

Field Nocturne 2

Lonergan's Obscurest Challenge to His Followers

In contrast to the previous essay, where it took some rambling to get to the point, here I get there before the end of the first sentence: the obscurest challenge centres on the superego.

I am being a mischief-maker here, recalling Anna Freud's view that the superego "is the mischief-maker which prevents the ego's coming to a friendly understanding with the instincts."¹ And I am still the more mischief-maker in viewing curiosity as instinct, and indeed in viewing the fundamental human drive as what I might call the field-drive.

I have been on about the superego before, in *Humus 2*, when I quoted a letter of Lonergan to Crowe, a quotation worth repeating here. "Incidentally, re anxiety, what the Freudians call the Super-Ego is Aquinas' cogitativa: just as the little birds know that twigs are good for building nests and the little lambs know that wolves are bad, so little human beings develop a cogitativa about good and bad; it reflects their childish understanding of what papa and mamma say is good or bad and in adult life it can cause a hell of a lot of trouble."²

The quotation cries out for follow-up. Was Lonergan taking on the role of analyst? I do not think so. But was there a role as superego? Let us listen to Freud pater: "If the patient puts the analyst in the place of his father (or mother), he is also giving him the power which his superego exercises over his ego, since his parents were, as we

¹Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense*, Hogarth Press, London, 1936, 59.

²This is quoted from the 13th of 129 written communications of Lonergan to Crowe, some as short as Christmas cards, some several pages long. This letter is dated 27th December 1955. I have no doubt but that these letters will eventually appear in some published form but meantime I avail of Fr. Crowe's generous permission to quote from archival material that has not been published.

know, the origin of his superego. The new superego now has the opportunity for a sort of *after-education* of the neurotic; it can correct mistakes for which his parents were responsible in education him."³ For *neurotic* here better to read, for Crowe, simply *disciple*. For myself, however, neurotic would do fine, and yes, *after-education* fits me too: it continues now in my 77th year.

Did my neuroses help me resist "The Temptations of Conventionality"?⁴ I suspect so: though I would view my addiction to Chopin and my lift into the theoretic by mathematical science as more fundamentally significant. In the fullest sense, of course, one breaks with convention by the deep luck of vertical finality. In the article just mentioned Kernberg remarks that "Adorno et al. (1950)⁵ considered conventionality a significant part of the authoritarian personality, which reflects an individual's disposition to excessive adherence to middle-class values, a consequence of his own value system. It is the rigidity with which individuals adhere to external social pressure that characterizes conventionality."⁶ Later Kernberg remarks, "In short, Adorno's, Green's, and my own work agree that ego and superego aspects of the personality predispose an individual to depend excessively on conventional values and attitudes."⁷

Now what could be more conventional than the convention of rich correlating description as a style of theological discourse? Could we do better than Paul, or Augustine, or Pascal, or Newman? "The Greek achievement was needed to expand the capacities of commonsense knowledge and language before Augustine, Descartes,

³Quoted, in his essay on "Transference", by U.H.Peters, in *Introducing Psychoanalytic Theory*, edited by Sander L.Gilman, Brunner/Mazel, 1982, 93.

⁴Otto F.Kernberg, "The Temptations of Conventionality", *Psychoanalysis: Towards the Second Century*, edited by Arnold M.Cooper, Otto Kernberg and Ethel Spector Person, Yale University Press, 1989, 12-34.

⁵Theodore Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper, New, York, 1950.

⁶Kernberg, *op. cit.*, 19-20.

⁷*Ibid.*, 24.

Pascal and Newman could make their commonsense contributions to our self-knowledge."⁸ So, we have the rich common sense of Crowe, and of many major figures in the Lonergan movement.

Am I being offensive? I enjoy recalling Crowe himself on the topic. "Is there not room for a measure of bluntness at this stage?"⁹ and I enjoy recall myself on the same topic of offense, perhaps discovering and saying something about my own confused adolescent superego!¹⁰ "I'll so offend to make offense a skill / Redeeming time when men think least I will "¹¹

I have touched only, commonsense fashion, only one facet of the superego problem. There is the possibility of "the universality of the 'Watergate syndrome' and the various ways to bribe the superego."¹² Further, one may note that "autohypnosis inhibits the alertness of the ego and thereby can evade the ego's and the superego's responsibility for what has happened, what is happening, and what can happen. No one can hold to a truth that has not been reliably registered ... pretended away from, rationalized, and disowned."¹³ Perhaps I should be talking about the field-drive that

⁸Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 261.

⁹F.E.Crowe (editor) *Spirit as Inquiry. Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan S.J.*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1964, 27

¹⁰"The libidinal investment in the self"? (Otto F.Kernberg, "Narcissism", *Introducing Psychoanalytic Theory*, Sander L.Gilman, Brunner/Mazel, New York, 1982, 126. Worth following up are the works cited in this essay.

¹¹The quotation is of course not mine but Shakespeare's, from *Henry the Fourth, Part One*, I. ii.208-209. I comment at length, in *Lack in the Beingstalk* 5-6, on my relationship with this piece from Prince Henry's speech, right from my first reading of it in my early teens.

¹²Leon Grinberg, "Integrity and Ethics in 'Becoming' a Psychoanalyst", *The Psychoanalytic Core*, edited by Harld Blum, Edwards Weinschel and Robert Rodman, International University Press, Connecticut, 1989, 361.

¹³I quote from an article in the same volume by Leonard Shengold with the frightening title "Autohypnosis and Soul Murder: Hypnotic Evasion, Autohypnotic Vigilance, and Hypnotic Facilitation", 187-8.

was a topic in the first of these essays? Certainly, then, one could make larger sense of what “Anna Freud (1988: 457) said, ‘Psychoanalysis is above all a drive psychology. But for some reason people do not want to have that.’”¹⁴ So, one must seek an approach that “enables us to study the patient’s conflict in terms of defenses against the instinctual drives and the resulting compromise formations produced by the ego in dealing with its three harsh masters - the superego, the id, and external reality”.

And so I swing back to the issue of social context and convention raised above, raised in this quotation in regard to the psychoanalyst, raised by me in regard to the critic of culture, theologian or not. “It is the materialistic deterioration of our cosmopolitan ethos and the infestation of the arts and music by an increasingly Middle-brow or Middle Mind orientation that will have an important impact on the capacity of the psychoanalyst to be creative, to bracket his or her personal interest, to remain equidistant between id, ego and superego as Anna Freud recommended, and at the same time to intensely participate rather than passively observe.”¹⁵

But I had best cut short this line of eloquence, condemned by my own footnote 13: “the protective cloak of a commonsense eloquence lacking solutions to genuine problems”. What I mentioned in the first sentence, yes, it is a problem of the superego. But it is only the above problem in so far as the real obscurest challenge of Lonergan is met in a globally adequate fashion.

And what, you may well impatiently ask now, is that obscurest problem? And I may add to your impatience and annoyance by pointing, once more with feeling after many previous pointings, to a single page of *Insight*: 464[489]. In *Field Nocturne 1* I asked you to read 250 with some degree of sophisticated attention: we need something similar here. The similarity is existentially opposed by the conventionality of superego

¹⁴Richard D Chessick, *The Future of Psychoanalysis*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007, 5.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 147. I would include in the ‘materialistic deterioration’ the blossoming of *haute vulgarization*

that I mentioned above. Indeed, to add to our problem an essential aspect, that conventionality can be expressed in a strange reductionist talk of e.g. **perseveration**, a “pathological disorder”¹⁶: “In general, perseveration can be thought of as getting stuck in a cognitive or behavioral rut - in an excessively and inappropriately stable attractor.”¹⁷ But the sticking, in that book and in that tradition, is focused on neurochemical modules in the heterarchically-structured brain.¹⁸ Am I being sufficiently obscure?

What is oddly clear, at least to me, is that the obscure and wonderful page that I have named **study** is paradoxically a quite sufficiently obscure pointing towards an entirely new tradition of positive reductionism that would replace the foggy reductionism of the books to which I have been referring in these past footnotes. What, for instance are the schemas of the book *Neurodynamics of Personality* with their unexplained tie-in to probability? Are they not the objective correlatives of the recurrence-schemes identified by Lonergan, in their flexible control of patterned acts of integrating forms of aggregates of physico-chemical reactions? These patterned acts are the stuff that dreams are made of: and superegos, and emotions, and virtues. It is Lonergan’s view that we cannot go on talking about such realities descriptively, however rich and existential and interlocked the patterns and recurrence-schemes of that talk.

¹⁶I quote from a book to which I may return later, in a fuller consideration of the topic of *Insight* page 464[489]: *Neurodynamics of Personality* by Jim Grigsby and David Stevens, The Guilford Press, New York, 2000. I quote here from page 295, where the authors refer further to the work of A.R.Luria, *Higher Cortical Functions in Man* (Basic Books, New York, 1980). Other relevant works of Luna are listed in the bibliography.

¹⁷*Neurodynamics of Personality*, 157.

¹⁸Contemporary neurodynamics considers the brain as a modular distributed system, a complex non-linear hierarchy for which W.S.McCulloch invented the name *heterarchy* in “A heterarchy of values determined by the topology of nervous nets”, *Bulletin of Mathematics and Biophysics*,(1945) 7, 89-93. More on this in the later essays of *Field Nocturnes*.

But enough of this for the moment. We should return now to Fr.Crowe and his life-long advocacy of Lonergan, and note his heroism in following his bent and his talents, which did not invite him into the world of neurochemistry. But he did not miss Lonergan's pointing to functional collaboration that I wrote of in the first essay, nor the dense pointing of chapter 15 of *Insight* that we touched on here.. He was ever modest and indeed amusing in our conversations about *Insight*, recognizing that the achievements even of chapter one were beyond him. He made a gallant effort to move forward the enterprise of functional history and often repeated the slogan, "What functional specialty are you in?"

We must move, in the next essay, to cherish that question of his in a way that can lead us gently forward in the question of functional collaboration so that we may slowly come to embrace the more difficult task of leaving behind both contemporary superegos and contemporary defective talking about superegos.