

Quodlibet 2

Convenient Images of Creative Control of Meaning

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Q2a

The title of this essay is cumbersome but useful. It may remind you of different facets of Lonergan's view: a change of culture requires a new control of meaning; the significance of symbolism; or at least the general need of image¹ for the occurrence of insight. I presume that you are with me regarding that last simple need. So let's see how far you are willing to go regarding more complex imaging.

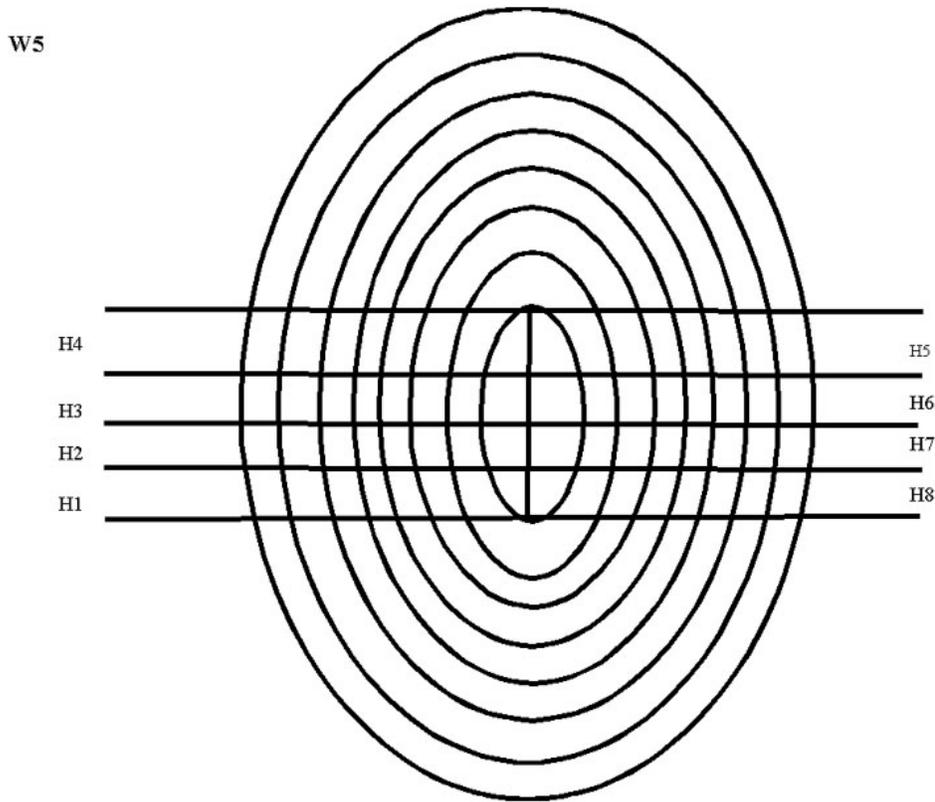
How far you are able to go. I am continuing my taking a stand, and my invitation to you to take a stand. The basic stand involved, as you know by now, is a stand on the need to get going with functional specialization. And the question we are sharing is, How? One answer to that How question is, by diagramming possible strategies or image-structures that would help us along. That, indeed, is a pretty spontaneous business: I don't suppose that any of my readers manage entirely without some image of the eight specialties: for example, four specialties going up and four going down, or a staircase diagram.

On the next page I give a diagram, labeled W5, which I find convenient for communicating some aspects of functional collaboration, and well get into that presently. Why "W5"? Because there are previous diagrams, imagings, that I find useful in handling problems of a sufficient control of meaning, and we will get to one of them in Q2b. But before moving to reflections on W5 I would like you to notice, even digest, the larger context given by two quotations from Lonergan.

[a] "Explicit metaphysics would consist in a symbolic indication of the total range of

¹There is an enlightening exercise offered in this Quodlibet, if you are interested in a cheerful illumination. Pause sometime during or after this first section and spell out for yourself what you mean by the word "image". See whether you agree with yourself when you finish reading and thinking about the Quodlibet in the light of what I call the first word of metaphysics.

possible experience" (*Insight*, chapter 14, section 3: the first paragraph).



[b] "The 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, at least 'without tears,' a whole series of questions right up to the last 'why?' Formal comprehension, however, cannot take place without a construct of some sort. In this life we are able to understand something only by 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 between them" [*The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, 151].

The quotation [a] indicates the place of images in metaphysics: you may not have taken serious note of the point on a previous reading of this text. Had you already held the view that a metaphysician's job should include providing suitable images? And what we are trying to image here is quite a whole, so [b] applies.

In the next section I will indicate further images, but let us get a simple preliminary glimpse of the usefulness of W5. There is a much fuller discussion and illustration of its value in the article of John Benton in volume 4 of *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis*.

You note that there is a diagram of a race-track superimposed on a usual imaging of the eight functional specialties. Why seven tracks? Because I find it useful to think of the tracks in terms of the standard seven colours of the rainbow: going, then, from red on the inside to indigo on the outside, the longest track.² The indigo track, in my imaging, is the track of most successful functional specialization. The inner, short-cut, track is the red track.³ I would note that this particular ordering and colouring of the image is my preference and it may not suit you. Facets of imaging can be quite personal. So let me stay for the moment with a generic usefulness.

Let us just consider the outside track which I think of as the one in which the team involved is beautifully efficient. It is a team of eight, each running one leg of the whole course. The team is not concerned about the other tracks and their goings-on.

²In Benton's article there is a very creative use of the seven. Different circumstances can invite variations of the number. Curiously, Lonergan himself presents a possible use of seven tracks: writing of his own limited list of conversions or their absence leading to distinct dialectic attitudes he notes "there are seven different ways in which this may be achieved" (*Method in Theology*, 251, end).

³One can enlarge on the imaging in all sorts of twisted ways. So, I have my own twist. Indigo? "In dey go": interiority reigns supreme. Red? A sort of red-neck compactness, or a communist red perspective, or simply a Stop to dividing up the work? Yellow? Using the functional specialty names undifferentiatedly in a compact, perhaps scared, position?

They focus on passing the baton sweetly forward, with the usual strategic overlaps at the hand-overs.⁴ Notice that I leave out the usual consideration of the “staggered starts”. Not only does this simplify the diagram, but it brings out a certain optimism: the outside team are so good that they can handle the apparent disadvantage of the longer run.

They are good; they are focused. Let me note one piece of the imaging that lurks here, that would need to be brought out further to get from ‘virtual’ to formal’. Think of the fourth leg, which I presume you can associate with dialectic. The dialectic runner really represents the “dialectic group”. Now when I say that the team is not concerned with other tracks I mean that the pick-up is from the runner(s) in the indigo lane, the baton is carried within the lane through dialectic, and passed to foundational running. Cross-lane pick-up, or even cross-lane interest - watching how the other teams are running - would cut down on efficiency. In particular I would ask you to think of the activity of *Comparison*: it is internal and unique to this section of the lane, having a definite internal structure. *Comparison*, then, does not involve “looking across”, looking over the shoulder as it were. Nor is there anything in the imaging that represents cross-track communications.

But what, you may ask, about the comparisons that are regularly expressed in Lonergan circles? Those comparisons belong in the relating that Lonergan designates for *Communications*: they can be considered as attempts to converse with other cultures of philosophy.⁵ And note that if such comparisons were identified as such, they would be more efficiently structured: but that is a complex question among many others regarding structures and imagings.

I wish you, then, simply to entertain the notion that you cannot manage to hold

⁴Thinking this out involves thinking out slowly the notion of **function**, a topic to which I devoted Cantowers 34-41.

⁵See *Method in Theology*, 133, number (8).

things together and advance in your hold without complexifying images. You can get quite some mileage out of thinking of maps and music scores.

Q2b

I am concerned here not to over-complexify these initial efforts. So I slip past the introduction of other images, words of metaphysics as I call them, to another useful image, the first indeed that I thought up way back in 1971.⁶ Let me take just a section of it: the section that symbolizes you or me as $f(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; q_n)$. Please bear with me and do not take fright. It is simply a brief way of saying that you function as a hierarchy (going up from physics to chemistry etc) of properties. The subscripts point to the properties: for example the "l" that goes with "z" (zoology) with include the various types of sensibility. What of the semi-colons? These are vastly important symbols that takes quite a deal of work to control: so, the semi-colon between physics and chemistry indicates that a chemical form is a form of an aggregate of physics-activities.⁷ Getting to grips with this, in my own experience, is very tough work. But as with W5, so here, I am not pushing you towards elaboration or subtlety. I just want to draw your attention to one simple usefulness in relation to the control of meaning, but it is a usefulness that is very telling.

Take the question, What is a phantasm? or What is a feeling? What is a dream?

⁶I had tackled the problem of imaging metaphysical distinctions in the 1960s, but this was the first successful leap. It found its place in the Epilogue, "Being and Loneliness" to *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, [available on the Website], p. 106. I had not thought out the semi-colon element at that stage. Reaching a serious meaning of that semi-colon meaning (see the next note) is something that I tackled in Cantower 29.

⁷Lonergan's earliest expression of this, as far as I know, is in "Finality, Love, Marriage", *Collection*, 20: "A concrete plurality of lower entities may be the material cause from which a higher form is educed". *Insight* invites a steady and difficult sophistication of the heuristic, a transposition of Aristotle's hylemorphism which I call aggreformism.

The realities referred to by these three words are at least on the level of zoology: cats and dogs imagine and feel and dream. Now the usefulness of the symbolism is that it keeps us humbled and focused. The phantasm is a structured psychic reality that integrates activities of botany, chemistry and physics; feelings and dreams have a similar complexity. What the symbolism does is help us to control our meaning in a symbolic push for an explanatory heuristic view. Otherwise, for instance, we can slip into talking about the phantasm or the dream or feelings in a very elementary mistaken sense. No point in trying to go into the mess that leaves us in: the leads are in *Insight*.⁸ On the one hand it leaves us open to an old style of metaphysics dealing, for instance, with the essence of seeing; on the other hand, it cuts us off from those who are trying to find out what the essence of seeing is. We become short of breadth and out of date: but more on that in the next Quodlibet.

Q2c

You may suspect that the issue is extremely complex: it emerged for me in a fresh and subtle way when I was working on my Lonergan "Centennial Essay" (Cantower 33 of December, 2004), and in the concluding section there I pointed to the challenge I would face in the Cantowers of 2008, the challenge of developing adequate subject-referent symbolizations for the control of metaphysical meaning, for the rendering luminous of metaphysical equivalents. But, heavens, I am going too too far with this, no

⁸Discussions about feelings is a particularly troublesome zone. Apart from simple misrepresentations of Thomas and Lonergan involved, these discussions tend to slip into an old metaphysics that would claim knowledge of essences. A help here is a venture into contemporary studies of the chemo- and neuro- dynamics of feeling. On the popular level I recommend, as a great introduction, Rita Carter, *Mapping the Mind*, Phoenix paperback, 2000. On the more technical level one might venture into articles in a recent *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 53 (2002): Dylan Evans, "The Search Hypothesis of Emotions", 4977-509; Louis C. Charland, "The Natural "Kinds States of Emotions", 511-537.

doubt discouraging you. So, two concluding remarks.⁹

First, all I wish from you is a stand on the need for diagrams, symbols, to help you along in your struggle to hold together your growing world-view. As you battle on you find that you need more of them: ones that complement others but also ones that conflict with others. Some of your imagings can be very personal, others - I like to think the my $f(p_i; c_j; b_k; z_l; u_m; q_n)$ is one - can be of general value.

Secondly, I would note the pattern of my own present struggle, since it may help those of you who are trying to push ahead through *Insight* towards an explanatory heuristic viewpoint. I must immediately remark that this push is at least a decade-long business. There is, for instance, the need to take with solid seriousness Lonergan's challenge expressed in the word *complete* in the canon of complete explanation.¹⁰

In my most recent climbing towards control of my meaning of being I find it useful to focus on the chemical level of the cosmos, and you may well find this useful when you tackle the problems envisaged in the next Quodlibet. Human subjects, you and I, can be imagined as complex chemical unities, layered infoldings of primal energy.¹¹ The forms of reaching that you and I are, are forms of chemical loneliness

⁹Reluctantly I skip over the other metaphysical words that I find necessary. You will find W1, W2 and W3 in chapter four of *A Brief History of Tongue*. W3 (on p. 124) is my central image of the collaboration that I have in mind: it complexifies considerably the race-track image though the race-track image has its unique contribution. Note 27 there helps towards understanding the need for complexity. Then there is W0, which involves an axiomatics of what Lonergan calls "the position" and which he describes sufficiently but inadequately in *Insight* 388 [413]. You can find the metaphysical words collected and commented on in Cantower 24.

¹⁰On this, see P. McShane, "Lonergan's meaning of *complete* in the fifth canon of scientific method", *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, 4(2004), available also in Cantower 39.

¹¹The story of my own struggle with Lonergan's suggestions regarding energy is, perhaps quite shocking, as a revelation of my slowness. It took me 45 years to figure out his connecting of prime matter and energy. Does my sketch of the climb in Cantower 30 help anyone to shorten the journey?!

twining round the finality that is at the heart of primal energy's groaning reach for an eschatological home. Well, see can you image that, starting from the usual neuro- and physio- diagrams, but striving always to read them in that strange identity of gramo-feedback.¹² And having said that, I am led to add an old Joycean ending - I think it was the end of a letter to Frank Budgeon - "if I can throw any further obscurity on the matter, let me know".

¹²Perhaps you recall that very suggestive note 34 of *Method in Theology*, 88: "At a higher level of linguistic development, the possibility of insight is achieved by linguistic feed-back, by expressing the subjective experience in words and as subjective".