

Field Nocturne 26: Helen Keller And I

My own shorter treatment of this topic is in the first chapter of *A Brief History of Tongue*. With permission from John Benton, I included his treatment of the topic here from his recent ground-breaking book, *Shaping the Future of Language Studies*, Axial Publishing, 2008.

CHAPTER 4: The Grounding Language Universals

This chapter marks a strategic shift to the problem of the genesis of language in the human. What this chapter adds to the previous three is an enlarged thematic identification of the core-attitudes as the basis for the grounding language universals.¹ Recall our position that the principle of language is the play of human sensibility and intelligence we named senseAbility. Our meaning extends to any language act, conventional or creative, the meaning of which sets the stage for our strategy, as well as for an appeal:

But what is that play when we speak adequately about language universals, and what is that play in the first sudden event of language learning? These are the two questions on which the remainder of the chapter focuses. There is the first bang, which we will consider shortly. There is the larger bang that will be the concluding topic of the chapter: a cultural bang that grounds adequate speech about language, its acquisition, its universals.

We may lead into our considerations of the first bang, our first event that shifted us from babbling to talk, by reflecting a little more on our problem-solving experiences. There is a sense in which each puzzle solved, in geometry, in life, is a shift from babbling to talk. You can surely recall a teacher who babbled because a puzzle wasn't really solved? Or you may

¹ Concurrently, we are searching for the elements of core grammar.

even have discomfoting memories of “babbling on” precisely because you didn’t have a clue? So, here, I need a certain tolerant openness about our next venture....”²

The focus of the venture, then, may be summed up by asking: What happened to Helen Keller? How do we as infants move from babbling to talk? Our full venture here will slowly pace along with Helen and our infant/childhood selves, and along with that pacing, we will weave in some supporting refinements from Aristotle, Aquinas and Lonergan with which to reinforce key elements we brought to light in earlier chapters. The result of our pacing along with Helen anticipates the breakthrough to follow; namely, the grounding language universals are in fact, the five core-attitudes expressed by all language users. Thus, the five core-attitudes³ shown below, spontaneously recurred in Helen and in our infant/childhood selves before, during and after the first sudden event of language learning, and recurred in all subsequent events of language acquisition in a series of shifts from babbling to talk:⁴

5. Is-to-do questions

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4. What-to-do questions

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² Op. cit., *BHT*, pp. 30-31. I take this opportunity to thank Philip McShane and Alessandra Drage for their generosity in granting me permission to reproduce freely from *BHT* and *TW*, respectively, throughout this and subsequent chapters.

³ We are also in slow pursuit of an appreciation of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. In each core attitude there is a searching, a searcher, for regularity, for ruledness, for sense. See Chapter 3.

⁴ Thus, our venture also reveals that the discovery of language universals is primarily the result of a self-search. Recalling the challenge posed in the Introduction, the discovery of the dynamics of one’s five-leveled structure of wonder is, at the same time, a discovery of one’s core self. This book is meant to encourage you, the reader and the language user, to gently discover the dynamics of core grammar by meeting yourself. For an introduction to a series of elementary exercises with which to undertake that self-search, I would direct readers to the following three sources: op. cit., *ICT*, Section IV, op. cit., *BHT*, Chapters 1 and 2 and op. cit., *TW*, Chapters 3-7.

3. Is-questions

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2. What-questions

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1. Sensible experience

The Dawning of Five Core Attitudes in Helen Keller and Our Infant/Childhood Selves

What happened to Helen Keller? The basic relevant facts are easily recalled. Annie Sullivan arrived on March 5th, 1887 to face the challenge of somehow bringing Helen to language. One of Annie's early gestures was the signing of w-a-t-e-r into Helen's hand. It was April 7th before it dawned on Helen what this gesturing was about. **Between March 5th and April 7th a cumulative series of core-attitudes arose in Helen**, in a series of shifts from babbling to talk, out of which a first word was correctly understood and then acted upon. The moment of discovery was a hand washing; immediately following the discovery, Helen hastened to the discovery of twenty or so words. This making sense, by way of understanding and using words, allowed her to make the choice to greatly expand her ability to communicate with her teacher and her family. Later, when she learned to read and to write, she had access to the written records of human meanings, with which to bring about an astonishing enrichment to her life.

1. Sensible Experience

The steady stream of sense experience is the first core attitude that occurred in Helen. Recalling Aristotle's observation, Lonergan notes, "a person without sense perception would never learn anything or understand anything."⁵ Seven-year-old Helen was blind, deaf and mute, and as a

⁵ Op. cit., *Verbum*, p. 28. Helen's ability to overcome the loss of two senses, most significantly her sight, gives weight to an advanced counter-cultural position on the status of seeing and the problem of correct understanding and the real. This issue has been named "the myth of the eyeballs." See op. cit., *ICT*, Chapter 19, op. cit., *Wealth*, Chapter 5, and op. cit., *Insight*, Chapter XIV.

result, prior to April 5th, 1887, she had not demonstrated the usual capacity for naming things.

Helen recalls,

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. 'Light! give me light!' was the wordless cry of my soul...⁶

Helen's days were lived out in what may be described as habits that were conditioned by routine biological patterns for which physical well being, play, and fun for its own sake were her goal. While she did demonstrate emotions, feelings, insecurities and longings, she recalls that her way of coping and communicating involved a familiarity with patterns of touch: "I would imitate what I wanted."⁷ Her teacher, Annie, observed, "When she wants to know the name of anything, she points to it and pats my hand,"⁸ [and] "Although Helen quickly imitated the hand signs, she made no connection between them and the objects they symbolized..."⁹

And so within the inarticulate blind girl - skin-deep and skin-shallow - there was a lightless viewpoint: she had, or was, a point of view. Or should we rather say a zone of view, a zone of reviewing, reaching, dawning? Certainly it is fair to say the child was not 'mindless'. There was within Helen's senseAbility a reaching and a frustration distinctly beyond the subtle sensitivity of cat, great or small. Take, for instance, Helen's view of water. There are the years of liquid-experiences, of drinking and washing, splashing and bathing, tasting and smelling, pouring and flowing, hot and cold, soapy and soupy. Helen, one can surmise, had "it" all together, where "it" is the vague "liquididentity" of her

⁶ Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1954, p. 35.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Joseph P. Lash, *Helen and Teacher*, Delacorte Press, New York, 1980, p. 51.

⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

2. What-Questions

The spontaneous rise of wonder triggers the second core attitude in both Helen and ourselves. That attitude is expressed in what and why questions.¹² In his great work, *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas draws out the fundamental significance of Annie’s hand touching by answering the question, “Whether we need a diagram or phantasm to understand?” Aquinas observed, “anyone can experience this of himself, that when he tries to understand something, he forms certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is desirous of understanding. For this reason, it is that when we wish to help someone to understand something, we lay examples before him, from which he forms phantasms for the purpose of understanding.”¹³ The patterns formed by Annie’s steadfast hand touching served as examples from which Helen could form phantasms for herself.

Helen’s struggle for phantasm at this stage of her journey could be summed up for us in the words, “What the heck is going on?” The “heck” hints at moods and moodswings, for we must struggle here with the reality of Helen having no words, only minded moods. Why do we start the y sequence later than the sequence x?

y y y y y yyyyÉ
x x x x x x x x x x x x x x xÉ

¹² This attitude, of course, is the “turn to the idea,” a *Wendung zur idee* that dominated our attention in Chapters 2 and 3 and grounds later chapters.

¹³ Op. cit., *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Q.84, a.7.

discovery of the name and meaning for ‘water’] can be accounted for by the reflection of intellect back to phantasm where the many instances of the one idea are represented.”¹⁷ Phantasm, then, is involved in the genesis¹⁸ of names and the meaning they represent.¹⁹

We have classified a particular attitude that is summed up in the word “whatting.” The attitude in Helen that we named whatting led her to the basic insight of language. And so the sensation of Annie’s spelling of the word w-a-t-e-r worked simultaneously with cold water rushing over her hand and all the memories of the varieties of liquid that Helen routinely experienced since birth converged in a drive of at least one, if not more, why questions toward the named identity of the liquid entity. The motion of Annie’s fingers and the sensation of liquidity had combined to provide an image or diagram, that served, in the words of Aquinas, as examples in which she may – by inspection, as it were – reach that which she is striving to understand. And so for Lonergan, “one cannot understand

¹⁷ Op. cit., *Verbum*, p. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ A distinction must be drawn here that will have great import in Chapter 7. It is important to note that in Helen, as well as in ourselves as infants during both our initial and subsequent struggles from babbling to talk, the achievement of our naming a word and attributing to it a meaning that is commonly accepted, results in the achievement of a nominal definition, that of naming things in relation to ourselves, the mastery of which is sufficient for us to function in the practical world of descriptive common sense. (In Chapter 7, we give Lonergan’s clarification of how the occurrence of insight into language works by distinguishing between a nominal and an explanatory definition, op. cit., *Insight*, p. 11.) Helen is in the wondrous state of *raising herself up* to a nominal definition of her first word. The initial mastery of language is a complex rite of passage for all humans, the achievement of which places humans in the intelligible world of meaning in which the capacity and need to elevate talk to the level of an explanatory definition then becomes the core drive. We are talking here about the human drive toward a more difficult rite of passage, the horizon of scientific thinking identified in Chapter 2 by Aristotle. The expression “elevate” is found in Patrick H. Byrne, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle*. State University of New York Press, 1997. See “To Reduce or to Elevate (Anagein)?”, pp. 23-27. I note here that the expression relates to Byrne’s work on the meaning of *analysis*. It occurs at the conclusion of that analysis in his discussion of a somewhat parallel word, *anagein*. It is important to notice that Byrne goes against a solid tradition that would relate that word to *reduction*, and makes the case for a richer Aristotelian meaning surrounding the general sense of *raising up*: water by heat, an audience by rhetoric and, significantly, potency to act. The basic elements of this elevated talk are introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Further refinements with respect to potency and act can be found in op. cit. *Insight*, p. 651 on “Causality”. “The basic division is between external and internal causes. Internal causes are the central and conjugate potency, form, and act...”

without understanding something; and the something understood, the something whose intelligibility is actuated, is the phantasm.”²⁰ For Helen and ourselves, then, the act of formulating is a personal inner achievement resulting from *direct insight* into *phantasm*,²¹ the goal towards which what and why questions tend.²² In other words, what- and why-questions seek to formulate an idea of what a thing is. Aquinas named the achievement of that goal an *inner word*.²³ The inner word is a formulation or definition or concept.

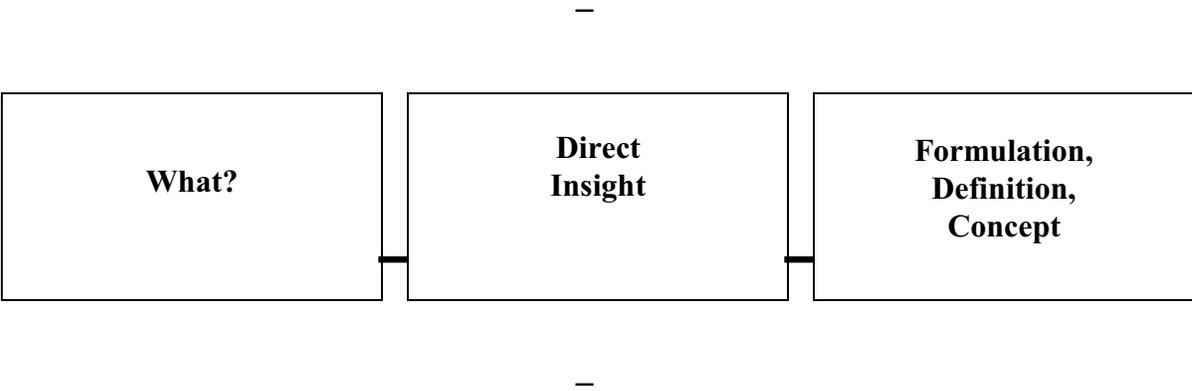
²⁰ Op. cit., *Verbum*, pp. 28-9. Obviously, this reinforces Lonergan’s point above about the need for sense experience: “a person without sense perception would never learn anything or understand anything.”

²¹ The key passage is *ibid.*, pp. 41-42. The introduction of the frontispiece of the book *Insight* has a quotation from Aristotle (*De Anima*, III, 7) that includes the key word *phantasmasi*, the key doctrine of Aquinas and Lonergan, “insight into phantasm.”

²² *Ibid.*, 25. Of course, prolonged self-attention would be needed to reach the level of refinement described by Lonergan here about the tricky relationship between phantasm and insight: “The act of intellect with respect to phantasm is an insight.... insight is to phantasm as form is to matter; but in that proportion, form is related to prime matter, but insight is related to sensible qualities; strictly, then, it is not true that insight is grasp of form; rather, insight is the grasp of the object in an inward aspect such that the mind, pivoting on the insight, is able to conceive, not without labor, the... concepts of form and matter.”

²³ For the many references to inner word in Aquinas one might begin with Lonergan’s seven elements in “The General Notion of the Inner Word,” *ibid.*, pp. 13-24. Lonergan notes the influence of Aristotle in Aquinas’ thought: “Four other works of recognized standing divide inner words into the two classes of definitions and judgments, and three of these recall the parallel of the Aristotelian twofold operation of the mind.” Lonergan thus footnotes this statement with: *De veritate*, q. 4, a. 2 c.; q. 3., a. 2 c.; *De potentia*, q. 8, a. 1 c.; q. 9, a. 5 c.; *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 5, a. 9 c.; *Super Ioannem*, c. 1, lect. 1., *ibid.*, p. 17.

The image below represents *the second stage* of Helen’s state of wonder dominated by her what-attitude. The what-question is the second of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. It is the second drive toward making sense of our experience, the occurrence of which we associate with the formal cause. The arrow below the box denotes the relationship between the first and second stages. The arrow above the box indicates that the process of Helen’s conscious struggle to learn her first word is still not complete – a further, third, mindful stage exists in her drive to master her first word.



3. Is-Questions

And so now we push on to grapple with a further third attitude, present in Helen’s puzzling, but regularly unnoticed. There is a long history of that lack of attention, of which, fortunately, Aquinas avoided. He distinguished the existence of two acts of understanding: the direct act and the reflective act. The first act he referred to as the expression of a first inner word occurs at the level of “whatting.” The second act, the attitude we speak of here, he referred to as the expression of a *second inner word* occurs at the level of “ising.”²⁴ In other words, what Aquinas discovered empirically was a distinction between the meaning of what- and why-questions, and the meaning of is-questions. For Aquinas, “both acts of understanding have their instrumental or material causes,” but, as we have seen, “the direct act has this cause in a schematic image or phantasm, while the reflective act reviews not only imagination but also sense experience, and direct acts of understanding, and definitions, to find in all taken together the sufficient ground or evidence for a judgment of fact. Hence, while the direct act of understanding generates in definition the expression of the intelligibility of the phantasm, the reflective act generates in judgment the expression of consciously possessed truth though which reality is both known and known to be known.”²⁵ In Aquinas’s terms: the first inner word answers the question, *Quid sit?* The second inner word answers the question, *An sit?*²⁶

Helen, then, is on the trail of expressing a second inner word. She puzzles, What *is* this sequence of Annie’s hand-shapings? Signing? Notice that “signing” here is qualified by a question mark,

²⁴ In this chapter I draw heavily on *ibid.* For a full account for the meaning of is-questions see Chapter 2, “Verbum: Reflection and Judgement,” pp. 60-105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

²⁶ *Quid sit?* [What is it?] *An sit?* [Is it so?]

marking this different attitude from the previous whatting question mark. This second case, poise, question markedness, is a case of is?-poise. There was little hesitation in Helen and she moved spontaneously into a new poise, an is-attitude. Our problem here, of course, is hesitation, where we give that word a very positive meaning of sticking, being stuck. By we, we mean Helen and ourselves shifting without hesitation to the is-ing attitude. And so we scrutinize this most difficult core attitude further.

We have explored how Helen had achieved a direct insight, had formulated a first inner word and had arrived at a possible answer to the name and meaning of w-a-t-e-r. Recall that Aquinas distinguished her what-attitude to be possession of a cause in a schematic image or phantasm yielding a solution or a hypothesis. But what happened next? She was not certain about her “hypothesis.” Spontaneously, her core humanity was not content to leave things at that. She wanted to know if her hypothesis or “idea” was correct. In fact, she spontaneously wondered further, nursed a different question, seeking a higher formulation for truth: Is this it? Have I got it? Helen’s is-questions, then, expressed or revealed a desire in her for correct affirmation. And so she spontaneously reviewed not only her imagination but also her sense experience, her direct acts of understanding, and definitions, to find in all taken together the sufficient ground or evidence for a judgment of fact.

The judgment of fact is the third of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. Earlier, Helen whatted over sequences, in a manner that can be expressed by “why?”: why the hand shaping? She was a searcher, searching for regularity, for ruledness, for sense. Now we identify a further attitude noted with Helen’s “signing?” question mark. The

answer to the mark in Helen is the remark, “Yes!” In that activity of identifying, the idea is represented by another cause, an activity that is variously called noun-ing, naming, it-ing, thing-ing, is-ing. At the moment of Helen’s Yes!-achievement, Annie observed amazedly, “A new light came into her face.” And, of course, Helen recalled that moment with a new joy, exclaiming “I knew that water meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand”²⁷ “the mystery of language was revealed to me.”²⁸

The image below represents *the third stage* in Helen’s stages of wonder described above. We have all experienced for ourselves that when we respond to is-questions, we typically come up with “yes” or “no” answers. Where we consistently arrive at some sort of solution or description or explanation in response to our what-questions, we would notice that our is-questions invariably end with a “Yes,” or a “No,” or an “I don’t know.”²⁹ Or we might notice our own spontaneous gestures in answer to is-questions – a nod, a shake of the head, a shrug of the shoulders. The arrow below the box denotes the relationship between the second and third stages. The is-wonder is the third of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. It is the fifth drive toward making sense of our experience, the occurrence of which we associate with the efficient cause. For Helen and ourselves, sense experience, the light of intellect, insight into phantasm, act of defining thought, reflective reasoning and understanding,

²⁷ Op. cit., *Helen and Teacher*, pp. 256-7.

²⁸ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*.

²⁹ Op. cit., *Thinking Woman*, pp. 65-66. I draw the reader’s attention to further refinements of Lonergan on the is-attitude that are beyond the elementary scope of this chapter. See *Insight*, Chapter IX, especially “6. Probable Judgments,” pp. 299-304 [324-29].

acts of judgment are all core psychological facts.³⁰



At this stage of our venture, we have an enlarged thematic identification of the first three core attitudes as the basis for the grounding language universals on the basis of asking: What happened to Helen Keller? How do we as infants move from babbling to talk? We have drawn attention to the fact that these three core attitudes spontaneously arose in Helen, and arise in our infant selves, in a series of shifts from babbling to talk. And so Helen observes: "...whatever the process, the result is wonderful."³¹ And, indeed, so is the process itself.

³⁰ It is important to note at this stage that the three core attitudes we have identified so far, taken together, are the dynamic underpinning for the activities of "syllogizing," and "logic." These activities have been commonly mistaken to mean the laws of "reason." I cannot enlarge on that topic here, except to quote Lonergan's caution in *Insight*: "A little learning is a dangerous thing, and the adage has, perhaps, its most abundant illustrations from the application of logic.... A familiarity with the elements of logic can be obtained by a very modest effort and in a very short time. Until one has made notable progress in cognitional analysis [knowledge of our core dynamics of wonder], one is constantly tempted to mistake the rules of logic for the laws of thought." (*Insight*, p. 573) With that in mind, I take this opportunity, then, to direct the reader to luminous introductions to "syllogizing" and "logic" in op. cit., *BHT*, Chapter 2, "How Language: Works?," pp. 57-65 and op. cit., *ICT*, Chapter 26, "Fallacies," pp. 100-104 and Chapter 27, "The Function of Logic," pp. 104-108. For advanced treatment, see Bernard Lonergan, "The Form of Inference," *Collection, Collect Works*, Vol. 4, University of Toronto Press, 1988, Chapter 1.

³¹ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 25 I include the context of that quote here as Helen compares her language acquisition to those children who hear: "I had now the key to all language, and I was eager to learn to use it. Children who hear acquire language without any particular effort; the words that fall from others' lips they catch on the wing, as it were, delightedly, while the little deaf child must trap them by a slow and

4. What-is-to-be-done?³²

Our enlarged thematic identification of core attitudes as the basis for the grounding language universals now takes us beyond the initial acquisition of language in Helen, and our infant selves, to its consequences, the event of which yields two further core psychological facts. It begins with a *fourth stage of wonder* that takes place in seven-year-old Helen and emerges at some point in our childhood selves. For Helen, then, the initial acquisition of language leads to a further shift from babbling to talk on that momentous day:³³ the dynamic process called the *action mode of wonder*. Helen's life is carried forward; and the shift to the action mode of wonder is a deep change, a lift in life mediated by a preceding pivotal word-grounding insight that exploded into a judgment of fact. We identify in Helen's journey, and our own, the categories involved in this process and the core attitudes that spontaneously occur when the language user comes to make a *choice* or *decision*.

The thematic basis for the action mode of wonder has its origins in the meticulously detailed empirical observations of Aquinas, and he expresses its essential elements in condensed form below:

Choice adds to consent the notion of a special relationship to that which is preferred to something else, and accordingly a choice still remains open after consent. For it may well happen that deliberation discloses several means, and since each of these meets with approval, consent is given to each; later preference is given to one and it is chosen. But if one alone meets with approval, then consent and choice coincide in point of fact, though they remain distinct meanings, for we think of consent as approval, and

often painful process.”

³² The illustration given here of the action mode of wonder is very elementary. Again, I appeal to the reader to grasp that the purpose of our venture into its discovery necessarily involves a self-search, to discover the dynamics of one's five-leveled structure of wonder is, at the same time, a discovery of one's core self. This book is meant to encourage you, the language user, to gently discover the dynamics of core grammar by meeting yourself. Reading through this section can be a deceptively easy exercise. However, if the reader seriously takes up the challenge to understand it better, many more complexities will emerge in diagnosing the patterns of minding that are involved. This relates to the elementary exercises suggested at the beginning of this chapter, as well as in Chapter 8.

³³ Helen recalls, “Gradually from naming an object we advance step by step until we have traversed the vast distance between our first stammered syllable and the sweep of thought in a line of Shakespeare.” Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 25.

of choice as a preference.³⁴

Cast into Aquinas' terms, then, Helen's core attitudes have evolved to a point in which her *consent* to this matter of language learning has suddenly become the center of her life. It happens that Helen's spontaneous deliberation at this point in her journey of discovery discloses that there is a *means* to an *end* that is a consequence of her having achieved a judgment of fact. And Helen's "mind was full of the prospective joys"³⁵ that that consequence brings. Thus, Helen deliberates on *possibilities* for an end of which the initial acquisition of language provides the means. Her goal is to choose an end that is *responsible, good, worthwhile, of value*. Helen's wonder is *practical* and, although she could not articulate that wonder in language, later she recalled: "unless I turn my glad thoughts into practical living and till my own field, I cannot reap a kernel of the good."³⁶

As a result, the first group in a series of attitude shifts in the *action mode of wonder* reflects Helen's on-the-spot desire to consent (to her new reality). And Helen's mood shift to this mode of wonder is caused by the judgment of fact that she "knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over [her] hand. That living word awakened [her] soul, gave it life, hope, joy, set it free!"³⁷ Helen reflects on other *known facts*: she quickly affirms that her blindness and deafness are "barriers that could in time be swept away,"³⁸ because she discovers that, in fact,

³⁴ Op. cit., *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Iiae. Q.15, a. 3. According to Aquinas, this process occurs in a curious mixed sequence of twelve basic steps. I cannot enlarge here on this achievement of Aquinas. He wrote it up in a central section of the *Summa Theologiae* (Q. 6-17 of the beginning of the second part). We briefly mention "consent" above. He deals with its complexities in Q. 15. It took him fifty pages of two-column Latin that comes out in translation to one hundred pages.

³⁵ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 39.

³⁶ Helen Keller, *The World I Live In*, The New York Review of Books, 2003, p. 128-29.

³⁷ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 20

³⁸ Op cit., *Helen and Teacher*, 257.

she can draw on the sense perceptions of smell, taste and touch and achieve the same result as if she could see and hear. *The first attitude shift* in the action mode of wonder, then, simultaneously carries Helen further forward to a state of alert *sensibility* that ushers forth *images* of possibilities: “As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.”³⁹

The prompting of fresh senses and images along with her possession of known facts propels Helen to *the second shift in attitude*. Suddenly her “field of inquiry [had] broadened”⁴⁰ in an urgent search to discover by what means she would go forward in her life. Helen’s practical search spontaneously percolates in *what-to-do questions* creatively directed toward her new future, to what might be; yet at this stage of her deliberations, she has no *concrete idea* of what course of action she might take.

Her practical what-to-do search rapidly leads to *the third attitude shift*, an achievement of *direct insights* into her known facts, senses, and images, to bring to light possible ideas for a plan of action. She pulls together numerous direct insights that occur because of “a habit learned suddenly at that first moment of release and rush into the light. With the first word I used intelligently, I learned to live, to think, to hope.”⁴¹ That luminous new habit is an achievement in Helen that finds its expression in at least one clearly *formulated possibility*, a plan that marks *the fourth attitude shift*: “I had now the key to all language, and I was eager to learn to use it.”⁴² In her

³⁹ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴¹ Op. cit., *The World I Live In*, p. 128.

⁴² Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 25.

deliberations to this point, Helen acknowledges, “At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities.”⁴³ Out of that “mass of possibilities” Helen reaches consent, the achievement of which is the prospect of an exciting new direction in her life: “I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought.”⁴⁴

Helen’s what-to-do search yields a possibility for action, but she has yet to act on it. A further series of attitude shifts in Helen lie ahead. This draws out an important distinction made by Aquinas: the process of arriving at consent “involves a special relationship to that which is preferred to something else, and accordingly a choice still remains open after consent. For it may well happen that deliberation discloses several means, and since each of these meets with approval, consent is given to each.”⁴⁵ In proclaiming herself to be “a little mass of possibilities,” Helen’s deliberation, indeed, could have disclosed several means of which she would have approved. But as it so happens, and not surprisingly given the magnitude of the circumstances, Helen had hit upon one means that met with her overwhelming approval, and to that she gave her resounding consent upon leaving the well-house, dizzied and excited by newly created prospects that resulted from her “soul’s sudden awakening.” This deep change in Helen’s life carries her forward to the cusp of a momentous attitude shift that occurs in showing *preference*; and so, the process of the action mode of wonder is as yet incomplete, for as Aquinas observed, “a choice still remains open after consent.”

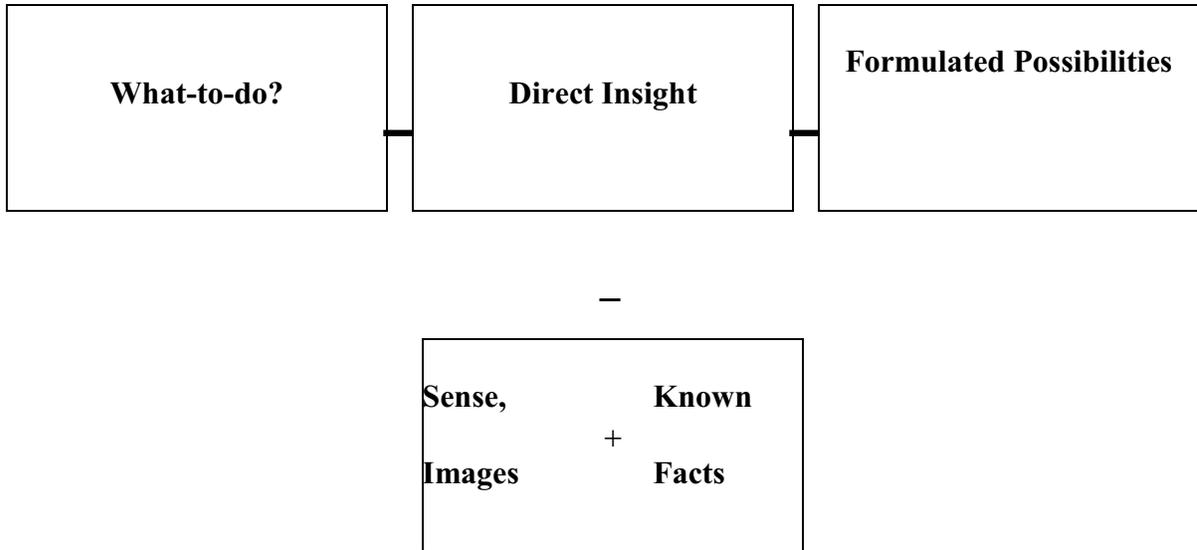
The image below represents *the fourth stage* of Helen’s state of wonder in action mode described

⁴³ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., *Summa Theologiae*.

above. The what-to-do-wonder is the fourth of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. It is the fourth drive toward making sense of our experience, the occurrence of which we associate with the exemplary cause. The arrow below the boxes denotes the movement of this attitude shift.



5. Is-it-to-be-done?

Because Helen had clearly formulated one possible means that overwhelmingly met with her approval, an achievement to which she gave her resounding consent, we arrive at *the fifth stage of wonder*, the recurrence of which emerges that day in seven-year-old Helen and surfaces at some point in our childhood selves. We draw further on Aquinas' empirical observations with which to bring our fifth core attitude into focus: "But if one alone meets with approval, then consent and choice coincide in point of fact, though they remain distinct meanings, for we think of consent as approval, and of choice as a preference."⁴⁶ And so what-to-do questions and answers (consent as approval) have their full home in this larger reaching of *is-to-do wonder* (choice as a preference). And Aquinas identifies the activity that involves our leap to preference or to choice. It is a leap that brings about a positive reality that otherwise would not have come about.

How does Helen reach the point of following through on what she plans to do? What goes on in her mind when she reaches for and arrives at a decision? Recall the eagerness Helen generates at the prospect of learning, and her renewed enthusiasm since the hand-touching of Annie has opened the world to her. This stance in Helen, no doubt, proves to be the catalyst for her spontaneous *fifth attitude shift to is-to-do questions*. Helen's search at this level is to affirm that her plan is *responsible, good, worthwhile, of value*. The is-to-do question asks: Is this plan worth putting into action?

At the fifth attitude shift, Helen finds herself spontaneously *weighing and evaluating the evidence* of her formulated plan. Her plan is *conditioned*: if it intelligently meets her needs it will

⁴⁶ Op. cit., *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Iiae. Q.15, a. 3. 17 of the beginning of the second part.

be a good plan. “I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that *mother, father, sister, teacher* were among them – words that were to make the world blossom for me, ‘like Aaron’s rod, with flowers.’ It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come.”⁴⁷ Still, Helen’s deliberations on the value of her plan involve a rapid back and forth movement, a continuous interaction of senses and imagination: “I did nothing but explore with my hands and learn the name of every object that I touched.”⁴⁸ But Helen’s is-to-do questions do not end there. She is wondering about implications and consequences: by giving reasons (causes) for carrying out this plan. Why should I do this? “[T]he more I handled things and learned their names and uses, the more joyous and confident grew my sense of kinship with the rest of the world.”⁴⁹ She also weighs the meaning of the plan for herself, its consequences in her life: “As my knowledge of things grew I felt more and more the delight of the world I was in.”⁵⁰ Moreover, she must see her way clear in her commitment to act: “I am never discouraged by absence of good. I never can be argued into hopelessness.”⁵¹ As well, she must be secure that she is up to the task: “Doubt and

⁴⁷ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Op. cit., *The World I Live In*, pp. 130-1. I would suggest this passage and others that follow, written in retrospect by an older, more articulate Helen, accurately express the strength of character of the younger, resolute Helen at the time of these events.

mistrust are the mere panic of timid imagination, which the steadfast heart will conquer, and the large mind transcend.”⁵²

Her activity of thinking, questioning, of weighing and considering the evidence does not actually end until *the sixth attitude shift* in which she achieves an *is-insight*, upon which pivots her firm *decision*. Helen achieves an *is-insight* with “a prophetic vision of the good that would come of the undertaking.”⁵³ For Helen, this insight grounds the reality where one possibility alone meets with approval, and consent and choice coincide in point of fact. Evidence for the judgment has been grasped, the judgment proceeds of necessity.

Consent and choice converge with *the seventh attitude shift* when Helen makes a firm decision about the value of language and its importance in her life; it is a convergence that we call “The Joy of Choice,” a *judgment of value*, ‘Yes! I will do it!’ The judgment of value is actually two simultaneous, complementary judgments. The first judgment of value regards the *good-to-be-achieved*. Helen decides to do it because “To what is good I open the doors of my being, and jealously shut them against what is bad.”⁵⁴ The second judgment of value regards *the satisfaction of that very judgment*. Helen decides to do it because “Such is the force of this beautiful and willful conviction, it carries itself in the face of all opposition.”⁵⁵ She later recalls this great leap forward, that the means are, of necessity, worth the end:

With the dropping of a little word from another’s hand into mine, a slight flutter of the fingers, began the intelligence, the joy, the fullness of my life. Like Job, I feel as if a hand had made me, fashioned me

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. 59.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., *The World I Live In*, pp. 130-1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

together round about and molded my very soul.⁵⁶

Helen's judgment of value blossoms into the fullness of two further momentous decisions that spring from this life-changing course of action. "Unprompted, Helen wrote on her tablet: "I wish to write about things I do not understand."⁵⁷ "From the beginning, Helen Keller was a writer...who found wholeness and salvation in words."⁵⁸ "[S]he painstakingly learned crude oral speech only several years later."⁵⁹ For as Helen recollects, "I resolved that I, too, would learn to speak."⁶⁰

The process of Helen Keller's breakthrough to language is a process that moves in parallel lines to our infant/childhood selves. The five core attitudes are spontaneously in Helen and in our infant/childhood selves before, during and after the first sudden event of language learning and, as a result, subsequent events of language acquisition emerge in a recurrent series of shifts from babbling to talk. This activity of 'making sense', by way of understanding and using words, allows language users to choose to bring to fruition their potential for knowing and doing what is truly good.

The arrow below denotes the relationship between the what-to-do and is-to-do attitudes. Is-to-do wonder is the fifth of five basic attitudes that can be associated with five meanings of the word why. It is the fifth drive toward making sense of our experience, the occurrence of which we associate with the final cause.

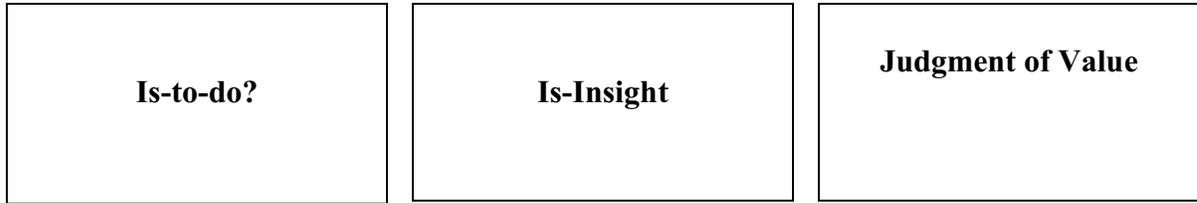
⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. x.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. ix.

⁵⁹ Op. cit., *The Story of My Life*, p. ix.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 48.



We draw our lengthy venture with Helen and our infant/childhood selves to a close. Thus far, we have an enlarged thematic identification of our five core attitudes as the basis for the grounding language universals. However, we have postponed formally naming these core psychological facts the grounding language universals. This identification takes place in Chapter 5, where the attitudes and achievements we have accumulated to this point will be assembled and further thematic considerations will be brought to bear. Only then can they be deemed necessary and sufficient with which to identify the language universals that ground generic linguistic performance.