

Field Nocturnes 7
Recycling *Insight* 464[489]

As I remarked near the conclusion to the last essay, you may well be ready for the small steps of the climb, ready then for *Field Nocturnes 8*, but a final pause of broader reading seems useful.

Why is the reading of this paragraph fascinating, or frustrating, or both at once? Because, as we will glimpse better in our 300 page climb, the paragraph gives a massive compact accurate description of the relatively static phase of biological method.¹ If one has not been engaged in such a procedure, then it is like a map of an unknown territory, or closer to the topic, a compendious preface to a book on the subject. It is, indeed, methodological doctrine² at its most compact. In this, of course, it resembles our companion page, page 250 of *Method in Theology*.

But in the case of that page the methodological doctrine is proleptic: it regards a method that has not emerged. I have occasionally talked of the wonder of **250** in terms of the fantasy of a medieval monk or Beguine sketching in a page something about which Butterfield would later write.

Is **study**³ more like a summary of Butterfield, a summary of what is already being done?

Here we must make a distinction that will lurk valuably over the rest of the efforts in these essays. It is a distinction familiar from Lonergan's writings. Recall the occasions when he wrote or spoke of the human mind: Hume's mind was working in a certain way, but that way clashed with the way he wrote. So, here, we have a

¹I note a parallel with the relatively static phase of a stable economy.

²See *Method in Theology*, 295-8.

³I use the single word occasionally to denote the key paragraph on *Insight* 464[489]. I would add the context of the considerations of stewing at the beginning of chapter 3, "*Haute Vulgarization*", of *Lack in the Beingstalk*.

description of procedure in botanical or neurological studies, but it is a luminous description, one that would clash with the conventional descriptions.

Later we shall use the study of narcissism as an illustration of convention clashing with luminous care, but the first sentence of the essay I use in that reflection is worth quoting here: “The clarification of the concept of ‘narcissism’ is complicated by two parallel and complementary levels of conceptualization of this term.”⁴ The essay contains brilliant suggestions about the nature and study of narcissism, but does this orientation hinder the searching? I would claim that in the long-run it constricts: conceptualism warps searching and murders teaching. Lonergan’s paragraph seeks to bring into self-luminousness the dynamics of searching and teaching.

The problem we are dealing with right through this series is that Lonergan’s seeking and stating were, and still are, quite beyond contemporary culture. Details of this would be too much of a distraction here but a single broad point can be intimated, very existentially.

Skim down the paragraph to the last sentence where there occurs the claim “must be coincident with”. This is an extremely tricky claim. The paragraph begins with the challenge of the climb that occurs in any science, including, as we shall notice later, the science that happens when we seriously read the New Testament. You start, say, with ears and hearing. What are ears, what is hearing? The climb begins, a climb of millennia, and in contemporary learning perhaps a climb of a serious undergraduate course. The climb, phylogenetic or ontogenetic, is the object of Lonergan’s description. History, or just the individual student, scrambles up to the strange laws that are beyond the regular goings-on of the two lowest sciences. What are these strange laws? That is a \$64,000 question of our reading project. But what, here and now, do you think of these laws and their coincidence with the original question, What are ears, What is hearing?

The request is a request for existential honesty. At the end of the course, say, on

⁴Otto F. Kernberg, “Narcissism”, in *Introducing Psychoanalytic Theory*, edited by Sander L. Gilman, Bruner/ Mazel, New York, 1982, 126.

the human senses, how do you spontaneously think or say about hearing? Never mind about the examination, in which perhaps, with multiple guessing, you were up there among the A students.

You marked off answers in terms of Cochlear divisions, Corti's rods, stereocilia. But what, in the heat of the hunt - or alas, the non-hunt of short-term memory - is or was your stand on the question, What is hearing? Range around, alone or with a friend, on the issue, "at pains not to conceal tracks but to lay all cards on the table."⁵ Spread your interest: what, after all, do you mean by such words as *seeing*, *dreaming*, *neurosis*, *phantasm*? That last word might stop you in your concealed tracks?!

I could spell out the problem in terms of those two simple words, *after all*. After all what?

What was the real climb in the classroom? I have to hand a text for grade 12 biology and quote the beginning of the section on cell structure. "This section describes the cell structures you are required to know. In addition to knowing the structures you are required to identify them in both diagrams and electron micrographs. It is also necessary that you are able to identify the functional interrelationships of cell structures. You will do this interrelating in more detail as you work through the course."⁶ One does not expect much more, in our culture, from the memory-control of teens, but one can toddle on into med-school, and generate patterns of control that simply prolong lower-school abuses. What of the higher laws of the sympathetic nervous system? Well, we can pin down how it works: "the behaviors related to it are summarized in the puerile (but effective) mnemonic used by medical students, called the four Fs: fight, flight, fright, and sex."⁷ But what appreciation of the higher laws lies

⁵*Method in Theology*, 193.

⁶Kenneth V.Strong, *The Biology 12 Handbook*, LPL Publishers, Vancouver, B.C., 1997, 11.

⁷**Neuroscience**, 509.

behind the students' - or the teachers', or the researchers' - spontaneous answers, to the questions, What is it flight, fright, fighting, f....?

Is our culture surviving on a *haute vulgarization* that is meshed with technical talk and tinkering? How many people genuinely "grasp the laws of the higher system"? But the issue at the moment is our grasp, and our grasp of the absence of grasp and the conventions of reading that exclude that grasp. "Most of all, what is lacking is a knowledge of all that is lacking and only gradually is that knowledge acquired."⁸

The present audience, mainly Lonergan students and mainly Christians, might profit from an anecdote regarding the reading of the New Testament and the meaning of the Trinity. I recall a learned theologian asking me about what difference the reading of Lonergan's two volumes on Trinitarian theology made to reading the New Testament. He was surprised when, by us pattering round with the question, he arrived at some glimpse of what I wrote of above. There is the move up from the described organism of the New Testament faith, quite familiar to both of us. But then, for him, came the shock of that other world that is, or should be, the grasp of the laws of the higher system, the tripersonal circumincessional system that "must be coincident with" the familiar described goings-on of new testament organisms. That other world of the field can, sadly and systematically, be excluded by the children of light.

How does one, do we, does history, battle that exclusion? We circle back to the question of the queen of questioning that held Lonergan's attention all through his life.⁹ We need some "appropriate institutional organizational of the new and higher collaboration,"¹⁰ to establish the longer cycle of incline.

So we must balance two aspects of the challenge in the present little venture. We, some small subgroup interested in following Lonergan's leads in this single

⁸*Insight*, 536[559].

⁹A useful source for brooding is *Phenomenology and Logic*, 126-7, 130.

¹⁰*Insight*, 723[744].

paragraph, must also keep our eyes on the how-answer of Lonergan and history. The how-answer is the emergence of an omnidisciplinary global cyclic collaboration at the heart of which is the brutal honesty of page 250 of *Method in Theology*. Only thus can history battle effective the exclusion of questioning and questing. As we move along through the self-searching to which *Insight* 464[489] invites us, we need to note and notice how that self-searching is not adequate, may even be effete.¹¹ So, we shall turn occasionally, perhaps even eventually habitually, to those larger issues. Those larger issues are not outside our struggle. Without the communal effort of Lonergan's followers to step out of the present line of decline, to step into seriousness about both our pages of interest, some few of us may well reach the lonely joy of higher laws both of particular disciplines and of cyclic collaboration, but we will not have reached as a community the beauty, unity and statistical effectiveness of the cyclic law of emergence for which the cosmos groans in each garden.

¹¹It is worthwhile to put together the comments of *Method in Theology*, 99 and 350-1 with those on *haute vulgarization* in *Collected Works*, volume 6, 121,155.