

*Quodlibet 15*The Discouraging Cultural *Ethos*15.1 “Where Does the Beginning Begin?”¹

“Hi Phil

I have a question for you. Could you spell out how a person would know if they have self-appropriated and how these traits would be accomplished. This may be too tall an order, but it seems only fair that this should be spelled out, so as to de-mystify this process which you describe as massively difficult. And while I am on it, how can anyone do it if it is massively difficult? How can it change the world if it is so hard to do?”²

To Alessandra

October 7, 2004.

I have been brooding over the possible manners of proceeding for some days: luminous, of course, about about about the place of that brooding as a **WHATAS** to be done.³

¹I am recalling the first lines of the first of the projected million-word 117 Cantowers. It certainly is an existential problem for anyone joining us in our searchings. Oddly, *Quodlibet 16*, to follow, is a sort of reasonable fresh beginning even for beginners. There is certainly no harm in repeating here note 1 of that first Cantower, which gives Voegelin’s words: “Where does the Beginning begin? As I am putting down these words on an 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 beginning.” (Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, Vol. 5 of *Order and History*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1987, 13).

²I quote from a professor who is “listening in” to our conversation prior to its appearance on the Website.

³Oddities in this sentence require references, mainly to Cantowers 27-31, but I leave that until *Quodlibet 16*. The word **as** in this *Quodlibet*, too, will stir your neuromolecules to a puzzling aliveness. Think of that problem **as** puzzling over reading the present *Quodlibet*. For example, you look on these words now **as** ?

Best begin a fresh paragraph to isolate that brutal little start. It is an *insentence*, between you and I, who have been on this topic for fifteen years. Giving meaning to that italicized word is the task of this essay: and that is a lie. Giving meaning to *insentence* is a task of perhaps fifteen years, in this present culture. This present culture? I am saying nothing different than Lonergan as he takes a stand against the mortmain, the necrophilia of centuries that “makes life unlivable”⁴ or as he pleads his case, in the Epilogue of *Verbum*, against those who have no notion of self-reading, the truncated still-present still present culture.⁵

You and I are in that culture, our molecules “half people and half bicycles,”⁶ in the sickness of sin and decline and dangling conversations. Yet our struggle against us has half prepared our molecules to self-read that selected page 464[489] with a hoping seriousness towards a remembering of the future. Moreover, our struggling *Commission* goes out to Pound’s addressees on the December Website to reach beyond the few present conversors, many perhaps so familiar with the transcendental *be attentive* that that transcendental has the dyed woolliness of present myth, in no **sense** then cherished

⁴Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 232.

⁵The work cited in the previous note is relevant here. The early chapters give a grim picture of decay that mesh with the view of section 8 of chapter 7 of *Insight*. The last two chapters raise the question of a cultural ethos in manner that would add a broader context to our reflections here. I leave it to you to read freshly the remarks in that Epilogue about reading intelligently.

⁶I am recalling a scene from Flann O’Brien, *The Dalkey Archives*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1964, p. 88, of which I made abundant use in the fourth chapter of *The Shaping of the Foundations*. A fuller quotation is available there, on page 103, worth repeating here in part, for its suggestive seed of truth: “people who spend most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadsteads of the parish get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of their bicycles as the result of the interchange of the mollycules of each of them, and you would be surprised at the number of people in country parts who are nearly half people and half bicycles.”

as the caul of the cosmos, cos-mi-c-all, seize all.⁷ And you and I, too, are lacking there, culture-crippled: so there is the tone of the hermeneutics of suspicion that also is the positivity of expectation of adult growth: today. How long might we spend on the problem raised at the end of the last *Quodlibet*? Taking Descartes advice from the first paragraph of *Insight* is hard. “Hurry on today” (Australian pronunciation) past the little problem, past the little flower.⁸

Aristotle did not hurry, but pushed beyond Plato to what I call aggreformism. So we must admire him, sez Lonergan, in a comment that I repeat in concluding Cantower 29, repeating it there from my note in Appendix B, “The Experience of Science”, of *Phenomenology and Logic*.⁹ I quote, then, the end of that note and that Cantower here: “So, ‘*Admiramini enim subtilitatem Aristotelis*’ (Lonergan, *De Deo Trino II. Pars Systematica* [Rome: Gregorian Press, 1964] 283: the entire appendix 2 there is relevant), ‘You just have to admire Aristotle’s subtlety.’ The decision problem is to reach for a Bell-curve translation of that admired subtlety into industry, commerce, classrooms, governments, religions, homes.” There is, at present, nothing like Bell-curve marking of attending to attending even among the primary carers for humanity’s way. What dominates is the Poisson distribution which deals with the infrequent: it was discovered first, as I recall, by the analysis of death by mule-kick in the Prussian army.

But our present concern is for some few who care herenow, no-w-here, open to reaching for a new hearing of hearing.¹⁰ And it is hard to hold to the hardness of the

⁷The drive towards this is discussed at the end of chapter 2 of McShane, *Lack in the Beingstalk*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2004.

⁸Chapter 3 of the work mentioned in the previous note gives a context for a sense of an adequate listening to all manner of flowers. See the second-last note below.

⁹Note 4, page 325.

¹⁰You recall this phrase, Alessandra, from the concluding passage of chapter six of *Process*?[See note 21]. But perhaps it is worth quoting here as a **forward**-pointing hope for fresh readers. I do so without including footnotes to *Finnegans Wake* and such. “The third stage of

heart's attention, and to hold to the paradox of the increasing hardness of soft-heartening. One must grow into that psychic mystery of non-seeing I.¹¹ We can falter like the great mathematician Leibnitz, who produced "a formal factorization of $x^4 + a^4$, and succeeded in convincing himself that he had done something remarkable That a mathematician, logician, and philosopher of the caliber of Leibnitz could so delude himself, substantiates Gauss' observation that the true metaphysics of the square root of -1 is hard."¹² And the true metaphysics of *attention* is hard. "How can it change the world if it is so hard to do?". Because the *attendants*, "our whole host and its great pilgrimage a wave in the eternal stream of human beings, of the eternal strivings of the human spirit towards the East, towards Home", are the feeble-minded invitee's of a risking divinity, and the great pilgrimage has just begun. Aristotle attended to his feeble minding of Plato's cave: the attention has been repeated only a few times in 2400 years.

Lonergan repeats and improves Aristotle's depth-charged attending, and axial culture would have it be a diving bored rather than a diving inward. But Lonergan has the emergent back-up of the chemists and the brain-mappers. What is it to attend? There is a chemistry and a biology and a psychology of its absence; and it's heart is absent from that chemistry and biology and psychology. What if, Alessandra, your class of those days that you describe in paragraph [6] had the presence of minding to which Lonergan had invited the previous generation? You would have been in a community, the sort of community that you were longing for when we first met. Instead you were

global meaning, with its mutual mediation of an academic presence, is a distant probability, needing painfull solitary reaching towards a hearing of hearing, a touching of touching, "in the far ear", "sanscreed", making luminously present - in focal darkness - our bloodwashed bloodstream. It is a new audacity, a new hapticity, to which we must aspire, for which we must pray". Check this, at some stage, with the final two notes here.

¹¹This is the problem raised by the first section of chapter 17 of *Insight*, mused over in Cantower 17, to be returned to in *Quodlibet* 17.

¹²E.T.Bell, *The Development of Mathematics*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Vew York, 1945,176. C.F.Gauss (1777-1855) was one of history's giants of mathematics.

like Hermine talking to Harry Haller: “Ah, Harry, we have to stumble through so much dirt and humbug before we reach home. And we have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness.”¹³

But let us brood over another What-if.

For the past fifteen years I have used a parallel between *Insight* and a book of equal length on Physics - a graduate summative text- by Joos.¹⁴ But let me twist the parallel into a new context of fantasy. It is a twist I have used before, writing of page 250 of *Method in Theology*: what if some medieval produced an equivalent single page doing thus briefly what Butterfield did seven hundred years later for the scientific revolution? Would anyone take her seriously? Now, fantasize with me: what if Galileo found a page-summary (it would be packed with strange advanced spacetime equations in the yet-to-be-invented differential calculus) of Einstein’s general theory? He would not just find it hard; he would find it utterly beyond his cultured attention.

My claim is that page 464[489] is a page in a yet-to-be-invented differentiated calculus that is to be in an **AS**-mode of about about about that is utterly beyond the Galileo’s of present cultured consciousness. Your challenge is to slowly, life-longingly, fantasy-stir that claim into a molecular **as** that is, not an ancient Roman measure,¹⁵ but a *nomos* of mysterious anticipation in your bones, an anticipation of centuries and millennia of the new science, within a new age of dark luminous hope.¹⁶

¹³Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, Penguin, 179.

¹⁴Georg Joos, *Theoretical Physics*, Blackie and Son, London, 1951.

¹⁵About twelve ounces weight, so, close to the modern *libra*, a pound; it was also an ancient Roman coin of copper alloy. You might find it useful to return to the fourth chapter of *A Brief History of Tongue* to relate to our times the contrast between the Roman *mos* and the Greek *nomos*. Poise also again with Lonergan’s few deva-stating pages on “Undifferentiated Consciousness in the Later Stages”, where he contrasts the early Greek poetry, “ever intent to stake out new areas of the mind” (*Method in Theology*, 98) with the contented nostalgia of Virgil.

¹⁶The diagram on page 124 of *A Brief History of Tongue* is a help here. I refer to it regularly as W3, the third of my metaphysical words, which are listed in Cantower 24, where

Why, then, so hard? The question is answered by the struggle. A contemporary Galileo in physics could be lucky enough to find a decent undergraduate course. There is no decent undergraduate course in GEMb. In a much later stage of culture all courses will be in the mode of GEMb. How much later? That depends on the operative communal reading of pages 464[489] and "250", winding into them selves the "can go on" challenge of the later, yet included, pages 286-7 of *Method*. It depends a bit, certainly, on some few now-readers leaving the ten-ounced bare-as brain-damaged culture of our pretentious times behind.¹⁷

I have said enough, perhaps, and at all events I am repeating myself. Yet I am not, and I would hope that you are not. We should never put our molecular feet twice into the same riverrun of cosmic desire. I think now both of Proust and of Lonergan. Proust corked off - literally with walls of cork - crippling culture, to father his *Opus Magnum*. Lonergan's *Opera Omnia* of 25 volumes are battered products of sick surrounds, and his final book-shot at paging us had to cut away his finest suggestion about about about about.¹⁸ Reaching towards that finest suggestion is hard. Reaching towards its beginnings on the first page of the first chapter of *Insight* is hard. Those of you who have just joined us may find that this re-reading if *Insight*, which reaches back

you will also find that diagram.

¹⁷Alessandra: no doubt you recognize the reference and recall the powerful appeal of the thirty-eight-year old Lonergan, a long passage of pp. 20-1 in *For a New Political Economy* about ".... a beast with a three-ton body and a ten-ounce brain".

¹⁸We'll get into this stuff in the next *Quodlibet*. It is perhaps worth noting the value of taking a serious run through the *Opera Omnia* of the greats of the past with the "about" level in mind. I recall doing it for Descartes and Pascal a decade or so ago, and musing about about about the parts of their work - in mathematics especially - that meshed with serious theoretic progress. But there was a great deal of messing in their mainly commonsense efforts, a point that relates to Lonergan's comment on their contribution: "The Greek achievement was needed to expand the capacities of commonsense knowledge and language before Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, New man could make their commonsense contribution to our self-knowledge" (*Method in Theology*, 261).

in the next *Quodlibet* to earlier works like his “Form of Inference’ or “Geometric Possibility”, is a post-graduate effort. Then you have to find friends who are honest enough to go against the mortmain of the nominalist following that crippled so much of Lonergan’s presentational efforts.¹⁹ You have to invent your own undergraduate work and so make more probable the emergence not only of the missing undergraduate tradition but the “massive transformation of education from kindergarten to post-doctorate studies”.²⁰

I have been answering the question about this shift being hard. It will not be at all as hard in a thousand years, when an adequate as, meshed into a TUV (Tentative Universal Viewpoint), will be a cultural *nomos*, *as* and *asset*. Let us get some sense of that **as** in the next *Quodlibet*. But meantime, there is the legitimate question of fresh readers expressed by Russell at the beginning: “Could you spell out how a person would know if they have self-appropriated and how these traits are to be accomplished?” And, yes,” this is too tall an order” but perhaps I have done some spelling out? The spelling out is the task of history: the rough difficult measuring by Galileo of a brick sliding down an inclined plane has nothing on the difficulties of taking the measure of the complex space of fundamental cosmic-bricks in the planes of brain. Still, I should have some helpful tests of self-appropriation, and I do: I offer three.

The first is a task I used to give my young ladies in my first year philosophy course, talking about the question “when do I know I have a serious concept?” My answer: (a) you can remember the months, or even years, that you struggled towards

¹⁹The previous note spoke of the value of brooding over various *Opera Omnia*. Doing that for Lonergan is an obvious worthwhile exercise. On the present topic I would ask you to peruse that sad collection of essays in volume 6 in the light of Lonergan’s comment therein on *Haute Vulgarization* (pp. 121, 155) : was that not what his audiences demanded of him?

²⁰I am recalling briefly the lengthier comment in the first paragraph of the first chapter of *Lonergan’s Challenge to the University and the Economy*. The book is available on the website, www.philipmcshane.ca . As it happens that copy is of larger interest in being a copy of Lonergan’s own copy, with some interesting markings.

having that concept; (b) you could or can talk steadily, coherently, non-repetitively, comprehendingly about it, for ten hours.

My students grappled with this, finding that perhaps they had some serious thoughts about their mate - interestingly, rather than themselves - but really no serious concepts in what they were studying. And, with a silence advised by me, they began to appreciate that there were doubts about the concepts of their teachers: even those who did have serious concepts certainly had no serious concept of their concepts or the acquisition and communication of those concepts. Anyway, there's my first (a) (b) test. And, in passing, notice something of importance my students noticed that is of importance to those who would compare Lonergan and X. The Xs of our times almost certainly has no concept of the acquisition of their concepts, whatever the resemblance of their words to Lonergan's words: GEMb is never reached unknowingly.

The second test? An exam I invented in 1989, for the book *Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders*²¹, dated for June 16, 2004, which was the centennial of Joyce's Bloomsday, the day about which *Ulysses* was written.. I reprinted it in Cantower 26, in section 4, with publication date May, 2004. I suspect that no one has ever attempted the examination. I wrote it in the format that I was familiar with from my studies in mathematical physics in University College Dublin at what is the final undergraduate level: I use the conventional New World "300" to number the level. I should note that, in those exams, there was no choice like, "do five out of ten questions". You attempted what you could. A pass in such an exam was 18%; second honours 30%; first honours was 45%. Read through the exam to see if you could have a decent shot at two or three questions, towards a pass. But read it also with an eye for the lurking presence of the problems of our page 464[489].

²¹The book is available on the Website: www.philipmcshane.ca

Attempt the following questions, using overlaps and interrelations as convenient.

1. Express the foundational perspective that grounds an integrative hierarchy theory, illustrating aggreformic binding in a particular pair of neighboring sciences in such a way as to bring out the limits of disposition in coincidental aggregates.
2. Discuss limits theorems, limitation theorems, canonicity and enumerability in the context of a general heuristics of analogy.
3. By specifying relevant nested inverse insights, locate 20th century mathematical theories of probability within a metatheoretic of empirical probability. Illustrate their limited value in particle physics and in cosmogenetic studies.
4. Sublate Joyce's and Aquinas' reflections on art into a metatheoretic of unity-thinking. Discuss the significance of this larger view of beauty in cases of incompleteness, fortuitous or intentional: fragmentary statues, collage films, etc. Reflect on the incomplete self, the incomplete drama of history, the cosmos, in this context.
5. Enlarge on the manner in which general aggreformic heuristics excludes the bases of description and predictmental relating in sciences. Illustrate its dynamic by considering the sequences of physicochemical acts that are informed by some particular organism's growth patterns.
6. Give a heuristic account of aggreformic metalinguistics, including precise introspective indications of the grounds both of linguistic meaning and of transcultural

grammar. Indicate how the resulting systematics contextualizes normatively transformational grammar and general semantics.

7. Elaborate a precise synchronic metasysematics of dreams, with emphasis on relevant physical and chemical fluctuations in REM sleep. Add indications of the broader diachronic heuristics relevant to an explanatory history or biography of significant dreams. Pinpoint the role of analogy and inverse insight in dealing with the religious significance of dreams in an absolutely supernatural order.

8. Illustrate, in some particular instance of historical development, the manner in which the canon of complete explanation, supplemented by precisions on metaphysical equivalents and grammatical invariants, locates and controls significant descriptive meanings and contributes to the emergence of relatively invariant pure formulations in that particular case. Add comments regarding the limitations on pure formulations of supernatural developments.

9. Give a precise account of the manner in which a fully contextualized heuristics of is-questioning gives rise to a thematic of the functional specialty of history. Relate this precision to the problem of borrowed content and to the distribution of what-questions in functional specialization.

10. On the hypothesis of the transposition of economic control and microcontrol to non-political meanings, categorize synchronically the normative dynamics of local and global political discourse. Locate this categorization diachronically and pragmatically within the context of the genetic geopolitical systematics of the seventh and eight functional specialties.

I suspect, Alessandra, that you found that heavy going to read, even after fifteen years? I think, nevertheless, that you could manage a pass: the strategy is to sketch as much about all ten questions as you can: 10 multiplied by 2 would give you 20!

Notice how much aggreformism haunts the questions, as it haunts the searchings of the levels in the brain. But in the present context it is important to see the exam in the fantasies of history that I suggest. Galileo would have made no sense of the equivalent exam that I did in mathematical physics, September 1956, to graduate in that subject.

So, the exam suggested is beyond the present generation of Lonergan students or students in philosophy. Notice, by the way, that it is not an exam "in Lonergan": it is an exam in understanding. And as I write I recall a useful strategy that was part of my exam format in undergraduate philosophy: my lead-in statement at the top of examinations was always: "Discuss precisely what you do not understand about the following". It could provide you with a useful way of self testing: it is, of course, what you spontaneously do if you are looking for precise help from a mentor.

Finally there is the third test, which comes from the last sentence of Alessandra's paragraph [4]: "But at least we can stay in 'the position' of extreme realism, that the real diagram is nothing like the seen diagram, however little we know of what actually is happening when we 'correctly understand our experiences'" And this is certainly true of you and me, Alessandra, however little we understand. But it was not easy climb. It took me seven years of mathematics, physics and philosophy and no doubt it took you a little while too. My first conversation with Lonergan, in Dublin, Easter 1961, was about the concomitant shock: he paced the room speaking of needing to talk to someone about it. The test is, indeed, to talk to someone about it, some Jack or Jill, where for Jill Jack "at least *seems* to be out there in front of her face."²²

Pause, thus, over that wonderfright *insentence* about about about "the discovery - and one has not made it yet if one has no clear memory of its startling strangeness -that

²²"Cognitional Structure", *Collection*, 1988, 217.

there are two quite different realisms, that there is an incoherent realism, half way between animal and human, that poses as a halfway house between materialism and idealism, and on the other hand there is an intelligent and reasonable realism between which and materialism the halfway house is idealism."²³ It is the latter image, the end of the line image, that you mean, Alessandra, when you write of extreme realism, and you are probably more optimistic that I about about about the % of Lonergan students who "can stay in the position of extreme realism".²⁴ That staying, as you recall, is what I mean by Poise, Poosition. Staying in it is the massive psychic control that I wrote of in Cantower 9, and again I think that you are optimistic. Can you really stay in that poise as you look askant at the diagrams, the CDs, in Carter's book? Wow!

So, we need further help, and it comes from our moving on into the mess of the questions you have been asking so as to come to control better, as queen of your "experience of science,"²⁵ your present attending to the diagram of your own brain, the turning and tuning of your neuromolecules towards an intussusception of and a

²³*Insight*, xxviii[25]. It is an interesting exercise to search psychically for where you really rest on this line. Almost all present and past philosophers - including the disciples of Lonergan - live in a quarter-way house the wrong side of idealism. There too you find schools that go under the name of "critical realism". Best, then, to take a stand on "extreme realism": a quite mad stand.

²⁴I refer here to the problem posed by Lonergan on the first page of chapter 14 of *Insight*: at the end of that page he is quite pragmatic about the shift of consciousness of, say, Jack and Jill, as they walk down the real street holding their real hands, but comfortable in the symbolic world of seen streets and felt fingers.

²⁵I am recalling Lonergan's title, "Experience of Science", mentioned above (note 10). Perhaps you have a glimpse of a much larger and challenging meaning from reflecting on our present reaching? Experience? Had you "thought of it as" molecular motions and e-motions, feeding on themselves? Might you anticipate strange advances to be expected in conceiving more adequately of what Lonergan called "The quasi-operator that presides over the transition from the neural to the psychic"? (*A Third Collection*, 29). Look back now at note 10 above.

feeding on themselves. "Of course the cells or whatever they are go on living. Changing about. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on feed on themselves."²⁶

²⁶James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, 1986, 89. As you see, I find Joyce amazingly suggestive. But the suggestions need carrying forward in a up-to-date as-searching of the disposed matter of consciousness. See for, example, this month's *Scientific American* (Oct 2004, 60-67) on "the Hidden Genetic Program of Complex Organism", regarding new patterning operations of RNA.