *Insight*’s “skimpy treatment”:<sup>22</sup> containing indeed much more than my skimpy pointing to a global situational analysis. Futurology<sup>23</sup> is only a glint in the eye of some evolutionary sports. “From such a broadened basis one can go on,”<sup>24</sup> but not in our time. “You can either sit on your hands or you can put spade to earth and move the first sod.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Axial Publishing, 2015. You would find it useful to pick up, on page 192, from the local situation of a church on the infamous downtown eastside, where my wife was working, and find your way to fantasizing about the hierarchy of situation rooms that would lift that situation effectively into a sane humanity. But then, you might well just start with the situation of your own church, synagogue, mosque, atheism.

<sup>19</sup> *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 281: those last two chapters are an obvious context for our dreadful task.

<sup>20</sup> *Insight*, 754, top line: referring to a missing second volume to *Insight*.

<sup>21</sup> *Method in Theology*, 287, end of (6).

<sup>22</sup> *Insight* 754, note 1.

<sup>23</sup> My *Futurology Express* (Axial Publishing, 2013) is a secular version of the full project that fits in neatly with the present local effort. It begins with a troubled family as this begins with a troubled region of North and South America.

<sup>24</sup> *Method in Theology*, 287. The quotation is from the most psychically devastating paragraph of the entire book.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick Crowe, *Theology of the Christian Word. A Study in History*, Paulist Press, 1978, 149. One can, of course, sit on hands busy with the old debates of philosophy and theology, name-dropping when these names need to be dropped in the interior light of the new Standard Model. See [Lonergan’s Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry](#), especially singing along with Sinéad O’Connor in the final chapter.

The first sod to be moved is you, you in your present situation, you in your department or apartment, perhaps picking up your local paper and finding, even a little,<sup>26</sup> that it is like a Klingon cloaking device but, I hope now, less successful in making invisible the fact that we are not living human lives, that these past centuries of the Californian story “have been trying to remake man and have done not a little to make life unlivable.”<sup>27</sup>

So, I do now what I would wish you to do in your own backyard: read, soon, freshly, trippingly, in an *Assembly*<sup>28</sup> leading up to the *1833 Overture*, a local paper, as I now do the *Lake County Record-Bee* of Wednesday April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

There is nothing startling about this local paper: an abundance of trivial world news that is not local, an opinion page that talks ineffectively about drug pricing, and adds and articles on house slippers and parole for lifers, etc. etc. A single obituary for an obviously gallant woman, Priscilla ‘Cris’ Ann Morrow (January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1940 – April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017) with thirteen grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren, some of which will see Clear Lake “and environs”<sup>29</sup> in “a hundred years or so.”<sup>30</sup> Will it all be the same, or more oppressively grape-shot and hovel-meshed and minimally-waged, with a life of supposed freedom, “for each is free, yet together swept in a swirling mass down the cataract of life to the serene pool of a green churchyard”?<sup>31</sup>

I must conclude and turn to the task of a fresh beginning, an effort to help people to climb to the new global view of interpretation that is to be effective in taking us out of the line of dehumanization, to be effective not by “chance influence”<sup>32</sup> but by “a resolute and effective

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<sup>26</sup> I have written in previous decades about the fact that “great ugliness is as remote as great beauty.” It is a decade-long contemplative climb, a climb in and into “The Interior Lighthouse,” to be able to get one’s neurodynamics to vibrate with the gloss of the cancered contemporary world.

<sup>27</sup> *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 232.

<sup>28</sup> The last word on page 249 of *Method in Theology*.

<sup>29</sup> I am recalling the first line of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. The environs are the field of *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 199.

<sup>30</sup> A favorite perspective of the Poet Patrick Kavanagh. I recall now, in today’s rain, Kavanagh’s short poem, *A Wet Evening in April*, which I set to music and sang often: “The birds sang in the wet trees / And as I listened to them it was a hundred years from now / and I was dead and someone else was listening to them / But I was glad I had recorded for him / The melancholy”

<sup>31</sup> “The Mystical Body and the Sacraments,” *Shorter Papers*, CWL 20, 78.

<sup>32</sup> *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 306.

intervention in the historical process.”<sup>33</sup> I would have you step out of line, to share in a contemplative grip of “an eternal fire of optimism and energy, dismayed at naught, rebuked by none, tireless, determined, deliberate.”<sup>34</sup> In the center of the first page of my April copy of *Lake County Record-Bee* there is printed in BOLD-FACE 72-point print the words **GET IN LINE**.<sup>35</sup> It heads a picture of goslings on the local Clear Lake. But does it not capture the accepted intent of the paper, of the period in which we live? Are you at home there? “In a sense everyone knows and observes transcendental method.”<sup>36</sup> The readers and writers of the Lake County paper do, as do those surrounded by the seeming best of papers of world capitals. “But in another sense it is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method.”<sup>37</sup> It is that difficulty that must be faced if we are to move into the positive Anthropocene age in this next millennium.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> The conclusion of Lonergan’s brilliant 1935–6 “Essay on Fundamental Sociology,” available in Michael Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, 16–44. The quotation is from page 43. The whole reach is an inspiring context for our present musings.

<sup>35</sup> **GET IN LINE**.

<sup>36</sup> *Method in Theology*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*