

Field Nocturne 15

A Context for Cell-searching Soul-searching

As I mentioned in the first note to *Field Nocturne 14*, this essay is about context, or as I use to write usefully, Kontext.¹ I may well give the appearance of repeating myself in these next essays, although I write from a fresh context, as a fresh Kontext. So I wish us to pause over the meaning of context, in order to avoid my repeating myself in a manner luminous to you, as if I was just vamping up previous writings round and about aggreformism, which is my convenient name for an updated versions of Aristotle's hylemorphism.

There are many contexts that might be drawn upon in moving along helpfully here. One that I find appealing is Appendix B (pp. 324-326) of Lonergan's *Phenomenology and Logic*, already mentioned.² I included that few pages in the book for various reasons. There is the obvious reason of completeness: the pages were with the notes for the lectures of 1957. But there is also the reason that the mood and the pointings of these few pages are towards a larger push regarding "the experience of science", a push that in fact was, sadly, not followed up by Lonergan.

This last point is worth pausing over. In 2008 it becomes increasingly clear to me that in some way the Halifax lectures of 1958 were an end to Lonergan's climb, his hylemorphic climb if I might so call it. The beginning of that climb goes way back to his first essay in Heythrop, on the *Vis Cogitativa*,³ reaching a massively refined perspective

¹*Kontext* is a simple linguistic device to draw attention to the fact that it is the subject that is the **context**. Later I shall use boldface with certain words to convey the same nudge: so, 'what' is just a question-word, with question mark omitted; **what** is you.

²See note 3 of the Previous *Field Nocturnes*.

³The essay is titled "The Form of Mathematical Inference," (Lonergan, *Shorter Papers, Complete Works*, vol. 7, University of Toronto Press, 2007) but the dominant theme is the *vis cogitativa*.

in “Finality, Love Marriage.”⁴ Talking of that essay and of his climb to me in his room in St. Mary’s Hall, Boston College - it was in the late 1970s - he remarked to me that “I had emergent probability then”. And he had also, in that essay, a very precise expression of the object of our interest, given in the Thomist terms that enter his “statement of metaphysics” in those late chapters of *Insight*.⁵ Why not add it here?: “A concrete plurality of lower entities may be the material cause from which a higher form is educed.”⁶ The entities of that article are present and presented in their acts, A_{ij} , in chapter 15 of *Insight*: they are phenomenologically present and presented as events, E_{ij} , in *Insight* chapter 8 We are going to be interested, from *Field Nocturne* 16 on, in that phenomenological presence, and that indeed in the peculiar sense given to human interest by the move forward into the third form of generalized empirical method,⁷ or what I identify elsewhere as the fourth stage of meaning.⁸ But we shall get to these refinements later. It is useful, however, to bear in mind as a luminous general attitude, that until one takes willingly the position offered on *Insight* 388[413], one is battling along in a rather rarified phenomenology.⁹

My suggestion is that, not only did Lonergan not return to that rarefied phenomenology, but he was subtly invited by his existential context not to bring it to fruition in the fuller metaphysics that bubbles in the dense pages of chapter 15, section 7, a central paragraph of which is our interest throughout these 41 *Field Nocturnes*. He

⁴Lonergan, *Collection*, 17-52.

⁵See the beginning of section 7 of chapter 15 of *Insight*.

⁶“Finality, Love, Marriage”, *Collection*, 20.

⁷See *Joistings* 21, “Research, Communications, Stages of Method”.

⁸See *Field Nocturnes CanTower* 44, “The Fourth Stage of Meaning”.

⁹A “positioned” phenomenology is outside the scope of present phenomenology. It is the achievement of *Insight*, but it needs refinements and details. See further, *Field Nocturne* 37, “Desire Undistanced: Light”.

was not permitted by circumstances, so to speak, to fatten those feelers into a massive heuristic transposition of the human sciences. In other- and I hope helpful - words, he was not supported in his urge “to live out the finest”¹⁰ that seemed to be in the air he breathed in, transformatively, in that pressured summer of 1953. He was breathing a rarer air than Tensing and Hillary that summer, and he breathed it alone on his Everest. Where was he? Two quotations are our interest here, and those two quotations serve to express an answer to the question of his Everest air. The first quotation is from almost the halfway mark of the pinnacle stuff of chapter 16 of *Insight*. “So it comes about that the extroverted subject visualizing extensions and experiencing duration gives place to the subject oriented to the objective of the unrestricted desire to know and affirming beings differentiated by certain conjugate potencies, forms, and acts grounding certain laws and frequencies.”¹¹

What a come-about, a dancing in the dark with his 49-year-old fingers on his elemental typewriter! And he goes on, to words of agony about thus freeing the “basic enterprise of human intelligence.”¹² He might well have written “I am getting on nicely in the dark,”¹³ but Joyce was not in his ballpark. Nor was Samuel Beckett, though years later I was to delight in finding his heavy marginal markings, in *Loneragan’s Challenge to the University and the Economy*, beside my quotation from Beckett: “Here is direct expressions - pages and pages of it. And if you don’t understand it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. This rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I call a continuous process of copious

¹⁰Loneragan, “Mission and Spirit”, *A Third Collection*, 27.

¹¹*Insight*, 514[537].

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London, 1958, 34.

intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of a stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension"¹⁴

At all events, I would have you pause with me over, and perhaps even within, that come-about sentence, a sentence which is a life-sentence, but still precarious, all the more so in the absence of a community such as the Tower Community of a much later time and meaning. "When some other pattern is dominant, then the self of our self-affirmation seems quite different from one's actual self."¹⁵ So, Lonergan leaves his sixth floor room of Bayview's Regis College and eats in an already-out-there refectory with an already-out-there-always community, and later that year leaves his room to be luggaged to Rome. What happened the come-about man?

But our interest now is what is happening to us, within the sentence, this life-sentence, this life-naming sentence? Perhaps what has happened to me has happened to you, could happen to you, and to all of you - with probability's zeal - in these next generations, generators-to-be, statistically bell-curve bent towards a normal law Tower presence?

What happened to me? Is it clear to you, perhaps, that I am on page 250 of *Method*, and if so, perhaps it is not unclear to you that we are, or might be, on the same page? Whether we are is not a happenstance, but a stance of yours, a decision problem like the positioning of *Insight* 388[413], but now a positioning regarding entry into the invariant cycle of a new Global Metasystem.

What happened to me? I was lucky in its profoundest sense, coming to philosophy from mathematical science, as Husserl might have done in 1882, since he

¹⁴S.Beckett, "Dante Bruno. Vico Joyce", *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work in Progress*, A New Directions Book, New York, 1972, 13 (first published in 1929).

¹⁵*Insight*, 385[411].

had a powerful schooling in serious sums: but, in my view, he was misled.¹⁶ I was led, after graduate work in mathematical science, including the Calculus of Variation, to Thomas' view of puzzling and Lonergan pointers to self. I have left, here and there, only a patchwork record of my positional narrative, not then adequate for a future normative performance of page 250's directives. Here I add another patch: it is a key patch regarding what I call **come-about consciousness**. It is a patch that belongs to the "further objectification of horizon" of that page got by my "indicating the view that would result from developing what he has regarded as position."¹⁷ That position, on **comeabout**, is to be a future component in the standard model, *per se* so in dialectic and foundations, but operatively luminous in the other specialties through the pressure of recycling.. How is this normativity to occur? Earlier I described the dialectic process with, say, ten participants.¹⁸ If there is a single dialectician in the process who holds to this normativity, then it has to be faced by the other dialecticians in that "final objectification of horizon when the results of the foregoing process are themselves assembled, completed, compared, reduced, classified, selected, when positions and counter-positions are distinguished, when positions are developed and counterpositions are reversed."¹⁹

Can you imagine the flourish of fingers and neural fibers as Lonergan finished that brilliant page? You might even think of him as Gould, hand in air, singalong. What a sad school of followers, with the page still not operatively read.

The operative reading is a former topic, but now our focus is on the other page, *Insight* 464[489], and our position and poise reading that other page. When, then, THEN, is that come-about consciousness? Obviously - I hope it is obvious - I cannot tell

¹⁶*Lack in the Beingstalk*, chapter 4, deals with the issue.

¹⁷*Method in Theology*, 250, line 26.

¹⁸See section 1.5 of Cantower 8, "Slopes: An Encounter".

¹⁹*Method in Theology*, 250, lines 30-33.

you: I can only point, or invite, up the slope. My own climb was shockingly slow. Indeed, a serious sense of comeabout consciousness was a thing only of my early seventies, and I suspect that you wont even find, in my writings, a reference to the sentence, “so it comes about...” before 2002. There were suspicions, yes, and I struggled towards some notion of “protopossession” in Cantower 9 of that year. But controlling the imaging by giving dominance to symbolisms of the chemical in the cosmic story: that was and is a slow struggle of symbolic lifting away from cosy containment in a large vibrant sunset windhover world. Still, Cantower 9, “Position, Poosition, Protopossession” does give the sense of a decade or more of relentless climbing, up up, in in, beyond in, to the position; arts and crafts of innervating twists, randomly, to a surround-sound psychic chemo-grip on self.

And, yes, this talk is descriptive, and elusively so. How do we get beyond this? Is there a parallel in physics-talk in terms, not a tensions and tugs and twists, but of genetic openings and sequences? Is there a parallel with the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, where talk of thoughts is scarcely English and theorems symbolize the emergences of deeper incompletenesses and fuller layered anticipations?

But let me draw back from these remote subtleties to bring in the other quotation that I had promised, a comment on the nature of context from appended fragments of the Verbum articles. The comment, eventually, will find its way into a massive study (about)³ contexts,²⁰ but here I skim along suggestively. Further, the quotation would best be considered in the wholeness of its paragraph, starting with the suggestion that “many concepts are needed to express one insight” and moving slowly to an appreciation of the claim “if one starts out to determine the nature of intellect by examining concepts taken in isolation, one almost inevitably ends up with a mere

²⁰See *Method in Theology*, the index under *contexts*. See also, in *A Third Collection*, the essay, “The Ongoing Genesis of Methods”. On the odd word (about)³, see *Christ in History*, a website book, chapter 2, section 2.

logical machine dignified with the name of intellect.”²¹ But let me home in on the point of interest by taking a piece from the middle of the paragraph:

“The conceptualization of understanding is, when fully developed, a system and one must advert to the implication of systematic knowledge in the Aristotelian and Thomist *quid quid est* if one would grasp the precise nature of the concept; the concept emerges from understanding, not an isolated atom detached from all context, but precisely as part of a context, loaded with the relations that belong to it in virtue of a source which is equally the source of other concepts.”²²

The quotation can lead to rich and astonishing reflection on intellect’s dynamic and destiny, but here I can only draw attention to a couple of pointers. First, we have been thinking about come-about consciousness: that is a context of methodological adulthood. Spelled out fully, the meaning includes integral consciousness luminous to itself. “Spelled out fully”: what could that possibly mean, especially if we think in terms of incompleteness theorems of human minding? My spontaneous tendency is to turn immediately to the wonders of beatific incompleteness, but our focus is on pilgrim minding-unity in the Tower of the fourth stage of meaning. And within that focus I would have you attend to the on-going genesis of such a unified minding. That on-going genesis is integral: the little “concept emerges from understanding precisely as part of a context”, lifting that entire context. This gives fresh meaning to Lonergan’s claim, “all we know is somehow with us ... it lurks behind the scene”²³

The lurking is to be luminous, lifting nerves into a context of joy. “Skin-within

²¹I am quoting here from the beginning and end of the relevant paragraph, which runs from 237 to 238 of *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, University of Toronto Press, 1997.

²²*Ibid.* You might find a pedagogical help here to go back now to what you made out of the definition of the circle of *Insight* ... and muse over the problem of context by attending to what Lonergan says in PL..

²³*Insight*, the conclusion to chapter 9.

are molecules of cos-mi-c-all, cauled, calling."²⁴

The single point merges with the limit of puzzling of the past page about the previous quotation. In that merging there is an intimation of the mindingbody conceiving of the mind-body solution to the emergence of life within a fulsome context that we now can only glimpse in a petscan, arlight, darkly. The glimpse has to be shared by a community, a Tower Community, so that some echo would spread to the streets from the angels of the churches of ten thousand villages.

Very obviously, "we are not there yet."²⁵

This essay, to recall my first paragraph above, has been spread out before you within so that the next essays would escape the appearance of my simply repeating myself. But you may be one (of, I suspect, many) for whom the words "before your within" make little sense. Is there a possibility of me, not simply, but complexly, repeating myself, indeed repeating myself at length rather than compendiously, so that the next generation would lift us out of the "provincial routine of familiar ideas", "the jellyfish amorphism of scepticism", the subtle muddles of post-modernism? Well, let us see, seek, seethe, in amoebaeian ways.²⁶ Let us try again and perhaps fail better.

²⁴I quote from my *Lack in the Beingstalk*, (Axial Publications, 2007), the conclusion of chapter 2, where the issue of growth and enlightenment is raised in the context of Patrick Kavanagh's reflections on the Shakespeare of *Pericles*. I am pointing here to a still a still larger context of luminous control, related to the on-going study of the neurodynamics of minding. There were hints regarding this in the reflection on words at the end of *Field Nocturnes CanTower 42*.

²⁵*Phenomenology and Logic*, 20: the beginning of another powerful paragraph.

²⁶There is an obvious pun, as you might suspect: for the amoeba takes the stage in the next essay. But one must advert to the precise meaning of amoebaeian and sublimate it into a view, a context, of new patterns of conversations that incarnate the Childout Principle of education: "When teaching children biology one is teaching children children". Amoebaeian has to do with responsive singing, with successive strophes of verse dialogue. It is to be contexts away from the present destructive inhuman texts about us and the little amoeba.