

Field Nocturne 5

First Exercises in Visual Self-Appropriation

Preface

There is no easy solution to the complex of tasks that faces us. In the final dense section of the previous Field Nocturne I wrote: "So we turn to *Field Nocturne 5* with its few hundred pages focused on the powerful suggestion of that single glorious paragraph of *Insight* which begins: "Study of the organism begins"¹ I have left that essay as it is, with that promise, which I now wish to modify. Indeed, the modification brings me back to doing this "Lonergan page-reflection"² in a way that parallels more accurately the first such effort of mine, on page 250 of *Method in Theology*. It seems to me now that spreading out the reflection over a series of essays would be a better strategy and more value in the fuller project of lifting the global community of culture into the context of functional collaboration.

In the venture, already begun, into the 300 pages promised, there was what seemed to me to be a necessary recall of work done, or work that being done would lift our discussion to a proper objectivity. So the second section of that now-abandoned project was such a recall, or an outline, of self-digestion. It still seems to me a necessary start, but I wish to be clear on its place for those who come along on this climb.

You will see from the descriptions and suggestions of this first section, the only section in the present Field Nocturne, that we meet ourselves here in the core cultural problem of the axial period. The problem has to be met by each of us at some stage in our climb if we, global-culture wrestlers, are to be released to follow finitude's reach for

¹*Insight*, 464[489].

²You recall that *Field Nocturnes 1* pointed to two key pages, one in *Method in Theology*: page 250, and one in *Insight*: page 464[489].

its micropresence.³ But I do not ask that each of us do that climb as a prior condition for the Nocturne climb of horizon towards the Field.⁴ That would be a bow to mythic realisms of minding. The prior condition eventually - I talk hopefully of the transition year 2111 A.D. - will be a presence in that region of history called the Tower of Able. So, I place that section 2 of the previous attempt here, as either a homely reminder or as a gentle invitation. The next essay, *Field Nocturnes 6*, is a fresh full beginning of the promised 300 pages that is to point towards the core of that distant hope, one I have mentioned repeatedly, of a “psychic force that sweeps living human bodies, linked in charity, to the joyful, courageous, whole-hearted, yet intelligently controlled performance of the tasks set by world order.”⁵

A Context In Our Struggle, For Our Struggle

We begin by recalling the very elementary exercises of *Wealth of Self*, chapter 5, “The Inside-Out of Critical Realism”. That text is easily available on the website. One of the problems that we have here is that I do not find the equivalent in the Lonergan literature on this struggle towards the “startling strangeness” that Lonergan wrote of, even in such a lengthy treatment of the problem as that of Fr. Liddy.⁶ Yet without such exercises one just does not make the elementary and essential break into the zone of what I now call extreme realism. Why do I use the word *extreme*? Because on the line of

³The loaded word points to a meshing of Lonergan’s reflections on “psychic representation of material manifold” (*Insight*, 469[494]) with his view of the dynamics of the 14 billion year project: “the universe can bring forth its own unity in the concentrated form of a single intelligent view.” (*Insight*, 520[544])

⁴“The field is *the* universe, but my horizon defines *my* universe” (Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 199).

⁵*Insight*, 723-4[745].

⁶Richard Liddy, *Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan’s Insight*, University Press of America, 2006.

views of what is real given in that famous passage of *Insight*, the correct view, your own latent operative view is “the end of the line”, the one associated with the neurodynamics that corresponds with your nodding head.

I have introduced the word *neurodynamics* here, and I had best comment broadly about it and our venture before going on, step by step. I am interested in bringing you forward to an appreciation of yourself that goes beyond that fifth chapter of *Wealth of Self*, beyond the partially equivalent chapter 8 of *Insight*. In terms of course work, I would say that these exercises that we are tackling are best included in the second half of a year’s work, after reaching some mastery - elementary but also deceptive in its incompleteness - of one’s own processes of what-thinking and is-thinking. You note, if you have the elementary text *Wealth of Self* to hand, that the strategy of the book puts a first examination of those processes before the Inside-Out chapter. Perhaps you might consider that what we are doing here is writing a new chapter 7 for the book, taking the book and ourselves in a new direction. Furthermore, the direction is easily identified, at least by name and number: we are on page 464[489] of *Insight*, at my oft-repeated words, “Study of the organism begins”, and the topic neurodynamics raises its ugly head as we move down that page.

So, we have located ourselves, at least nominally.

But this locating is at present bristling with difficulties. When teaching an equivalent course in mathematical physics, the class at this stage - I am thinking concretely about my own teaching of that subject - is located more than nominally. The students have a common context of understanding as we move forward, say, to the study of orbits under a central force: the moon round the earth is a familiar instance. Furthermore, they have come to have an existential grip on what it is to study. I cannot presuppose an equivalent uniformity here and, while there is to emerge a complex of later solutions to this, I have to hold here to meeting a contemporary need. I recommend, then, that the text below be first read through and then read selectively by either teachers or students or both working together towards the creative self-

appropriation of their own vision, in both senses of that word.

Let us go back, then, to those odd eye-ball I-nodding exercises before we go forward to page 464[489] of *Insight*. The *us* is a vague unknown, and the *I* that is you has to assess where to pause here, and where to skip. In *Cantower IX* I described, at the beginning, the slow long climb first to what Lonergan and I call The Position, and then to what I call The Poosition. By the end here I shall be describing exercises that relate to, fall into the context of what I talk of as the “comeabout”. That, in present culture, is a rare achievement. There is no problem in you admitting, at least to yourself, that you don’t have the time or the talent for that part of the struggle. But I would invite you at least to get a sense of the foothills, the initial stages. That is the invitation of those eye-ball, I-nodding exercises, which occupied a month or so in my first year classes - mainly young ladies of 18 - for twenty years in Nova Scotia’s Mt.St.Vincent University. So let’s you and I review how much we have puttered in the relevant area, and where that puttering has left us: or stayed with us!

That last little twist, “stayed with us” is good for a puzzled laugh, and perhaps you would like a text of Lonergan to go with it. You’ll find it at the beginning of that strategic chapter 14 of *Insight*. No woman, “no man is born in that pattern; no one reaches it easily; no one remains in it permanently; and when some other pattern is dominant then the self of our self-affirmation seems quite different from one’s actual self.”⁷ A question that you might entertain is whether “no one remains in it permanently” during waking hours is be true of all future cultures?

Various experiments and exercises will turn up as we move along that relate to this question, but meantime back to the foothills. It seems best, for realism regarding our previous or future puttering, to keep thinking of the challenge as it is faced in a classroom context. In my experience, it can be weeks - with three class hours per week - of classroom fun, backed by home exercises. Let us just focus on the single simple

⁷*Insight*, 385[411].

exercise of moving your spectacles up and down or on and off. You are looking at the room, a friend, a distant view. The moving makes the view or the friend fuzzy? You may say, “no, not fuzzy: appear fuzzy”. Getting round that direction of musing requires a lift of attention, a twist of focus. Try that immediately here and now. You are looking at the page, on a computer screen or on a printed page. Take off you glasses, or if good-sighted, don a borrowed pair. The seen print of these words - words, **words** - is not the same. Your problem is to pause over this, patiently, puzzle-reaching. Pause over the phrase, “the seen print of these words.” What do I mean by this, what might you mean by this? Never mind about the change of font, which was just a gimmick to slow you down. Or was it more?⁸

Just pause and think about what you might mean by the phrase “the seen print”. The variation of position of spectacles varies the seen print, and you get to grips with this as an existential business if you take your self-attentive time. That self-attentive time leads you, but slowly, to some beginnings of an appreciation of the seen print being on the eye-side of your spectacles, indeed of being behind your eyeballs. Are you with me in this? If you are, without having to withdraw from this paragraph for hours of experimentation, then you should be able to recall doing that experimentation earlier in your life. “No one reaches it easily.” There is an invitation here, and I think now of that book *The Invitation* by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, and of this invitation calling you to stand tall and invisible inside-out of Plato’s Cave.

*“I have sent you my invitation,
the note inscribed on the palm of my hand by the fire of living.
Don’t jump up and shout, ‘Yes this is what I want! Let’s do it!’*

⁸I hint at a later challenge represented by linking the two chapters 9 and 20 of the recommended text (see final note in the essay) or the treatment of seeing and language in any text.

Just stand up quietly and dance with me."⁹

The invitation is not mine, but the invitation of "the order of the universe with that order's dynamic joy and zeal."¹⁰ I recall now, in an interview I did with Gadamer, listening to him rise to speak of "the dance of words."¹¹ Here we find ourselves in a deeper, core, dance of words. Where do the words dance?

And which words do I speak of, do you read, do you mean? Certainly the real words, on the page that somehow is there but not out there, dance with rhythms of physics and chemistry, God-formed. Is there some strange sense in which "God writes this world with them"¹²? So we find ourselves identifying ourselves as being in the realm of prayer, since we are "questing in the real." But the question is to locate the seen words as they dance within our eyes. To locate them and to find that they are indeed ourselves, dancing nervously.

And we are making a new beginning. We are, in fact, going to read the single paragraph of *Insight* 464[489] that begins "Study of an organism begins". You may have read it before, indeed many times. I have been reading it for exactly fifty years, still now finding it startling. You may, in a briefer time, get more fully into its shocking meaning. Then you will be able to improve on my puttering here if you come to teach that meaning.

The paragraph is about a flower, but let us stretch to thinking of ourselves,

⁹Oriah Mountain Dreaming, *The Dance. Moving to the Rhythms of Your True Self*, Harper San Francisco, 2001, 1. I quote the first verse of the poem, "The Dance", which begins chapter one: "But Can You Dance?". The full poem is on pp. xiii-xv.

¹⁰*Insight*, 702[722].

¹¹I conducted the interview at York University Toronto in 1979 with the three elders, Gadamer, Lonergan and Voegelin, and can make copies of the video available.

¹²See *Wealth of Self*, the top of page 106, where I am quoting Herman Hesse, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, Penguin, 61. The quotation points back to the perspective touched on in note 2 above.

mobile two-stemmed-flowers, normally moving in the direction of those bumps called eyes.

All along here many of you will have a problem, the one introduced above. Where are the words? Very few of us, even after perhaps a decade with the book *Insight*, are sensitive to the real book not being already out there and the seen book being so plausibly out there in front of my face. That is a problem that calls for a patient dancing with an enlightened partner. The real book *Insight* does not look like the seen book: isn't that odd? Yet we cannot pause directly over that: it lurks in the more complex problem that we are tackling here. So, move elsewhere: to, say, the safety of a powder-room. You find yourself - but do you really find yourself? - looking not at the book, or the words, but at your eyes in a mirror. Notice how strange and tricky that looking is: try looking at each eye with its mirror image! Best just look at your nose? So again there is the odd claim: the seen eyes are not like the real eyes. What, then, are the real eyes like?¹³

We seem, so to speak, to be taking leave of our senses, leaving common sense behind. But I would have us pause over the brilliance of common sense, and of the manner in which "we appeal to the immemorial convictions of common sense."¹⁴ Common sense, when not battered, say, by a reductionist culture, is quite comfortable in calling a spade a spade, and a horse an organism. We are quite comfortable with the notion and the cinema-seeing of a horse on an African plain taking off at a gallop at the sight of a lion.¹⁵ There are sets and aggregates of insights involved in that comfort. We are not shedding them here, but identifying them, and we shall find that this

¹³*Prehumous 2* gives the fullest context for this question.

¹⁴*Insight*, 441[467].

¹⁵We have met this evolutionary puzzle before: it is the problem of the *vis cogitativa* in animals, which we saw blossomed out into problems of the superego in humans. See *Humus 2: Vis Cogitativa*: "Contemporary Defective Patterns of Anticipation."

identification is vastly illuminating. But the identification is the hard work of our present undertaking begins: the flight of the horse from the lion is in a quite different world, even though it “previously was grasped in sensibly presented organs.”

I have quoted now the first and the last few words of that paragraph. What of the journey between, that I suggest is hard work? It is a suggestions that I would like turned into effective persuasion. Notice that I did not say “that I would like to turn”. In the long run, effective - *ut in maiore parte* - persuasion is a matter of the turn that is cyclic collaboration. But we are getting ahead of ourselves here. Let me have a shot at introducing you to the hard work.

It would be an advantage here to have to hand a decently-sized text on vision, on seeing. The text that I am using for the past few years is *Neuroscience. Exploring the Brain*,¹⁶ but any undergraduate text will do.

¹⁶Mark F.Bear, Barry W.Connors, and Michael A.Paradiso, Lippincott Williams and Wilkin, 2001. The text is referred to below as **Neuroscience**.