

Field Nocturne 19

Molecules of Willows and Women, of Mice and Men

“The keys to. Given!
 A way a lone a last a
 a loved a long
 the riverrun past Eve and Adam”¹

What are the keys to coping with the given?² Or should I not say rather, **What** is the key to coping with the given. And there is, as I hope you expected, no question mark. I am inviting you forward with me to what about your whatting about the molecules of you.³ They are not molecules of you, of course, in the strict sense: they, as non-they, are you. “If the laws of the chemical compound are observed within the living cell, it would seem that chemical compounds exist, not only in their free state, but also within cells”⁴ and mice and women.

There are many aspects of this foundational topic that need present nudgings, but my pragmatics of foundational pedagogy leads me to hold to two: there is the

¹James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, the conclusion and the beginning.

²I am thinking here, of course, of those curious two pages of *Insight* on “the given” that can so easily be slipped over: *Insight* chapter 13, section 4. I suspect that it is worth recalling for most of my readers, that at that stage in the book the reader is not invited to luminously take a positional stand. A perusing of the last paragraph of this chapter 13 helps the focus.

³It is difficult for me not to add footnote leads. You perhaps recall meeting about in the complex form of (about)³ before? Then your whatting is reaching from a fuller context of the views of all other significant whatters on the about that we are about. We are, THEN, talking about the standard model of UV + GS.

⁴*Insight*, 258[283]. I draw your attention to the ambiguity of the normal word observe. Here it means “are verified, are obeyed by”. Our effort in this essay, curiously, are directed against the lurking in you of the bent towards imagining that the laws, or the cells, or the molecules, are observed, in the other sense of observed.

aspect that is related to the struggle with the meaning of the text mentioned in note 2 above, and there is the aspect that is brought out by the quotation from Richard Feynman that follows immediately.⁵

“To illustrate the power of the atomic idea, suppose that we have a drop of water a quarter of an inch on the side. If we look at it very closely we see nothing but water - smooth continuous water. Even if we magnify it with the best optical microscope available - roughly two thousand times - then the water drop will be roughly forty feet across, about as big as a large room, and if we looked rather closely we would still see relatively smooth water.... magnify it two thousand times again. Now the drop of water extends about fifteen miles across, and if we look very closely at it we see a kind of teeming, something which no longer has a smooth appearance - it looks like a crowd at a football game as seen from a very great distance. In order to see what this teeming is all about, we magnify it another two hundred and fifty times and we see something similar to figure 1-1.

⁵The quotation is from note 14 of *Cantower 27*, and is an extract from the first volume of Feynman’s 3-volume *Lectures on Physics*, extract from the beginning of the second section, “Matter is made of atoms”, of his first chapter. It is worth noting here that that *Cantower* is the first of five *Cantowers* that present a paralleling of *Insight’s* first five chapters with the first five chapters of Feynman’s first volume. The parallel helps towards a more serious reading of self and *Insight*. The present essay points to a much deeper seriousness, a lift of self to a quite new strange reading that is to be standard for those of the Tower community of later times. The next essay will pick up on Feynman’s image of water to carry us forward to problems of imaging a cilia or an amoeba.

This is a picture of water magnified a billion times, but idealized in several ways.

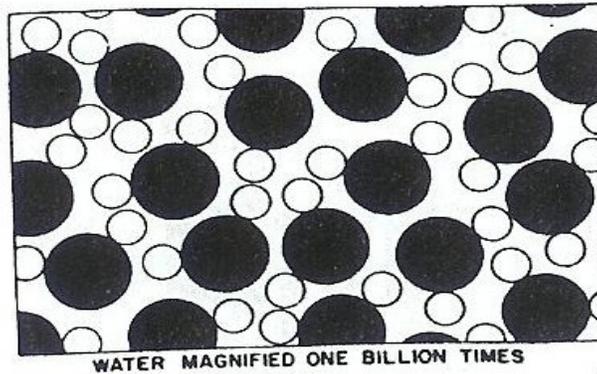


Figure 1-1

In the first place, the particles are drawn in a simple manner with sharp edges, which is inaccurate. Secondly, for simplicity, they are sketched almost schematically in a two-dimensional arrangement, but of course they are moving around in three dimensions. Notice that there are two kinds of 'blobs' or circles to represent the atoms of oxygen (black), and hydrogen (white), and that each oxygen has two hydrogen tied to it. The picture is idealized further in that the real particles in nature are continually jiggling and bouncing, turning and twisting around one another. You will have to imagine this as a dynamic rather than a static picture. Another thing that cannot be illustrated in a drawing is the fact that the particles are 'stuck together' - that they attract each other.... The whole group is 'glued together', so to speak. On the other hand, the particles do not squeeze through each other. If you try to squeeze two of them too close together, they repel". There is some great pedagogy here, but are there flaws? Go figure."⁶

⁶Useful here: *Quodlibet 16*, "Seeing Water in a slice of Brain".

The diagram from the Feynman text is one illustration that suits our present searching but you may find other diagrams more helpful, more - literally - to your taste. You may have joy in dealing with a diagram of the amoeba and that dealing certainly is closer to our basic text, **study**. Or you may find a simple personal sketching of the willow to be a pleasant presence here. But where and what is that pleasant presence of willow or windhover or whatever? We have the imagination-boggling text of Lonergan as a handy context for the question, the what-skin presence: "No doubt, I can imagine the plant as seen, as related to my sense, as described. But if I apply the full principle of equivalence and prescind from all observers, then I also prescind from all observables. As the electron, so also the tree, in so far as it is considered as a thing itself, stands within a pattern of intelligible relations and offers no foothold for imagination."⁷

I am not venturing now into the type of discussion of the imaging of water mentioned in note 6. I would wish us to go elsewhere, indeed offering not a foothold for imagination but a headhold of imagination. Indeed, you might find it useful now to note that I am beginning where section 4 of *Insight* chapter 13 ends: "the pure desire to know regarding the flow of empirical consciousness as the materials for its operation."⁸ By the end of our struggle - for it is not just yours but mine too as I seek to climb - within the pointers of this essay, we will be able to read that conclusion with startling freshness. And when to expect that end? I recall the saying of Camus: it takes ten years to get an idea. I might go further of course, to point to the eschatological reach, no longer a struggle but a gently expanding surprise of the pure desire regarding a circumincessionally-entwined empirical consciousness, a pleasantly expansive awesome omnipresence.

But I would like us pilgrims to rest herenow, herewow, in the problem of the

⁷*Insight* 250[275].

⁸*Insight* 383[407].

pleasant or the terrifying presence that is my what regarding what is given herenow.⁹ Screen, print, willow sketch or water diagram, all are neuroshapings that you and I have to battle to bring towards luminosity of presence. We are reaching for our ontic selves, the **what** that is poorly named “ the subject as subject”. “What is meant by the subject as subject? When I look at the paper before me, there is present to me black on white. That could not be present to me without my being present. But my being present is ‘present’ in another sense. The word ‘present’ here is equivocal. I am not present in the sense in which this paper is present to me. I am not present in the sense of being presented to myself. I am present in the sense of necessarily being there if anything is presented to me. And that is not present as presented but present as what other things are presented to, that is the subject as subject.”¹⁰

Linguistic feedback in a later age will charm us, you and I in our lonesomeness, into each selve’s solitary skin-light and skin-delight of being skin-tentionally all, and also each other, Jack and Jill, immortal diamonds, and we will have moved, in a post-Joycean specialization of talk “from the global and awkward to the expert and precise. It would simplify enormously if, from the beginning of human speech and writing, there existed and were recognized the full range of specialized modes of expression . But the fact is that the specializations had to be invented, and the use of the inventions presuppose a corresponding development of prospective audiences or readers.”¹¹

By what special twists of talk might I get this print so into your skin as to be luminously there, and with the print there, nowthere, an onwardness of your continued fumbling then, THEN, with any of the various diagrams? The continued fumbling my be anywhere on the road to, or refinedly beyond, the “comeabout” consciousness of

⁹The word given in this sentence echos loosely the problems and the meanings of the discussion of *Insight* chapter 3 section 4

¹⁰Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 314.

¹¹*Insight*, 572[594].

which I wrote earlier. "A man who understood everything might proceed from his grasp of metaphysical analysis through its determination in appropriate sciences to the nature and occurrence of his own sensations and acts of imagining," but I suspect that you are not near to making that claim. I suspect, indeed, that this print calls you out to the very real screen or book, thus battling very successfully my invitation to your climbing to counter-control the control of "any prior 'existential' state."¹²

That little phrase just quoted brings you round about into the challenge that is at the heart of the book *Insight*. It is within the second of the three descriptive specifications of his position by Lonergan. It is his offer to you of a choice, and you may read it now more properly - if you are reaching to join the Tower Community - as belonging to the second half of page 250 of *Method in Theology*. Perhaps - but only from reading and re-reading yourself - you can come to sense, to sniff a little better, that your first, or even fortieth, reading of that challenge was not up to snuff? Indeed, you may have read those conditions from an out-there book, evident real print of the world dictated by a prior existential state, and even passed on in reading that out-there print to see what else the man has to say.

Do I intrigue you or terrify you? Or perhaps just baffle you? The simple point is that you may well have misread the section in *Insight* chapter 13 on the given, which is a stepping stone to the dark light, dark night, of the sole position. The entire book was an effort - poor indeed, with little linguistic feedback - to climb into your what-self so as to bring you to this terrible is-self. That terrible is-self is a what-self that is a "pure desire regarding the flow of empirical consciousness".

And what more am I to write here? I recall, as I have done many times in other contexts, Lonergan pacing his little room in the Bayview Regis College - probably in the summer of 1966 - saying "what am I to do? I cannot put all of *Insight* into chapter one of *Method*". So, I would make three useful practical points here.

¹²*Insight*, 388[413].

First, you will find talk in the new series that follow, indeed in *Field Nocturnes CanTower 41*, of collaborative conversations that may occur in the later essays *Field Nocturnes CanTower 42-117*. Such a possibility is open to you, and it is only one of such possibilities: you may find a colleague, a Jack or a Jill, who is willing to hold your hand in front of your face. “What does Jack know when he looks at his hand? What does Jill know when she looks at hers? Two answers are possible, so Jack may say that his hand is out there in front of his face, and Jill may say that her hand at least *seems* to be out there in front of her face.”¹³ If you are both genuine in the slow struggle then you find that both answer are lurking and working in your neuroskinned whatness. Might you climb together, so that you both disappear? “If I am asking whether mice and men really exist, I am not answering the question when I talk about images of mice and men, concepts of mice and men, or the words, mice and man.”¹⁴ Can you imagine - but I mean **think** and **is, is-to-be as a commitment** - a Tower of Able Community where the poise is a dominant psychic presence? Which brings me to the second of my pointings.

Secondly, then, THEN, the answer to Lonergan’s question about the content of chapter one of *Method* is the answer **given** - that key word again - by the dynamic invitation of functional collaboration to recycle the book *Insight*.¹⁵ Thus is the Tower of Able to emerge, a humble workable solution to the problem of Cosmopolis. But my pointing is practical. We need to be patient in these terrible times, 13.7 billion years out but with only 7 million years of whatness on the skin of history. The next two billion years is on the side of the zeal of history’s molecules. We must be “strong enough to

¹³Lonergan, “Cognitive Structure”, *Collection*, University of Toronto Press, 1988, 216-7.

¹⁴“Cognitive Structure”, 213.

¹⁵The Cantower series ends with that invitation as expressed by Lonergan in the note on *Method in Theology*, 153. See *Field Nocturnes CanTower 117*.

refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though we have to wait.”¹⁶

Thirdly, there is the challenge, to be met by some few crazy strong women and men, of personally recycling *Insight*. Are you one of those? Then the challenge includes battling with your commitments and probably with your surrounding colleagues, even perhaps with friend Jack or Jill, for space and time to climb. But at least you could take time off now to go back to paragraph one of the first chapter of *Insight*, armed and disarmed by the phrase “pure desire regarding the flow of empirical consciousness” to find in some strange freshness the print-presence of an invitation to littleness, a key to given, within your neuroskin regard, a regard which is not a regard at all but a guarding of self’s story and history’s being.

¹⁶Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning”, *Collection*, 245.