

*Quodlibet 16***Seeing Water in a Slice of Brain****16.1 To Alessandra and the Reader.****October 17, 2004**

Our dialogue continues. Where, you may ask, is it going, leading? Yes, *leading* is a better word: perhaps it would be better to say *educing*. It is leading, in the large picture, to a cultural discontinuity in education. I am obviously leading you on, but also, less obviously, moving on myself. Is the latter claim **obvious** to you? Since you are not moving on with me - unless you too are an elder, a Ven Mistress, the less obviousness is less obvious: and so we might circle round "towards the way", *ob-via*, where the way means the way of human life's search for that type of enlightenment which is understanding of What? Recall the dialogue of Arjuna and Krishna. Arjuna asks "Krishna, What defines a man?" And we can answer with a "Yes, what defines a human!"<sup>1</sup> But what is what? And what, then, is seeing water? What, Zen, is seeing water? What, Ven, is seeing water?

Should I repeat my favorite verse from Dogen, that great searcher for enlightenment - but not the differentiated enlightenment that is our topic at present? "To what indeed shall I liken / The world and human life? / Ah, the shadow of the moon, / When it touches in the dewdrop / The beak of the waterfowl."<sup>2</sup>

But we can cherish Dogen's verse - with a cherishing that might age within our *Shobogenzo* - with the lift of the differentiated enlightenment that is our concern.<sup>3</sup> "To

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<sup>1</sup>*The Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Barbara Stoler, Bantam Books, 1986, II, 54.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Heinrich Dumolín, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Volume 2: Japan*, New York, Macmillan, 1990, 72.

<sup>3</sup>We will focus attention of that topic in Quodlibet 21, "The International Search for Enlightenment". I note that this is the title listed for Cantower 53. Cantower 54, listed for the next month September, 2006, is titled "Quantumelectrodynamics, Pedagogy, Popularization", is to be Quodlibet 20. I am quite pleased that Quodlibet 21 has the same number as the Cantower

what?" That what is within the "what?" that patterns energy's brain achievement in its skin-lurking<sup>4</sup> openness that soaks in moonlight's dalliance with lensed bird-bill. There is, then, a pattern of the brain that we name "what?", elusive in its distributed eagerness yet somehow shadowing being in that mirror eyedrop of the soul. That pattern preys on patterns, and our interest at present is in a somehow reaching for the eye-ful tower-base before any tower is **thought**. That is our journey round and about about about Feynman's little paragraph, searching for a flaw that haunts axial physics and human life.

But let us read and re-read together some the Alessandrian reflections of last week. Not all: other exchanges are omitted, raising questions about about about what we are about. And there is much more that could be said before the re-reading, but it seems as well to save further comments until we read section 2.

## 16.2 To Phil

October 15, 2004

2.1 What, now, about looking at the magnified sample of water? First of all, what is 'magnification' about? What's going on when water, or anything, is magnified?

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in which I first raised this topic seriously: Cantower 21: "Epilogue". Of course I think here of Mozart's Elvira Madigan movement (the second) of the 21<sup>st</sup> piano Concerto, and of the second part of Volume 21 of Lonergan's Volume, re-presenting the search for economic enlightenment that haunted his year of 1943. These connections are not obvious to you: but then, how does one connect the moon's shadow brushing a bird's beak in morning water?

What of the Quodlibets in between? I have already made available to you Quodlibets 17: "The Origins and Goals of Functional Specialization", and Quodlibet 18: "Obstacles to Metaphysical Control". They are an emerging context of and for our efforts. The struggle here, in Quodlibet 16, will twist aroundabout, submarine voyaging in the water below the beingstalk. Quodlibet 19 will set firmer sail or sub down the stringy cells of page 464[489].

<sup>4</sup>"People who study anatomy and the development of the eye have shown that the retina is, in fact, the brain: in the development of the embryo a piece of the brain comes out in front, and long fibers grow back, connecting the eyes to the brain. The retina is organized in just the way the brain is organized and, as someone has beautifully put it, 'The brain had developed a way to look out upon the world.' The eye is a piece of the brain that is touching light, so to speak, on the outside", *The Feynman Lectures on Physics*, I, 36-2.

The sample of water is visually enlarged – it isn't, obviously, actually enlarged (*The Gods Must Be Crazy* – was it in that film the bushman looked through a telescope and was astounded at what he saw?). So magnification 'does something,' changes or enhances the 'optics' of 'my vision,' of anyone's vision who happens to be looking through the microscope, in a way that allows me to see the sample of water molecules 'up very close.' What does this 'closeness' achieve? I can see parts, details, components, movements, shapes, shadows..., that I would not have seen without the magnified view. So I see 'more' of the water molecules than before. What if I could get into a little wee tiny submarine and get right into the middle of the little sample of water molecules. Would I see even more activity? Would there be more shapes, more shadows, more moving bits and pieces? Would I be any closer to understanding the make-up of the water? Or would I simply have more 'data' for my eyes, my interest, my perception, to process? Would I know when I'm looking at an atom of hydrogen, or of oxygen? Would I know what a proton in an oxygen atom looks like? Would the secrets of how water 'holds together' be suddenly revealed?

**2.2** The problem with expecting 'secrets to be revealed' simply because I'm 'taking a (much, much) closer look is that the revealing is not a part of my seeing, of my perceiving – it is a later event that follows on intelligent questioning and grasping, etc..... So my seeing, its extroverted quality and its neural-molecular-chemical processes, doesn't change simply because what I happen to be looking at has changed.

**Oct 16, 2004**

**2.3** Start again with my looking at a magnified sample of water. Feynman's example has the water magnified a billion times. When I look at it, what do I see? I see 'bits' or particles of the water that are indistinct, fuzzy around the edges. The bits are moving around, three dimensional moving bits. Also the bits are 'stuck together' here and there. There are different kinds of bits – would I recognize the different kinds of bits that are hydrogen or oxygen atoms? Or would the bits all look the same to me? Let's

say I took a little submarine ride right into the centre of the water molecules. What's going on? The bits are "jiggling and bouncing, turning and twisting around one another." Also the bits are "stuck together," as well as jiggling and bouncing around each other. What do I see in my little submarine when I'm right inside the water, up close to these giant atoms, bits of water? The atoms are really, really big. The water is magnified a billion times and the size of one of these bits un-magnified is a whole lot smaller than the size of a pin head. Magnified a billion times, the bits are now huge and they're bigger than I am in my little submarine. Since they're bigger than me, I can be looking right at an atom of hydrogen or an atom of oxygen, I can be resting in my little submarine up against one and not know what I'm looking at. It just looks like a blob, a big 'side' of something I'm resting against. The thing is, since the water has been magnified *for my seeing*, I see it now growing and growing and growing to the point where it's huge. It's bigger than I am. And because it's so huge now I can be inside it and see its parts all moving around.

**2.4** What is the problem with this strategy of magnification? From the point of view of extreme realism, what is going on when I'm seeing the magnified water? What do I mean by 'seeing'? I'm seeing particles getting bigger and bigger and bigger the more they're magnified. If I went from seeing a glass of water to seeing the glass of water magnified 100 times, 1000 times, 100,000 times, 1 million times, 1 billion times, then I might go through something like the following: from seeing the glass of water, to being able to see vague motion happening in the water, to being able to see moving parts, to seeing more motion and bigger parts 'inside the water,' to seeing even bigger parts 'inside the water.' At some point I'm not seeing the parts (as) 'inside the water;' I'm only seeing the parts and the motion. But I know that the moving parts are 'inside the water' because I know I am looking at water. From the point of extreme realism, what is going on with my seeing? The water is 'disappearing' and in place of the water I'm seeing bigger and bigger moving bits. The magnification, in terms of just my seeing,

places me 'inside' the water, in among the particles that are jiggling and bouncing around, all stuck together.

**2.5** But my seeing is within a context of knowing: knowing that what I'm seeing is 'water.' If I didn't have that context, then what would my seeing be like? Let's say I'm back in my little submarine, in among these big bits jostling around each other. I can see the bits and what they look like but I don't know what they are or where I am – like Jonah in the whale before he knew where he was...

**2.6** So what do I mean by 'seeing' and by 'magnify'? What is happening? It seems that what is happening is that I shift from seeing 'a whole' (the glass of water when I started, say) to seeing *parts* (of the whole – the water magnified a billion times, say). What if I start with the magnified seeing? Then I start with seeing *parts*, like Jonah in the whale. But making this distinction between 'parts and whole' is a 'later' distinction – a grasp of insight; my seeing doesn't make *any* distinctions. I just see. If I don't know what 'a glass of water' *looks like* already then I merely 'see something.' But this is true of the magnified water as well. If I don't know what the parts of the water *look like* already then I'm still 'merely seeing something,' except now in the plural, 'somethings,' activity of bits. So what does this say about seeing, what do I mean by seeing? My seeing, in this sense, is 'blind.' Even though magnification enlarges the image – I'm still blind.

**2.7** What does it mean that magnification 'enlarges the image'? What do I mean by the 'image'? The lens of the microscope in effect gives me a 'new eye' to see by. When I'm looking at the glass of water with my 'own' eye, I see what I can (later) name as 'water-in-a-glass.' When I'm looking through my 'new eye,' I see a different image. My new seeing is correspondingly different – corresponding to the effects of the microscope. The neural processes and configurations of each of my experiences of looking, and of each image seen, differ. The 'bottom line' seems to be that the magnification provides a different image, or set of images, although this seems like a

bloody obvious statement! But there seems to be a subtlety, in that I think (and Feynman thinks ) I'm looking at the same thing: water (in this case). But if the images are different, what does that say or imply about the 'thing' I'm looking at?

**2.8** By 'seeing,' existentially, I spontaneously mean 'what is out there.' In the first case, I mean 'the glass of water' out there. And I can notice that what I see is basically static. In the second case, seeing the magnified water, what do I mean? I mean 'the moving bits, particles of water' out there, seen through my 'new eye.' In this second case, I can notice that what I'm seeing is dynamic, moving, interacting. My seeing, though, isn't a meaning in the sense of an understanding – it's a meaning *sensibly*. And as a sensible meaning it is spontaneously extroverted. The image, too, in this sensible mode is 'what is seen' and is also spontaneously extroverted. But in fact both are neural process – though notice that this distinction is one of *understanding* what seeing is, not of simply seeing existentially.

**2.9** But what is the problem with the strategy of magnification? Does any of what I've said help? If it is true that by looking I (literally) mean what I see, then magnification changes my looking, changes what I see, changes the image that I see. As a strategy, magnification promotes the idea that I can 'see inside' something and 'see what's going on.' But whether or not my seeing is magnified, the business of 'grasping what's going on,' even of identifying what it is I'm seeing, is not an activity associated with seeing. If it's true that the meaning of my seeing is just sensible, then my seeing, whether magnified or not, is 'blind.' So if the strategy of magnification promotes the notion that one can understand, can 'see' the secrets of, say, water, then this notion simply isn't true. The magnification doesn't magically give to my seeing a quality that it doesn't possess, that is, the quality of being able to grasp and understand.

## 16.3 To Alessandra

October 17, 2004

My re-reading leads me to random focusings of your attention in your next re-reading!

I begin with 2.9's beginning "But what is the problem with the strategy of magnification?" It echoes a recurrent question: 2.1, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, etc. "What is going on when water, or anything, is magnified?" (2.1). And your second sentence-question of 2.9 helps. "Does any of what I said help?" Perhaps: in so far as you re-read your saying about help, and your saying about magnification. First, take your saying about help: secondly, we pause over your first sentence.

Your saying about help, an Indo-European word: was it a cry? I think now of Aristotle's first paragraph of the metaphysics, turning round the preferred sense of sight (980<sup>a</sup>25), of which he can say, with the others "they do not tell us the 'why' of anything e.g. why fire is hot; they only say that it is hot " (981<sup>b</sup>11). They do not 'say', of course, nor tell: but perhaps that is the translator having his say. However, the pointing is that Aristotle goes back to earlier sayings .... "these thinkers, as we say, evidently got hold up to a certain point...." (985<sup>a</sup>11).

There is the broad problem of being human in leaning back on all the sayings of the past. "To what indeed shall I liken the world and human life?". You have already seen the quotation about Hegel at the beginning of Quodlibet 17: we must lean. The character of our leaning, or giving character to our leaning, or becoming normative characters of leaning: that is what our present conversation is about about about.

So, back to your first sentence, which haunts your entire reflection: what is it to magnify?

That is a massively tricky question, and people have said things about it. You flex your way towards the tricky question in your little submarine, battered by giant molecules. Molecules? Do you see molecules? It is a word that people said as chemistry advanced. It is connected with **thought**, beyond the 'tower base'. The end of 2.7 lifts

your submarine, marine, adventure towards a sobriety that Aristotle would be happy about: magnification gives you a different image. But notice that you must use the sayings of history to “home in on” the meaning of both **magnification** and **image**? You don’t cut off you **as** to spite your facing of the search. Recall Lonergan pushing along towards a glimpse of “the given” in chapter 13 of *Insight*. Notice above my use of Feynman: a nudge towards a new imaging of the eye as a brainstorm drain. Feynman has two chapters on seeing, perhaps not available to you, but you have the possibility of following up a reference he gives: “Sight, Sense of,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He was using the 1955 edition; you can do better than that. And there is all that stuff about **as** in those Cantowers I referred to already.

But notice the value of simply mucking around, something that eventually should be part of the replacement or transposition of those standardly-wasted years of school memorization of ‘peoples sayings’, be the sayings in chemistry or philosophy.

Still, there is that haunting question, What is it to magnify? It is a question about which much has been said, even in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. And when you have read some sayings there, go back to what people have said about the eye, and what the little eye-lense does, in us, in the bee, in the frog, in the salamander, in the octopus, whatever. Does the eye-lense magnify or minify? In what sense does it give a little image of the relevant world of fish or fowl?

#### **16.4 A Searching Interlude**

Alessandra and I continued our dialogue, on paper and by telephone. My effort continued to be Zen-like rather than in the pattern of either conventional or third-stage teaching. By telephone we moved into the mood of the Childout Principle and a growing mutual self-mediation of the significance of messing-round in relation to breaking with the haste-ethos of present culture and to the reality of molecularization in the incarnate growth of theory. That meaning can only be shared by some similar

experiment in searching: so, for the reader, reading along here could be like reading those books like *Zen and Archery*, *Zen and Flower Designing*, where the author writes of years of Zen training in, for example, archery or flower-design, that seem to lead nowhere. So I shifted to the mode of address that I was familiar with in teaching mathematical physics: precise indications of types of image, etc. In such teaching in physics, the ethos of the classroom was such that it was taken for granted that hours of exercises went with a single 50 minute presentation. So, our struggle continued.

Meantime, there was another accidental contribution on the topic: on the question of seeing a green apple [as opposed to Alessandra's problem of seeing a 'colourless' water molecule!]. I keep the contributor anonymous, only noting that this is a serious searcher after the meaning of both seeing and metaphysical equivalence. So I quote the question and my reply.

"Empirically distinct and metaphysically identical?

Suppose that 'I am seeing this green apple.' or, equivalently, that

'This green apple is being seen by me.'

Intentionality Analysis (Yielding distinction)

In and through my act of seeing this green apple:

A1. I am experienced as seeing and not as seen.

A2. This green apple is experienced as seen and not as seeing.

What is seeing and not seen is not what is seen and not seeing.

I and this green apple as empirically given are distinct: the data of mine are not the data of this green apple (e.g. 'green as given' belongs to this apple as seen and not to me as seeing).

Metaphysical Analysis (Yielding identity)

B1 Q. What is the metaphysical equivalent of the true judgment 'I am seeing this green apple'?

A. My act of seeing this green apple of course.

B2 Q. What is the metaphysical equivalent of the true judgment 'This green apple is being seen by me'?

A. My act of seeing this green apple of course.

My act of seeing this green apple is this green apple's act of being seen by me. The seeing and the seen are identical in act (in the act of seeing).

Conclusion: The seeing and the seen as such are empirically distinct and metaphysically identical!"

### **My Reply:**

This is more complicated than you might expect. But it is very enlightening both in relation to the mess of phenomenology and the project of moving towards a full metaphysics.

The key is to digest the second (2) principle of metaphysical equivalence. Amazing how this comes nicely as a problem after my article on metaphysical control.<sup>5</sup> The metaphysical analysis has to lean on "(2) .... the anticipation of explanatory knowledge" and you can be helped towards this by going back to page 464[489] of *Insight* [which, of course, is also relevant to the empirical analysis!].

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<sup>5</sup>The article mentioned becomes *Quodlibet* 18.

Now before going on I must also draw attention to the later definition of generalized empirical method, with merges metaphysics and empirical analysis..... you cant do one without the other, sez the later Lonergan...[ reference is *A Third Collection* 141, top few lines]. the earlier Lonergan did this in practice, but his theory of it was behind... so, e.g. the stuff in section 4.1 in *Insight* [about p. 80 in the old insight] re AA',BB', etc needs revision.

O. K. See the problem? Self-“study of the organism begins...” *Insight* 464[489]  
 What is seeing? The potency for seeing is that organ, including the extrusion of the brain to the surface called the eyeball, it is an aggregate of physico-chemical dynamic acts that is *pattered* .... the pattern is the form that is the *potentia operativa*. The act of seeing is an autonomic [I coined the word back in 1969, in the first Florida paper .... Lonergan remarked to me about that paper “it just opens up area after area!” .... but no one seems to have read it, so the areas remain to be opened up!!!!] act of intussusception of photon radiation [conjugate acts] within a certain wave-length range [varies from eye to eye, e.g. the bee, the frog, the salamander, the octopus]. So there is, so to speak , a dynamic patterning of a dynamic pattern. The metaphysics of this requires some of my symbolism e.g.  $f(p_i ; c_j ; b_k ; z_1)$  . The semi-colon points to the aggregiform structure which I treat of in Cantower 29, a difficult and neglected topic of Lonerganism, not handled by any contemporary philosophy of science [e.g. Systems Theory blanks out].

Distinctions? Identities?

One has to push forward in the light of *Insight* chapter 16. Add in the question of the autonomic characteristic of “consciousness” [the plant also has autonomic forms, but the level of self-turnedness is called irritability}.

So you see that there is non-identity .... patterned potentia operativa [or capacity-for-performance] and patterned act [**up-lifting** the photon radiation to being part of the “solution to the problem of living in a given environment’ [*Insight* 265 in old edition] Anyway, this gives you a start:

The key problem is your question, What is the metaphysical equivalent of my true judgement, “this green apple is seen by me” .... you have to push for explanatory structure, even if it is a very thin heuristic.... *DDT II*, on ‘Relations’ has the point near the end of that appendix 3: even in the beginning of science, it is better to get into the explanatory mode.”

I give question and answer just as they developed, randomly and spontaneously. It adds to your context, Alessandra, and to the context of our companion readers, to whom, I suspect, the “jumping beyond the question is a shock”, but it is simply the shock of what Lonergan as pushing for right through *Insight*.

So, back to you Alessandra, for reflections on the new mood, new progress, whatever. I would like especially to have your reflections on this in the context of that strange Exam which I wrote for June 16, 2004.

## 16.5 To Phil

### Reaction to the EXAM in Quodlibet 15

October 26, 2004.

This exam is way beyond me, which is at first discouraging, frightening, frustrating. I’ve been at philosophy for about fifteen years and am nowhere close to being able to answer these questions. Are they just ‘pie in the sky’?? I don’t think so. From my readings and re-readings of *Insight* over the years I know enough to know that I have little grasp of the depth and wealth of explanatory detail that pervades that book, detail that these exam questions expose and encompass. So I am missing a fundamental basic grounding. For one, I didn’t have a good education, so I’m lacking the mathematics and science that I should have developed through good schooling, and

that is a hindrance which I'm striving now to balance. But more than that, where could I have come across 'basic foundational courses' in 'this kind' of philosophy? 'They' (!!)

simply do not exist.

This lack of rigorous training following on *Insight* is a fundamental problem. I'm beginning to appreciate that *Insight* was, is, a tremendously huge leap into the future. And the difficulty with that situation is that it has left most of us wallowing around in the present, trying to make sense of a very difficult, unfamiliar way forward.

For instance, at the present time in history, mathematics and science are not a cultural norm, not a common possession in literary academic circles, let alone through the 'whole' of most cultures. And nor has it ever been, truth be told. This step alone, of being confronted with science, with statistics and emergent probability, with mathematics and space-time, as just a couple of examples, is, perhaps like those EXAM questions above, initially discouraging, frightening, frustrating, even threatening. In my own experience, there is the constant temptation, when you know you haven't got the necessary knowledge, to look around and see if there isn't some way out, some little loop-hole. I have been often tempted to take hope from the kind of paragraph I sometimes come across in *Insight*, like this one:

"Finally, to conclude this chapter on the Elements of Insight, let us indicate briefly what is essential, significant, important in its contents and, on the other hand, what is incidental, irrelevant, negligible. What alone is essential is insight into insight. Hence, the incidental includes:

- 1) the particular insights chosen as examples,
- 2) the formulation of these insights, and
- 3) the images evoked by the formulation.

It follows that for the story of Archimedes the reader will profitably substitute some less resounding yet more helpful experience of his own. Instead of the definition of the circle he can take any other intelligently performed act of defining..."

This kind of message offers that little ray of hope: maybe, after all, I can get by without the mathematics, the science, without *really* understanding what defining is. Maybe I can replace these examples with some less resounding experiences of my own, even if they don't happen to be mathematical, and even if their status as an "intelligently performed act of defining" is questionable! But how long can I delude myself? The fact is, I don't have a stock of examples to replace the defining of a circle – although I'm starting to build a few now. But the point is, I'm not an exception. In the philosophical world, in the large majority of the academic world, how many of us have the required background, the necessary basic fundamental groundwork pointed to in *Insight*?

So what we're into is the evolution of a *science* of philosophy, the science Lonergan pointed to with and in *Insight*. Or actually the science of Method. What do we have to do to begin the evolution? That question is huge - Axial!! But from the perspective of these EXAM questions, and of the challenges to explanation and science in *Insight*, a beginning is, or at least has been for me, the psychological challenge of confronting who I am, what background I have or don't have, and what I have to do and can do to 'put this show' on the road. Obviously I believe *Insight* is a worthwhile 'show,' otherwise I would have left it long ago. So given that I believe in it, that it speaks to me at some intimate 'gut level' of 'rightness,' I should at the very least find a way to contribute to its cultural growth. One way I can do that is to 'confront myself': confront the questions that these works prompt in me. Take a biographical stand. In those EXAM questions, if I can't attempt to answer them, what I can do is reflect on them and try to record as many as I can of the questions that occur to me about them. In fact, maybe this is the key to a proper personal, and so eventually, cultural

beginning: noting *questions* instead of trying to come up with answers and 'learned' essays – again, though, a *huge* change to try to implement, for example, in the academy!!

But the hurdle is psychological – getting myself to a point where I can admit my weaknesses. That is the struggle that is disheartening, discouraging, tiring, 'full of tears' as opposed to 'without tears.' My hope comes with beginnings. If I can admit to myself that, like it or not, I had a terrible – abusive – education in mathematics and that I have come out of it without even being able to deal with the simplest of operations, like adding and multiplying fractions, then as embarrassing and emotionally upsetting as it is to admit my lack of capability, to face the truly unwelcome thought that 'I'm not as bright as so and so,' at least I *do* have a base, a starting point. I can at least learn a little math! Go onto a little physics... What I have found is that I can't live without hope – that when I hit the 'low' realizations about myself, I eventually have to look somewhere for hope, for how to carry on, for how to go forward out of what I am, where I am. So even if it my going forward is in small steps, like learning how to add fractions, it *is* a going forward. But then, everyone has different ways of finding how to go forward... or to not go forward and maybe convince themselves that they are....

Plunging into mathematics also isn't an easy answer. Another difficulty comes up. Teaching in these areas is notoriously poor – full of memorization of formulas without getting at genuine understanding. So what do I do? If I have a desire to learn some math, what happens if I get into another whole set of classes or courses or guidance that leads me (again) astray. How do I find a teacher who will lead me in the right direction? There is definitely some luck involved here, or Providence maybe. Anyway, there is a huge cultural 'catch 22.' The teaching of these fields has to improve, has to be lifted by Method, by philosophy in its evolution forward, yet in order for that lift to begin to take place, we need people who can embrace the challenges of *Insight* and of the climb toward these EXAM questions. (Enter Functional Specialization!)

Putting aside FS for now (that's another ball park!), I'm back to the personal starting point of taking a biographical stand, making some decisions about where I need to go and how to get there if I want truly to help the mission of *Insight* along. But let's say I haven't even realized that *Insight* is as 'advanced' as it actually is? Maybe this is the true problem. And maybe this relates too to Russ Sawa's question about how do we know when we are self-appropriated?

So I'm thinking now of two things. First, right away in the introduction to *Insight*, the *introduction*, the reader is faced with a very strange kind of 'talk,' the talk of "startling strangeness" and "self-knowledge." For me personally, figuring this puzzle out was the beginning. What is this 'startling strange insight' this man is talking about?? That was my primary puzzle and if it's in the *introduction* then I figure it must be darn important. My own struggles with this puzzle were in and through the book *Wealth of Self* and it didn't hurt at all (Lady Luck) that during a summer stroll around Halifax in 1987 with you, Phil, my 'first philosophy lesson' (you remember?) prior to reading any such book as *Wealth* or *Insight*, was to look at a tree and be told that it wasn't the real tree! Well, why the hell not? What could all this 'real' business mean? What are these people getting at? So for me, maybe one 'early-warning' test of self-appropriation is whether or not you can honestly answer that implicit question on page xxiii of *Insight's* introduction: do you have a clear memory of that startling shift out of your habitat and into the universe?? Did you spend some years brooding over this puzzle, trying to piece together the relevant necessary insights to bring it clearly to mind, into your mind?

The second thing I'm thinking of is *Method*. In the index under *self-appropriation*, the very next word is "arduous" and refers the reader to page 167 where a parallel is drawn, implicitly, with Archimedes' long struggle of arriving at his Eureka. So, self-appropriation is not an easy venture, and also not a 'clear cut academic path' but an arduous puzzling that leads to the oddity of someone puzzling about puzzling and

writing about herself writing. The next words in the index lead straight to *Insight*. The reference is to the footnote on page 7 of *Method*, where Lonergan is talking about the necessity of *struggling with* some such book as *Insight*. “Struggling with,” not breezing through, and if Lonergan, who wrote that book, can speak of struggling through it, where does that put me in my struggles through it?? To steal a title from an honest author on women’s tennis in its early days, it’s a long way, baby!

So back to that earlier ‘what if’ – what if I don’t recognize *Insight* as an advanced book? Is that really possible? Is it?? This is a genuine question I’m asking, not a sarcasm. Was that how I viewed it when I first set eyes on it? Could it be that culturally we are so abused that we can’t recognize something that demands serious, prolonged, difficult, arduous, years-long puzzling? And even if we’re sincerely willing, even if we’re trying our best, even if the hints are there, and more than hints, the bold statements like that one about a startlingly strange insight that needs to happen, is it possible to overlook them, pass over them in favour of those passages (like the one I quoted earlier) that are kinder to the ego and self-esteem? Is it possible that personal neurosis (here I think of Karen Horney’s thorough work in that area), arising out of our very early, ongoing, repetitive parental and educational experiences of native wonder being cut off, smothered with demands for inhuman routines of memorization before our wonder ever has a chance to blossom to its full stature of ‘seeking to embrace the universe;’ is it possible that this sort of perpetual cultural situation can develop in us the fears and doubts and uncertainties, plant the seeds of a neurosis strong and deep enough, coupled with cultural general bias, to turn us away from being able to ‘see’ the depth, the challenge, of such a book as *Insight*?

Or is it a matter of ‘seeing’ the challenge and persuading ourselves into avoidance? Or maybe it’s not avoidance but not knowing how to go forward? I think of several years in my own struggles, years that I now look back on and think of as ‘waste years.’ I was reading and struggling with *Insight* but that was it. I simply didn’t

'get it' that this required more than sitting and 'reflecting on this book.' I was naive, innocent of what was required, innocent of the implications of the book, innocent of knowing how to 'read seriously,' and even more significantly, innocent of the implications of what it means to 'live in the universe.' As I think on this now, I realize that the very slow shift into some *meaning* of that much earlier startlingly strange insight is what moved me into a grasp of the implications of *Insight*. Even though the 'words were written on the wall,' were there all the time in *Insight*, I didn't have the background, I think especially the 'serious science' background, to make much sense of them. It was only when I was pushed into formulating what had happened in that strange insight... no. More than that: it was when I began to really grasp the 'encirclement' notion, identifying the 'objective of the detached and disinterested desire to know,' that I began to appreciate the full implications of 'being in the universe.' So here perhaps is another not-at-all-so-early test of self-appropriation??

## 16.6 To Alessandra

October 27, 2004

You are beginning to "see" the book *Insight* differently and **The Exam** certainly contributes to that seeing. You caught the point of the analogy with a successful science that brings out especially the novelty of this new type of inquiry. Would you have caught this fifteen years ago? That question reminds me of a relation of mine who said to me a some time ago: "Why didn't you tell me twenty years ago that I was neurotic?" She couldn't have heard the telling then, no more than the telling of Lonergan's Epilogue to the *Verbum* articles - about neurotic conventional reading - was heard in 1949.

I have previously reflected on the word *tell*, and on the impossibility of **telling**. I have been **telling** of the cultural discontinuity of *Insight* now for over forty years. The telling has failed. It might have succeeded had it been shared by the generations of Lonergan enthusiasts of the twentieth century, but it was not. Most of those were

handicapped, as you were, by a poor education in serious thinking, missing the lift of the world of theory.<sup>6</sup> I, on the other hand, was, you might say, overly-lucky. I shifted straight from studies of quantum mechanics and relatively theory to the challenge of the *Verbum* articles and then to *Insight*. My sense in the late fifties was “this wont take”, but I had little serious sense of just how bad things would be fifty years later.

I won't enlarge on that at this stage, but rather switch to the need for another type of **telling**, a strategy of **telling** that is the great discovery, or uncovering, of Lonergan. It is a global telling, the topic of the next Quodlibet, but one that has been raised regularly before. Still, this new telling of mine may be more telling!

Your reflections of section 5 require no comment because they deserve prolonged comment. Briefly I would conclude here by noting that *Insight* is not a book to change a discipline called philosophy: it points to a massive change of the norms of reflection in any zone of culture. The telling of functional specialization is to bring that about slowly, and under the usual providential statistics. But there remains the demand for some few mad people seeking “being in the universe”, as you concluded section 5. That seeking lands us right back in the first paragraph of *Insight*, and in the little submarine, or subterranean, voyage of asking about our envisioning of a molecule of water. We shall get back in the water in Quodlibet 18. In the next Quodlibet we reach for a glimpse of the larger task. It is a glimpse related to a Conference on functional specialization in California, Easter 2005.

Getting back in the water? You will have my beginning of Quodlibet 18 in mid-November, then we will wade forward slowly, up to our knoses, our frontal lobes, in the ocean of being, struggling with AS as it is identified in *Verbum*. At the end of the Summer of 2005 you should have a little more to say about **AS!**

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<sup>6</sup>The point, and the challenge, is succinctly expressed on *Insight* 35[558-9].