

*Quodlibet 13.*Reading the Book of Herself, Don't You Know¹

September 29, 2004

To Alessandra.The text we are reading is "Study of the organism begins...."²

Let us shift to, "Self-study of the organism"?

The diagrams of Appendix A of *Phenomenology and Logic* are a beginning: one reaches them in an elementary course, like that given by *Wealth of Self*, where the diagrams occur on pages 15 and 48. Reaches them? There are different levels that are reached in so far as one maintains the search over the years. In a first course very few indeed break through to what I call extreme realism, where one "pins down" psychically the inwardness of sensibility. *Cantower 9* sketches out the climb of a decade or more under the title "Position, Poisition, Protopossession". Poisition points to the fuller psychic "pinning down" of naive realism, but in discussing protopossession my emphasis was primarily on the possibility of conversation within this mode. Jack and Jill breaking out of the blocking that Lonergan describes at the end of the first page of chapter 14 of *Insight*. Here I take another route.

¹A twist on James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin 1986, 153. This *Quodlibet* is directed to a particular person for reasons discussed in *Quodlibet 12*. There are the evident advantages reflected on there. I may note briefly here that Alessandra is a left-handed female while I am a right-handed male: we have common elements of meaning - yet we do not. Reaching empirically for the absences of commonness is clearly of relevance to the understanding and promotion of feminism, which is Alessandra's main interest at present. Other facets of our dialogue are noted in that previous *Quodlibet*.

²*Insight*, 464[489].

In trying to progress beyond a naive grasp of the diagram of knowing it is always best to hold to the fuller diagram, and indeed it is even better if there is a virtual³ “cloud” over the “what-to-do” question, the cloud of question 7-17 of the beginning of the second part of Thomas’ *Summa*. Indeed, we shall see that that issue cannot be avoided in the struggle suggested here. But let us take it in slowly, starting with the diagram of knowing with its seven steps.

The first step in the diagram is named “sensibility”, what is named early in *Method in Theology*: “operations in the pattern are seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting.”⁴ Named thus simply, for whom? I suspect for the general audience. But what did the sixty-seven year old Lonergan read there when he read the proofs in 1971? Even if he was pretty focused on typos, I suspect - from conversations with him over those years - that page 287 of the book was not too far down in his cranium.⁵ And lurking behind that memory was the haunting presence of chapter 15 of *Insight*.

There is a great deal to be said about that chapter and the problem of the emergence of the rest of *Insight*, but suffice it to say that chapters 15 and 16 are a massively compact hurried invitation to the beginning of metaphysics. Later I shall ramble further about the place and the problems of chapter 17.⁶

Back, then, to the meaning of “sensibility” for you and me, or perhaps now just for you. Certainly it has the common reference to our experienced and described senses: the sort of start you might expect Thomas to have had, but don’t underestimate

³*Virtual* takes a meaning from the quotation in footnote 10 below, but it has other layers to be mused out in *Quodlibet* 14.

⁴*Method in Theology*, 6.

⁵The topic is too complex for a footnote. Suffice it to say that the need to somehow place the short work *Method* in the context of his achievement in *Insight* was a central puzzle for him in the late sixties. The dense referencing of pages 286-8 was part of his answer.

⁶*Cantower* 17 already pointed to aspects of this, but I expect our conversations in *Quodlibets* 15-20 to complexify this considerably.

him: he had Aristotle pushing him down his version of page 464 of *Insight*. And recall, too, Damascene, nudging him towards those questions 7-17 of the Second Part of the *Summa*.

But has it further reference? Even the beginner - who began, say, as you did with *Wealth of Self* - has that clouded cultural *ethos* of acknowledging that sensing is a complex goings-on between the ears. "We are all condemned to solitary confinement within our own skins" was a quotation from Tennessee Williams I played on there. The beginner does not grasp it as you do, in your position on the real. The beginner does not walk in your woodlands as you do, poised in an unstable appreciation of the non-reality of the wonders "around you". Non-reality? Well, obviously these "wonders" are real: they are your wonders, in a sensibility round which your wonder floats, at times no doubt Windhover-like, in cherishment. Even perhaps at times in Joycean madness, "Fed and feeding brains about me: under glowlamps a sloth of the underworld Tranquillity sudden, vast, candescent".⁷

Fed and feeding brains about me?

Might we feed our diagram of knowing complexify helpfully from feeding on feeding brains, brains feeding wonder? "About me"? "About"?⁸

We read together Rita Carter's *Mapping The Mind*.⁹ The diagrams there feed us and lead us beyond the lines of the diagram of knowing, but taking the leads and re-digesting the lines is a very slow process of intussusception. Let me ramble round about the digestion and indigestion.

We have our original diagram, KD; we have a variety of diagrams, CDs, in Carter. Let us try to locate and differentiated these diagrams. Locate? Extreme realism

⁷James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, 1986, 21.

⁸Cantowers 27-31 introduced twists on the meaning of this little word, but let's leave the problem to Quodlibet 14, when we return to a companion twisting word of those essays, "as".

⁹Phoenix Paperback, 2002..

leaves us comfortable locating the different diagrams within sensibility, an inner cranial reality: this, of course, when we are talking about the diagrams as perceived, as “how they look to us”. The diagrams have also their worldly reality. Are they like the perceived diagrams? We don’t need to go down that blind lane. The real diagrams, like anything else real, are reached by correctly understanding the spread of inks on papers, an understanding that would give secondary determinations to real geometries of physical entities and to chemical players on those fields, a real elusive vibrant mess, uncontrollable by system. The main point is that we cling to the realist proposition that the perceived diagram is not like the real diagram.

But pause here. Is there not some likeness involved? Recall Lonergan’s reflection on diagrams, quoted below for convenience.¹⁰ Consider, then, KD. It displays, with some sufficiency, the elements of knowing and their connections. Sensibility? It is just a generic box, an undifferentiated starting place. Let us suppose that it is a drawn box: what does that box as perceived mean to you, or to various readers? It depends, obviously, on what is brought to it. So, It may mean little more than what the normal person reads in the quotation given from *Method* at note 3. What might it mean for an elderly metaphysician? The reference of a metaphysical symbol is to all the occurrences, even to possible occurrences, a patterned reference contained, say, in the set of diagrammatic structures called metaphysical words, or more compactly in that phrase of mine “discernment of discernments of discernments”. And you, thirty years

¹⁰“This comprehension of all 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 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.

younger than I, are on the road somewhere in between. And we are reaching here for contemporary sophistications.

In chapter 5 of *Wealth of Self* I use another diagram, another presentation: a large box with eyes, and a three-floor box inside, the bottom box being designated as the inner "sensitive integration". Let us home in on that diagram, supplementing KD, a psychic overlap. Home in on yourself. Doing that properly, as you know, involves homing in on the homing in. Then the diagram "is of you", re-presents you to you. Re-presents? This is pretty heavy stuff, and we are not near to a comprehensive diagram yet; but suspect that it lifts you into all the troubles of Lonergan's *Imago Dei*! Take it simply, without troubling with problems of your inner word of you. Then, O.K., it points to the elementary connection between my/your senses and the two basic question-types 'in' you or me. Its pointing becomes conscious in the sense that you can mean what you like with a symbol, and here you mean the conscious you, layered 'upward' with a meaning of upward that you find by refined advertence to yourself as, say, sniffing, searching, or saying an end-Yes like the fictional Molly.

Turn now to the CDs. Imagine asking Rita Carter about these diagrams. What are they off? They are obviously diagrams of the brain, the head-space. You could agree with Rita on that: but your conversation with Rita would very quickly become quite a hairy adventure. Might you sketch out some of it, even push to exhaust its possible directions?

Stay with the obvious for the moment. The CDs can be accepted as replacing the bottom box, the bottom level in KD. But it brings in lots of distinctions. A first one to notice goes back to the idea of "conscious". Rita would have you note that, as you attend to her print and to the diagrams, you get to a stage of identifying conscious, sub-conscious, unconscious "parts" of the diagram of me or you or Rita or anyone else after 1,000,000 B.C. But doesn't that seem fair enough, even if there are problems lurking in the wings, in the neurons? Our usual KD doesn't bother too much about the unconscious or even the sub-conscious.

But there is clearly a dimensional shift: our flat (square) box - or even if you imagine it as a box, one even containing five sense-types and other half-specified sensibilities,¹¹ is replaced by a quite complex topological “three-dimensional” display. Furthermore, the dimensional complexity is overlaid with what I might call a topology of consciousness and of response. I do not wish to get into detail at this stage, but one may note an early diagram locating e.g. thinking “up front”, visual processing at the back, and language at the left side.¹² A later diagram goes into the sophistications of different locations for responses to spoken and written words.¹³ What is going on here, and how does it - if it does - demand adjustments of our KD?

Certainly it requires modification in step one of KD: it pushes us toward a space-time topology of the normally-identified senses. Might there be a way of modifying - or a necessity of modifying - the other elements of KD? You may think of various possibilities and their advantages, but you will find that the advantages bring problems.

For instance, can one locate “what-questions?” in some sort of three dimensional set of zones? Think of what happened to Helen Keller: the language insight pivoting on a central what-question. . I think now of that classic film with Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft, which I happened to see last night. What happened in the final “water-scene”? Was there a focus of wonder in and ‘about’ the left brain, peculiar in that Helen was deprived of other sensibilities? Might that be investigated in both normal and deprived people in a manner that would lead to locational answers? And what of this business of thinking as located “up front”? What then of thinking about visual experiences? So, there arise question of unity and linkages. Indeed, there arise questions that are the operators of progress in the understanding of the organism, in the self-

¹¹I think here of Aquinas effort in the fist part of the *Summa*, q. 78, aa.3, 4.

¹²Carter, 29.

¹³Carter, 243.

understanding of the organism that is Alessandra. The page we are attending to now is general, not directed towards psychic or intellectual operations, but it seem to give a very relevant program.

Indeed, this seems a good place to stop in order to brood over the possibilities, the necessities, th oddities, connected with enlarging our working image of the elements diagramed in KD, so as to fit in with the top part of that page in *Insight*. And it is useful to focus on the top part of the organism, even though neural structures touch teeth and toes.

So we have a fresh reading of “the first step”, either the first step in KD or the “first step” referred to in that place in *Insight*. The parts of seeing, hearing, etc are inside: a “descriptive preliminary necessitates dissection”. Then there is the long process of the second step, to physiology and a third step where you are faced with the mass of work in biochemistry and biophysics. And the key problem right along here is “that there have to be invented appropriate symbolic images of the relevant physical and chemical processes”. But the deeper problem is to hold to an investigative heuristic that doesn’t make me lose my mind and my minding.

Well, at least we can claim that we have made a start: might we eventually arrive at a comprehensive image, “a diagram in which are represented all the various elements of the question along with all the connections between them”?¹⁴

¹⁴See note 10 above.