

Fusion 12

Interpretation: *Method 7* lifted into Canons and Collaboration I.I

Is my magnificent muniment to mystery and meaning effective?¹ Only if there emerges a Tower Community resonant with the slow yet accelerating adult tasting, self-tasting, of it.

But one element in the strategy that can point to the desired effectiveness is some diagramming of the goal. Something like the refinements that are possible of the original Periodic Table of chemistry. To that I now turn, first noting Lonergan's drive in that direction.

There is Lonergan's statement of the drive: "The aim of discursive reason is to understand and it arrives at understanding not only by grasping how each conclusion follows from premises, but also by comprehending in a unified whole all the conclusions intelligibly contained in those very premises. Now this comprehension of everything in a unified whole can be either formal or virtual. It is virtual when one is habitually able to answer readily and without difficulty, or at least 'without tears,' a whole series of questions right up to the last 'why?' Formal comprehension, however, cannot take place without a turning to phantasm; but in larger and more complex questions it is impossible to have a suitable phantasm unless the imagination is aided by some sort of diagram. Thus, if we want to have a comprehensive grasp of everything in a unified whole, we shall have to construct a diagram in which are symbolically represented all the various elements of the question along with all the connections

¹The issue is that raised in the first section of *Insight* chapter 17. It is a further twist on the last section of Chapter 7. The answer is a global functional collaboration that would shift, with normal law statistics, Monday to Sunday, so that every day has the glory and freshness of a dream. Dream? Now there's another puzzle of freshened dreaming: see note 8 below.

between them.”²

Now there is the curious fact that Lonergan did not leave too many diagrams either in texts or in his notes. When I was editing *Phenomenology and Logic* Fred Crowe and I perused the various archives for diagrams of cognitional and volitional structures without much success. There are the various diagrams Lonergan used in economics, of course, and diagrams that turned up in lectures. But the book *Insight* is diagram-free: one might consider that surprising granted the frontispiece from Aristotle. *Insight*, however, is a strange and powerfully controlled book, written in a strange heightened consciousness that, I would say, was underpinned by a heterarchy³ of neurochemical controls, flexibly-structured aggregates that might well have pitched forth more palatable patterns of sensibility, visible, audible whatever. His inner neurodynamics was sufficient for him. I surmise that he played that old typewriter of his like Mozart played the contemporary piano. I still recall, in the early 1970s, working through the typescripts of *Insight*, watching how, for instance, he did not pause over an unwanted direction on a line but played out the line with an typing exercise and then plunged on. My mood became that of Salierry in the film *Amadeus*, when he dropped some music of Mozart in surprise, remarking “but there are no corrections!”

So, I would say that the book *Insight* is diagram-controlled. Here we are getting closer to our problem of lifting description into a heuristics of explanation. Take the stuff on “Species as Explanatory” in section 6 of chapter 8 of the book and the corresponding section, section 3, “Explanatory Genera and Species” in chapter 15. The two accounts differ, in that one is pre-metaphysical and the other post-metaphysical.

²Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, University of Toronto Press, 2002, 151.

³Contemporary neurodynamics considers the brain as a modular distributed system, a complex non-linear hierarchy for which W.S.McCulloch invented the name *hetararchy* in “A hetararchy of values determined by the topology of nervous nets”, *Bulletin of Mathematics and Biophysics*,(1945) 7, 89-93.

But they have parallel complexities accurately imaged. And did you not find, if you were reading seriously, that you had to battle towards images that were not just simply symbolic in order to handle, get a handle on, such a sweet paragraph as:

“The key notion in the explanatory species is that any lower species of thing T_i , with their conjugates C_i and their schemes S_i admit a series of coincidental aggregates of events, say, E_{ijm} , E_{ijn} , E_{ijo} , . . . which stand in correspondence with a series of conjugates C_{jm} , C_{jn} , C_{jo} , . . . of a higher genus of things.”⁴

So, one reaches for elementary texts in different areas, or one draws on one’s past study of such areas. But, bluntly, one is not really reading if one is just reading on. What Lonergan says of *Verbum* is altogether more true of *Insight*. The entire paragraph of 26 lines is worth perusing in this context, but the point is that, in dealing with a creative author of this calibre, “one has to learn. Only by the slow repetitious, circular labor of going over and over the data, by catching here a little insight and there another, by following through false leads and profiting from many mistakes, by continuous adjustments and cumulative changes of one’s initial suppositions and perspective and concepts, can one hope to understand”⁵

But let me hurry on in, I hope, helpful fashion. Lonergan’s original pointing to the need for diagrams was made in the context of his Christology and there I struggled, especially in teaching for telling diagrams. The central one was what I called the elbow-bone diagram, where the elbow bone was associated with the person, the vertical bone to the shoulder with the divine nature, the horizontal with the human nature. One had immediately a nudge to think of the gap that guaranteed the “non-confusion” of natures, but with a little juggling one could add the distinctions right up to the Council of 681, handling human minding

What of *Insight*? Struggling to understanding in the late 1950s and to teach in the

⁴*Insight* 262[287].

⁵Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, University of Toronto Press, 1997, 223.

late 1960s led me to the beginnings of what I now call W1 and W3: Let us stay with W1, which at that stage was $F(p_i, c_j, b_k, z_l, u_m, r_m)$, with the obvious meaning of a hierarchy of layered properties. For a plant, for instance, z , u and r were zero sets. Later I changed the symbolism slightly, replacing the commas by semicolons: $F(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; r_m)$. It seemed, and seems, to me to be a neat compact symbol of aggreformism: something between the comma of reductionism and the colon of vitalism. But, the sixty four dollar question is, How is it to be read? In the decades since I have found that the reading is enormously difficult: self-reading that would lead to a generalization of Aristotle. I'll come back to that, but you can at least skim past the challenge for understanding the semi-colons that point to the plant: $F(p_i; c_j; b_k)$, expressed by Lonergan: "To this end there have to be invented appropriate symbolic images of the relevant chemical and physical processes; in these images there have to be grasped by insight the laws of the higher system that account for regularities beyond the range of physical and chemical explanation."⁶ The semi-colon pointed to the meaning of this sentence for each level.

Again I hurry on, with the intention of coming back. So, let us attend to the symbolic expression of the human: $F(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; r_m)$, and let us focus on the subclass of insights that ground language.⁷ The focus drives us to what I now call W2, an addition inspired by a very crazy week in New Brunswick, "looking across"⁸ the Fundy marshes at a cow, mouthing the word cow, searching the psychic happenings.

⁶*Insight* 464[489].

⁷There is a popular introduction to the problem of appreciating the grounding insight in the first chapter of my *A Brief History of Tongue. From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes*. Axial Publishing, Vancouver, 1998. Referred to below as **BHT**.

⁸I place "looking across" in quotation marks to bring to mind the difficult task of reaching a poise of realism, the strange psychic position that I write of in *Cantower 9*, "Position, Poission, Protopossession". A help here is *Wealth of Self*, chapter 5, "The Inside-out of Critical Realism", available on the website.

The result was, and is, W2:

$$V\{W(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; r_n) > HS(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; r_n)\}.$$
⁹

Again, I do not wish to delay on this: I aim at the moment of an overall impression of things to be done. Never mind the H and the S: the H refers to history, the S both the systems and schemes; but what is important to notice is the duplication. Two aggregates are correlated in “wording”, whether the wording be voice-boxed or grail or whatever. So, for example, the voiced layered aggregates, *cow*, are associated with the conceiving, perhaps even the affirming and cherishing, of the cow.¹⁰ The conceiving, of course, is of a brown cow with other colourful, odorous and audible and tangible characteristics so we have the further heuristic that is to come out of struggling with Lonergan suggestion, “Prior to the explanatory conjugates, defined by their relations to one another, there are the experiential conjugates that involved a triple correlation of classified experiences, classified contents of experience, and corresponding names.”¹¹ Fifty pages earlier he made a general point that locates our troubles: “When one is endeavouring to explain, one is orientated to the universe of being; one is setting up distinctions within being; one is relating distinct beings to one another; and one is

⁹See **BHT**, 122-25, for more details. See also the following note.

¹⁰I still have the notes from that crazy week at the Fundy marshes in the mid-1990s. There had been a previous daft effort: a month of evenings in the Dublin National Library where I took up the challenge - in the late 1960s - of understanding the related triple correlation, “Prior to the explanatory conjugates, defined by their relations to one another, there are the experiential conjugates that involve a triple correlation of classified experiences, classified contents of experiences, and corresponding names.” (*Insight*, 555[578]). I sat at the same desk, with its green lamp, and puzzled over the seeing green, ending up with some light and 60 foolscap pages of notes. I mention these efforts because it seems to me that the task of self-tasting is consistently misrepresented as some facile self-attention. As an available illustration of the required seriousness I recommend Merleau-Ponty’s last incomplete work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he struggles with the meaning of touch. See *Field Nocturne 24*, “Merleau-Ponty and other Mudflesh” and *Field Nocturne 28*, “A Touching of Touch: Getting on Your Nerves”. See further note 22 below.

¹¹*Insight*, 555[578].

relegating all merely descriptive elements in knowledge to particular instances of the case that arises when some being with senses and imagination is related through his senses and imagination to other beings."¹²

Is this relegation really of importance? If you pause and think about it in the context of any work that might interest you, it seems pretty crazy. Think of Freud and the interpretation of dreams.¹³ Dreams are a product of sense and imagination, within a panoply of interpersonal and international relations. "When one is endeavouring to explain" dreams, well of course "one is orientated to the universe of being" but this daft project would have dreams and the thinking about dreams somehow disappear into thin thought! But is the project so daft? As we move on into this century there is increasing interest and competence and relevance in dealing with the chemistry and the neurochemistry of dreams, and perhaps what is becoming increasingly daft is the subtle or stubborned efforts to stay unapologetically in the richly descriptive world of old-style depth psychology, or to boldly defend its richness as something lost in the move to explanation. What Lonergan wrote fifty years ago is now altogether more true of the defenders of an isolated "depth psychology: the defenders were left in the unenviable position of always arriving on the scene a little breathlessly and a little late."¹⁴

But is it equally daft to stay in that world when one is interpreting, say, the evangelist Mark, or Tertullian, or Aquinas, or Lonergan, or N.W. Wright? Might I throw in here the discomfoting suggestion that the science of interpretation is in its stumbling infancy, even after more than 2 millennia? That there is something alchemical about it?

¹²*Insight* 505[529].

¹³A refined reading of *Insight* on Freud and Jung reveals that Lonergan is thinking within his subtle heuristic, even anticipating the moves of the second canon of hermeneutics in his final comment on his two chapters on common sense: "May we note before concluding that, while common sense relates things to us, our account of common sense relates it to its neural basis and relates aggregates and successions of instances of common sense to one another." (*Insight*, concluding sentence of chapter 7).

¹⁴*Insight* 733[755].

That *Method* chapter 7 slides tolerantly past that alchemy in the hope that, eventually, there will be an academic surge “not only to read *Insight* but to discover oneself in oneself.”¹⁵ But there is the problem of reading *Method* and discovering that the tolerance is tricky. The message of breathlessness is repeated there, in a single brutal paragraph.¹⁶ The **oneself** that needs to be discovered is, perhaps, the disturbingly undifferentiated self that was comfortable with the first half of *Method*, and that would prefer to gloss over the *Insight*-demands of pages 286-7, only to be reminded bluntly why the book *Insight* was written, why its heuristics and consciousness-differentiation are needed that we might go on: “Such differentiation vastly enriches the initial nest of terms and relations. From such a broadened basis one can go on”, not only “to a developed account of” the entire **Part One Background** of *Method*, but to a effective implementation of the tasks so inadequately described in **Part Two Foreground**, an implementation that would redeem dreams and sensibilities in a global “psychic force that sweeps living human bodies, linked together in charity, to a joyful courageous, whole-hearted, yet intelligently controlled performance of the tasks set by world order”. But we will redeem dreams and sensibilities in this next millennium only through the effective mediation of their explanation. Surely this is the meaning of the simple suggestion of *Method* chapter 7, about the need for “understanding the object.”¹⁷

But let me take a simple illustration of this need and the advantage of meeting it

¹⁵*Method in Theology*, 260.

¹⁶The astonishing paragraph comes after Lonergan’s listing of things to be discovered by ingesting *Insight*. It is worth quoting here in full. It certainly deserves more attention than it gets, and de-contexting helps. Read it and weep! “Such differentiation vastly enriches the initial next of terms and relations. From such a broadened basis one can go on to a developed account of the human good, values, beliefs, to the carriers, elements, functions, realms, and stages of meaning, to the question of God, of religious experience, its expression, its dialectical development.” (*Method in Theology*, 287). I would note that the “one” Lonergan envisage, in 1952, as doing this was himself. He had hoped to write a second volume with some such title as *Faith and Insight*, but he was shipped out in 1953 to teach in Rome.

¹⁷The title of section 2 of that chapter.

at the level of our time: it helps us towards grasping where we are going, in this third millennium, where history is going in its full eschatological splendour. So I turn to John Damascene, writing of sensibility in 740.¹⁸

“The *imagination* is the faculty belonging to the irrational part of the soul. It acts through the sense organs and is called a sensation The organ of imagination is the anterior ventricle of the brain.”¹⁹

“*Sense* is a faculty of the soul by which material things are perceived, or distinguished

The first sense is that of *sight*. The sense organs or media of sight are nerves leading from the brain and the eyes. Fundamentally, it is the visual impression of color that is received ...

The second sense is that of hearing. This is capable of discerning voices and sounds, of which it distinguishes the high and or 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 do not move their ears ...

.... *smell* ... *taste* *touch*

One should note that sight sees along straight lines, but that smell and hearing get their impressions not only along straight lines but from all directions. Touch and taste, however, get their impressions neither along straight lines not along any line, but only when their proper organs are in contact with their organs.”²⁰

You are, I would hope, astonished at this piece of John of Damascus’s discussion

¹⁸I used Damascene previously, and at greater length, in *Lack in the Beinstalk*, (Axial Publishing, Vancouver, 2007)19-25. That book, obviously, is a context for our struggle.. I quote here, as I did there, from *St John of Damascus, Writings*, translated by Frederick H.Chase Jr., Fathers of the Church Inc., New York, 1958.

¹⁹I quote from chapter seventeen of *De Fide Orthodoxa*, in the translation referred to in the previous note.

²⁰Chapter eighteen, *De Fide Orthodoxa*.

of Faith. But now let me recall the earlier clue²¹ about listening to a friend: the shift that gets you from her or him talking, to her or him moving through life and history. Here you might think in terms of such questions as, Where did he get these leads, Where was he going or leading with them, Where might the talk lead and where did it lead, and Was he - so to speak - on the ball?

Was he on the ball in his specification of sensibility? We are back at the question, What is sensibility, what is the object about which he is talking?²² And let me throw in the odd and discomfoting question, What is the object about which we are thinking, indeed the object that would best control our thinking? Are we, are you, thinking of the long human struggle to understand sensibility, to mediate its possibilities in people, cultures, history, to appreciate the chrysalis of its pilgrim meaning and anticipate its eschatological glory? And are you thinking thus at the level of our times? If the answers you give to these questions are a **yes** echo of being, then you are tuning into the first canon of hermeneutics, edging round the second canon, reaching for “cumulative and progressive results.”²³

But enough for the moment. Our next steps are an effort to come to grips with Lonergan’s invention of the science of interpretation and the difficulties we are going to

²¹See the beginning of *Fusion 11*.

²²Talking; talking and thinking. Recall note 10 above. What am I talking and thinking about there and here? I am talking about serious scientific effort. As a help I point you to a parallel that I have used in the past twenty years between *Insight* and a graduate text in physics that I also used in the late 1950s. The text was Georg Joos, *Theoretical Physics*, Blackie and Son, London, 1951., having, like *Insight*, 800 dense pages. But it was readable, because of the background of a host of undergraduate texts. There were, and are, no such texts leading one to seriousness about reading *Insight*. Joos has about 30 pages on “The Mechanics of a Single Particle” but the background work involves a bundle of texts with tough exercises. Lonergan has about 30 pages on hermeneutics. What am I doing in these essays? I am inviting some courageous folk to do the detailed exercises, and write the required back-up texts. But certainly I am not summarizing in the style of *haute vulgarization*.

²³*Method in Theology*, 4

have in getting on the ball. Like chemistry, interpretation has had a long history of muddling along.

We have reached a tadpole stage of history when muddling can be, and might be, replaced by heuristically-controlled method, when it could become clear to interpreters, as it is doing so so slowly to physicists²⁴ in their much simpler searchings, that “*only in the intermediate scientific stage are relations divided into predicamental and transcendental, and even in that state such a division is not very suitable.*”²⁵

[to be continued]

²⁴A relevant distraction here leads me to note a few helpful points and parallels. Take Lonergan’s pithy clearing-up of the Newton “bucket problem” (*Insight* 154-5[176-7]) and compare it with the mess, on the same topic, that Brian Greene carries right through his book, *The Fabric of the Cosmos. Space, Time and the Texture of Reality*, Knopf, New York, 2004, on the same topic: see the index, under *bucket of spinning water*. Nor is it a matter, in physics, of poor a philosophical and popular literature. The muddle radiates through technical works on astronomy and on general relativity. Are there not galaxies really out there, and black holes?

²⁵Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, University of Toronto Press, 2007, 725. The italics are his.