

FuSe 15

The Future of Functional History

I have puzzled for some time during this third seminar as to how to bring the final **FuSe** on it to a constructive conclusion. The paragraph to follow¹ gives a decent idea of where I am going in this essay. Read it, for the moment, and its note 4, but only to get an impression of where I wish to go, but then take seriously my invitation to home in on section 3.1 (585-7) of *Insight* chapter 17. Our task is to enlarge on the study of sick dogs - or frogs!² - so as to get us in tune with that terrible second canon of hermeneutics. We move into that in section 1. Section 2 muses over the task of studying battered growth: a task for the future, not now. Section 3 talks briefly of handing on the task.

“So let us rather think in homely fashion about the story of the sick dog, and then the study of the stories of the aggregate of sick dogs.³ And let us get closer to scientific studies by thinking of **genetic systematics**: the **GS** of my formula for a Standard Model. Scientific study of animals heads primarily for a genetic account: the vet is more interested in disorientations. But if the only animals available for study are, so to speak, animals with normal ups-and-downs, then you have to conjure with what you arrive at in order to get the genetic account. If you are with me here, then you are not surprised when I note that what we are heading for is a lead into notions of the history of ideas, of

¹It comes from Fuse 10, “Contexts of Functional Interpretation,” which gives a full context for our struggles with the shift into our context of the study of interpretation in *Insight* 17.3, a study which reaches into history.

²The original list of Cantowers contained one, *Cantower 58*, titled “Tadpole, Tell Us Telling Tales”. Note 22, below, gives some directions regarding the story of the writing of that series.

³My analogy is quite loose of course: the reader may think of a definite variety of plant or animal. Useful on botany there is the 1970 Florida Conference paper, “Image and Emergence; Towards an Adequate *Weltanschauung*”, available on the website as chapter one of *The Shaping of the Foundations*; chapter three of the same work deals with “Zoology and the Future of Philosophers.”

history with its battered story of the realisation of ideas,⁴ of genetic ideas as somehow a sequencing of complexes of ideas, and so on. But what is important is the *and so on* as inviting you to glimpse the problem of that *and so on*."

1. "if interpretation is to be scientific"⁵

I am not optimistic about this attempt, one more of many trying to get people to take seriously the shocking achievement of this third section of *Insight* 17. Perhaps if I twist and turn a little you and I can make a fresh startled start.

The title of the section of interest is *The Problem*,⁶ and I riffle through the pages to another section so titled, section 1 of chapter 20, **The Problem**.⁷ And then add the conviction of Lonergan: "There can be a problem only if there is an intelligibility to be grasped."⁸

So, off we go together, for a fresh reading of this section 3.1. The title above in my section, "if interpretation is to be scientific" is from the last paragraph, two pages away, and repeated three times there. Lonergan certainly reads here - or should I say types here? - as if there is a solution. And it is quite a typescript. I recall my first contact

⁴"History with its battered story of the realisation of ideas": I skim past this phrase, knowing that it is a bookful. Well, certainly it is enough to keep us going through several seminars. I was tempted to enlarge here on "the reversal of counterpositions" in relation to the genesis of genetic system, starting with the sick plant as source of understanding the healthy plant, but as, you note immediately, we cannot be "bolder spirits. They select the conspicuously successful science of their time" on the topic, since no science is conspicuously successful in dealing with genetic development, much less dialectic development. All I can hope for here is that my skimpy cover story nudges you to at least push the analogy descriptively, thus finding how GS, fermented from UV - the analogue for which is the account of the stages of the sick dog or plant - offers a control within the standard model.

⁵*Insight*, 587.

⁶*Insight*, 585.

⁷*Ibid.*, 710.

⁸*Ibid.*, 716.

with this creation of 1953 in the old Lonergan Centre of the Bayview Regis College, just twenty years after he typed it. My reaction was like that of Salieri in the Film *Amadeus*, when he was handed creations of Mozart's pen: "But there are no corrections!" No hesitation here, as he plunges into his topic, but what a cheeky plunge: "The problem of interpretation can best be introduced by distinguishing between expression, simple interpretation, and reflective interpretation."⁹ Cheeky, and perhaps smiling: or impatient, or laconic, or? Well, think of your own first reading of the sentence? I suspect that you did not pause and think, "What in heavens name is a reflective interpretation?"

And now here I come wishing you, yes, to read on but to be halted, to pause as it were over the Grand Canyon when you shift paragraphs on the next page:

" there arises the problem of settling the differences between audiences and of incorporating them into the interpretation..

A reflective interpretation, then"¹⁰

Does Lonergan's use of that little word *then* make you nervous?¹¹

And see how he plunges on, soaring down from his own hidden solution to his compact suggestions about, for example, "the audience's habitual grasp C" of its own intellectual development." Who is he talking to, who is he kidding? Pages later he is to talk of sharing pure formulations: "They are pure formulations if they proceed from an interpreter that grasps the universal viewpoint and if they are addressed to an audience

⁹*Ibid.*, 585.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 586.

¹¹You might recall that wonderful instance of an inclusion of *then*: "What, then, is being?" (*Insight*, 665) in chapter 19. The question "what is being?" has been weaved through the book since the beginning of chapter 12..

that similarly grasps the universal viewpoint.”¹² Six years later¹³ he will lecture about that problem of habitual grasp, and it is certainly worth your while to pause over a long key section within the context of the nudge regarding “similarly grasps”:

“The history of any particular discipline is in fact the history of its development. But this development, which would be the theme of a history, is not something simple and straightforward but something which occurred in a long series of various steps, errors, detours, and corrections. Now, as one studies this movement one learns about this developmental process and so now possesses within oneself an instance of that development which took place perhaps over several centuries. This can happen only if the person understands both his subject and the way he learned about it. Only then will he understand which elements in the historical developmental process had to be understood before the others, which ones made for progress in understanding and which held it back, which elements really belong to the particular science and which do not, and which elements contain errors. Only then will he be able to tell at what point in the history of his subject there emerged new visions of the whole and when the first true system occurred, and when the transition took place from an earlier to a later systematic ordering; which systematization was simply an expansion of the former and which was radically new; what progressive transformation the whole subject underwent; how everything that was explained by the old systematization is now explained by the new one, along with many other things that the old one did not explain - the advances in physics, for example, by Einstein and Max Planck. Then, and only then, will he be able to understand what factors favour progress, what hinder it, and why, and so forth.

Clearly, therefore, the historian of any discipline has to have a thorough

¹²*Ibid.*, 602.

¹³*De Intellectu et Methodo*, 72 pages of notes from a course given at the Gregorian University in 1959.

understanding and knowledge of the whole subject. And it is not enough to understand in any way at all, but he must have a systematic understanding of it. For that precept, when applied to history, means that successive systems which have progressively developed over a period of time have to be understood. This systematic understanding of a development ought to make use of an analogy with the development that takes place in the mind of the investigator who learns about the subject, and this interior development within the mind of the investigator ought to parallel the historical process by which the science itself developed."¹⁴

The pause helps to glimpse the distance across the Grand Canyon. The shorter text of *Method 602* is the more startling in that it takes in the problem of the historian's audience, the problem we have been talking about since the first seminar, the problem of a common *acquis*, a **standard model**. Indeed, that little piece from *The Sketch* impresses me as the closest thing in *Insight* to answering the problem he nursed for the next dozen years. Think of the audience as belonging to the next group of functional collaborators in the circuit with which we are familiar. Lonergan did not envisage that circuit as he battled along, in the closing pages of *Insight*, with the topics of cosmopolis and collaboration.

But back we should go to that Grand Canyon, the leap from simple interpretation to reflective interpretation. I could say that Lonergan is setting the reader up. Lonergan has in mind an expression of the answer: *The Sketch* and the Canons to follow are the beginnings of making interpretation scientific. Reflective interpretation is

¹⁴I am quoting from Michael G. Shield's translation of 1990, *Understanding and Method*, 130-2. *De Intellectu et Methodo* has the material on page 55. For me, the first reading of this in the late seventies was the occasion of a shocking insight: finding out that the seventh specialty was a matter of a genetic system of systems. Twenty five years later I was to arrive at a better heuristics by envisaging a geohistorical global image of tunnels of meaning, giving a decent grasp of ongoing, overlapping, space-time jumping contexts. My earlier view already coped with the strategy of reversing counterpositions to thicken the sequence of systems in the genetic structure. But all this is too heavy for our present venture. You might find *Cantower 7*, "Systematics and General Systems Theory" useful.

a neat - and very difficult - watering down of his answer that can - but I would claim that it did not, and here is where I pin down my present illustration of functional history at work - that can lead a serious reader to get to grips with the two flaws of reflective interpretation exposed in the next brilliant paragraph. Exposed? I jest of course. "It is quite another matter to set about the investigation of such obscure objects,"¹⁵ and, as far as I know, the Lonergan school has neatly dodged that setting about, that investigation.

It would be silly of me to tackle an invitational commentary on that paragraph: it would need to be a long pedagogical essay that would get readers - you even? - to intussuscept and cherish the concluding comment and questions." Reflective interpretation is a smart idea. But is it a practical possibility? Has it ever been achieved?"¹⁶ And then Lonergan begins his final two paragraphs of the section, knowing what he is up against: the deep bias of "the historical sense", a bias that controls solidly the mass of his followers.¹⁷ And so we now read, with sadness, his typing flourish of nine words at the beginning of the first of those paragraphs: "this brings us to the basic problem of interpretation." Us? Might it bring you and I now, nearly sixty years later?

The nine words reminds me of the nine words in the middle of *Method* page 287, "from such a broadened basis one can go on". One? Us?

2. Studying a Sick Frog, a Wilting Sunflower

The problem is, of course, that I am inviting you to envisage the study of a sick tadpole in an early pond of history, the study of a seed or sapling on stony ground far from the high smile of the sunflower.

¹⁵*Insight* 588, the bottom line, in both senses!

¹⁶*Insight*, 587.

¹⁷ On the problem of the axial-superego, see Bill Zanardi's Appendix to **FuSe 12**.

The difficulty here is that you are, most likely, quite innocent of the collaborative challenge that the study of growing flowers or animals is. The growing thing is a totality of molecules, and “the totality of molecules cannot be interpreted scientifically by a single interpreter or even by a generation of interpreters. There must be a division of labor, and the labor must be cumulative.”¹⁸

You notice here a little trickery on my part: I replace *documents* in the original Loneran quotation with *molecules*.¹⁹ The patterned chemicals of the tadpole’s struggle for mature life is placed in parallel with the patterned chemicals, the documents, that are an expression of the struggle of the human pseudo-organism towards maturity.

But please now stick with the tadpole to help glimpse the extraordinary lift of seriousness that Loneran proposes.

That last typed sentence of mine halted me. I am going to repeat it in the third section with another twist, but here my pause leads me to pessimism and to optimism. The pause leads me back to my 1,500,000 word effort of the *Cantowers*, and its beginning with Voegelin. “As I am putting down these words on a empty page I have begun to write a sentence that, when it is finished, will be the beginning of a chapter on certain problems of beginnings.”²⁰ I began to write a sentence, “but please now stick with the tadpole”. My focus is on a very definite certain problem of beginning. In the midst of my *Cantower* series there was an interruption²¹ of 41 *Field Nocturnes* leading

¹⁸*Insight*, 610.

¹⁹It may help or discourage to recall my nudges about reading the 17th word of *Insight*, Renaissance, as a totality of layered chemical patterns.

²⁰Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, Vol. 5, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1987, 13. Quoted at the beginning of Cantower 1, “Function and History”.

²¹*Field Nocturne Can Tower 43*, *FNC 43*, tells the story of the full series. The interruption at *Cantower 41* led to a new introductory series of those 41 *Field Nocturnes*, then the series continued as *FNC* to *FNC 117*, which was the original goal of the Cantowers, in line with Ezra Pound’s achievement of 117 *Cantos*.

towards that same problem of beginning, and it began with a lead-in from Lonergan: "Study of the organism begins" I rambled round that page of *Insight* to intimate the complex collaborative climb to "the immanent and transient activities of the organism in its environment as the ground of the flexible circle of ranges of schemes of recurrence. However, the organism grows and develops." That was less than a page later: I had rambled towards the present problem of beginnings and halted there, at the problem of growth and development. To carry on would have been another hundred *Field Nocturnes*, twisting round those next few pages of *Insight* to intimate "how is the operator studied?", with my eye roving away from plants - as it was in the 41 *Field Nocturnes* - to invite eccentric honesty towards, to? "To stick with the tadpole to help glimpse the extraordinary lift of seriousness that Lonergan proposes."

The analogy from glimpsing the Grand Canyon in tackling the totality of documents is one unavailable to the Lonergan community, the totality of molecules that would be the expressed story of one sick dog. Without some serious sense of the concrete collaborative scientific reach for understanding such a story, it just is not true that "this brings us to the basic problem of interpretation". **Please now stick with the tadpole:** but can I really expect such a sticking from you, or from any present audience?

What should follow here, of course, should be some nine hundred pages involving you and I in some rough experience of the collaborative tasks that make up genetic method. It does not follow here. "The totality of molecules cannot be interpreted scientifically by a single interpreter or even by a generation of interpreters" without that primary scientific effort that would give us expressions of the climb towards understanding the sick frog or dog. A simple interpretation would pick up on that expression, and the scientific effort behind it, to generate "the practical insight F' that depends upon ... a grasp B' of the anticipated audience's habitual intellectual development C' and upon a grasp D' of the deficiencies in insight E' that have to be

overcome ... ”²²

The simple interpretation does not follow here, because in the main the audience is of the same culture as that which first read *Insight*, an audience locked into a brutal bias of “the historical sense”²³ sometimes given the fatter name of “historical consciousness.” **The Truth of Interpretation** - the bold-faced title of this third section of *Insight* 17 - is totally closed to that community trapped in a Linnean puttering with rich, colorful, but ineffective, descriptions and comparisons.

What are we to do “if interpretation is to be scientific,”²⁴ grounding luminous global growth, and “cumulative and progressive results”?²⁵

3. Handing Round the Baton

I suppose that the brutal datedness of Lonerganism is to be exposed by time, time on our side as with the problem of the similar brutal dodging of science in economics. “The spirit of inquiry, the heart of serious science, is just not present either in contemporary establishment economics, or in the range of views opposed to it.”²⁶ I shift that harsh judgment to present Lonergan studies: not a risky business for an 80-year-old, since I do not need or expect a job offer.

But it is more than sad that we have to wait through these next decades of time’s cruelty to our starving tadpole of history to bring us to our sciences. How long do Lonergan studies have to putter on in the manner described by Henman in the previous

²²*Insight*, 585.

²³*Ibid.*, 587.

²⁴*Insight*, 587: three repeats.

²⁵*Method in Theology*, 4, 5.

²⁶The conclusion of my essay, “The Global Economy and My Little Corner”, *Divyadaan. Journal of Philosophy and Education*, vol.21, no.2, August, 2010. The volume is devoted to giving an elementary answer to the question, “Do You Want A Sane Global Economy”.

FuSe, FuSe 14? Surely there has to be some growing embarrassment about effeteness and some shift of younger people towards a sense of the need of a global collaboration in seriousness of understanding? Or, more neatly and cuttingly, surely there has to be a noticing than we are dodging Lonergan's challenges and invitations in an increasingly unsubtle way?

So, I end now with a noting and hopefully your serious noticing of my own contribution to our seminar of an instance of functional history. Functional history has to be faithful to all the principles of historical work, some of which are pointed to in Lonergan's two chapters on history in *Method*.²⁷ But a key thing about functional history is the identification of lost opportunities about which something can now be done. The nudge to doing becomes more effective in so far as the identification is precise, telling, troubling. Here my identification is an identification of a Grand Canyon Gap²⁸ between two paragraphs on *Insight* 586: a paragraph on simple interpretation which raises a question that no one fusses over in Lonergan studies: might we think of them saying, even now, "of course different words from those of X are used when "simply" presenting X. And as for scientific effectiveness, well, we manage to hit it off sufficiently to gain recognition or even publication. So what need is there for the horror of them differences and subtleties encroaching on our sound historical sense by somehow "incorporating them into the interpretation"?²⁹ "

The baton is to be passed round in our small seminar effort, and passed on soon to the fourth functional specialty efforts of the next seminar. My Lonergan colleagues,

²⁷Functional History is a good deal more complex, but I pass over that here, merely mentioning the convenient distinction between meaning and ongoing meaning [see FuSe 10, section 4] that helps when handling the distinction between the second and third functional specialties. The seventh specialty, of course, moves into a fully informed genetic dynamic of the ongoing story.

²⁸For an enrichment of context here, see Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, the index: *Existential, gap*.

²⁹*Insight*, 586: end of the paragraph on simple interpretation, edge of the chasm!

for the most part, are not interested. I would like to think that they are slightly threatened by this climb towards 25 seminars and 80 **Fuse** essays. But I do not envisage a communal rush to get to grips with genetic method, a key hoist towards viewing properly the Grand Canyon between those two paragraphs of *Insight* 586. So my plea, “please now stick with the tadpole to help glimpse the extraordinary lift of seriousness that Lonergan proposes” falls at present on the deaf heirs of Lonergan.