

THE OBVIOUSNESS OF INTENTIONALITY ANALYSIS

This little essay was written weeks after what I may call the *learned essay* to follow but it now seems to me important to place it first. You, of course, can skip on to the other essay, or skip back and forth to get a sense of what I now think of as another “existential gap” in humanity’s struggle to find its way out of present darkness. Need I go on about that darkness? I should not: my aim is a simple invitation, well, to learn from the trees. I recall an interview with the elder Anthony Quinn, in which he was asked about his occupations in his quiet life, and he went on to talk about the old tree outside his window: “I think it has something to teach me.” My own recent experience is of planting a slip of a Virginia Creeper last year and now I attend to its leaves waving at me from an entire fence: meters of meeting. Is there something creepily intentional about its climbing life? Is that not worth puzzling over: worth an intentionality analysis?

Strangely, now, as I read about “the quaking aspen,” I recall the Quakers—group now only a memory, perhaps a revitalizing memory?—and their peculiar lessons. But let us stay with the trees and listen to and with that odd fellow, Peter Wohlleben—what a suitable name!

The quaking aspen takes its name from its leaves, which react to the slightest breath of wind. And although we have sayings that associate this characteristic with fear (“to shake like a leaf”), quaking aspens don’t shake because they are afraid. Their leaves hang from flexible stems and flutter in the breeze, exposing first their upper and then their lower surfaces to the sun. This means that both sides of the leaf can photosynthesize. This is in contrast to other species, where the underside is reserved for breathing. Thus, quaking aspen can generate more energy.¹

¹ Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, Greystone books, 2016. Translated from the German (2015) by Jane Billinghurst, 183.

How long do you have to listen to be tuned into its forming of energy? Might a degree in the new botany of the—still distant—positive Anthropocene Age change your breathing and your breeding?

We have learned that mother trees recognize and talk with their kin, shaping future generations. In addition, injured trees pass their legacies on to their neighbours, affecting gene regulation, defense chemistry, and resilience in the forest community. These discoveries have transformed our understanding of trees from competitive crusaders of the self to members of a connected, relating, communicating system.²

Have we not here, here hear, a tincture of system?

I know what I mean by “have” in that question; I know what I mean by “here hear”. But what of you, trapped in the trappings of the negative Anthropocene? The discoveries that transform are not possessed by you, and not possessing you. But perhaps you hear here? Perhaps there is a tincture of your meeting yourself, your system? The horror of the negative Anthropocene is that the high pointing towards meeting ourselves of the academy and even the arts can be a glittering fraud. Always meeting ourselves, thus, in a text of Heidegger or of St. Paul, in an unseen water lily of Monet, an unheard phrase of Amy Winehouse. “Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-law. But always meeting ourselves.”³

The sentence, “the intentionality analysis of the tree” has “of” locked out of the being of a subjective genitive: unless you are thinking now of the Great Analysts who need no analysis. But you, flowergirl, flowerboy, can you afford to continue to lock it out ontically in phyletic madness?

Intentionality analysis of flowers is not something remote from self-meeting: it is key to the luminous drive up through autonomic forms of being.⁴ It is the key to future

² *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 249.

³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London, 1958, 273.

⁴ I introduced the terms *autonomic* and *synnomic* to denote the two fundamental forms of materiality at note 92 of “Image and Emergence: Towards an Adequate *Weltanschauung*.” The paper of 1970, on Botany, is available as chapter one of *The Shaping of the Foundations*, available at: <http://www.philipmcschane.org/published-books>.

botany in its cyclic redemption of the field. Intentionality analysis is not some fluffy poise of a type of philosophy: it is to be a general scientific poise that is to envelop high-school students in self-embrace. But it is to begin earlier, in the alphabet soup of childhood years. The Childout Principle⁵ is to be its bent: that principle is simply a Mom and Pop and Tot version of a generalized empirical poise specified by Lonergan.⁶

And now perhaps is the time for me to halt and point you, glorious organism, bright lily of the field, towards a fresh beginning⁷ of empirically-grounded metaphysics: “Study of an organism begins ...”⁸

Here hear! Might you be hearing, reading, stunnedly, Lonergan stunningly getting you into a preliminary poking round in the discomfoting untapped fact that “in any plant, animal, or man”⁹ “conjugate forms are implicitly defined by empirically established explanatory correlations.”¹⁰

So I halt abruptly, turning back to thinking of Anthony Quinn’s old age. He had his old tree: I have my single 60-year-old leaf: page 722 of *Insight*. “Repentance becomes sorrow” (line 28) at the millennia-long locking out of the intentionalities of our embodiment. Still, stilly, there is the freshness of a dream that if we have slowly come to understand, in these few past centuries, the things of the simple sciences of physics and chemistry, we can follow through to begin to learn from our cousins, the lonesome acorn and the leaping salmon.

⁵ A cosy description of it is “When teaching children geometry one is teaching children children.” It is simply an educational twist of the methodological principle proposed by Lonergan: see the next note.

⁶ “Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness: it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject’s operations without taking into account the corresponding objects.” “Religious Knowledge,” in *A Third Collection*, Paulist Press, 1985, 141, top of the page.

⁷ *Insight*, 484. “To prepare our statement of the integral heuristic structure that we have named metaphysics” (line 10).

⁸ *Insight*, 489.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 484, the beginning of section 7.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 485, “Fourthly.”