

**Field Nocturne 29**  
**Beginagain Awake**

The night before a colectomy operation, Lonergan, in his late seventies, propped up in bed, was in good humour, chortling about capitalized initial letters of English names in psychology. He talked about the importing of these capitals from the normal German convention of capitalizing nouns. This essay is about taking the capitals out of English nouns in a way that gives them respectability and at the same time locates us humbly in the infanthood of humanity. The **Id** becomes just an *id quod*, or indeed named something less pompous that would open us to find out just what realities are to be investigated by the “study of the organism” called psychology or sociology.

But this essay is about too many topics that need such treatment. A parallel may help. Consider the “definition” of the circle given in the first chapter of *Insight*: “locus of coplanar points equidistant from a centre.”<sup>1</sup> This is, indeed, a capital definition within Euclid: should it be capitalized? Is this It, ID? Well, no: the circle is not The Circle. Rather it is a small piece of geometry, Euclidean for a start, that involves secondary determinations of geometric meanings in some defined geometry, that indeed involves in its understanding a “comprehensive grasp of the whole subject.”<sup>2</sup> of sequences and networks of geometries. Is there a way in which my parallel cuts very

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<sup>1</sup>*Insight*, 7[31]. Note that the word *definition* above is within inverted commas. Why? Because Lonergan is using that word loosely: a topic we get back to in the following *Field Nocturne*.

<sup>2</sup>Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 357. Is there a way in which my parallel cuts very close to a conventional reading of *Insight* that would make the circle into **The Circle**? This page give sober leads to the larger view.”A Geometer understands the whole of Euclid, he can tell you where the key propositions are, and prove all the propositions that follow from a set of axioms. He ‘s got the whole thing in his intellectual paws, so to speak” See also Lonergan, *Verbum: word and Idea in Aquinas*, 238, an important text on this topic, but I give here only a nudge from it: “the concept emerges from understanding, not an isolated atom detached from all context, but precisely as part of a context”.

close to a conventional reading of *Insight* that would make the circle into **The Circle**? The page referred to below in that note gives sober leads to a larger view." A Geometer understands the whole of Euclid, he can tell you where the key propositions are, and prove all the propositions that follow from a set of axioms. He 's got the whole thing in his intellectual paws, so to speak" Study of geometry: Euclidean, Riemannian, whatever, is altogether easier than study of human organisms in their primary and secondary determinations. So, of course, is physics, and chemistry, etc ... all the way up in the scale of difficulty. Understanding the plant is a vastly more difficult enterprise than understanding the particle, but infinitely simpler - literally<sup>3</sup> - than the study of persons.

Well, there you have it: my excuse! If you recall the final note of *Field Nocturne 14*, you will remember that I was already in trouble there with my project of helping us along in the reading of the paragraph named **study**. I was referring forward in that note, but the troubles were bubbling earlier. How were we to move along in understanding hearing - whether as students, or as the advancing scientists to which the paragraph is more properly addressed - without being able to get to grips with the dynamics of bending hairs? Yet on I went in the *Field Nocturnes* to more complex areas of the bending of mind around nerves, the **whathere** of you with print on your brain, and the puzzle of its strange givenness and its strange neuropresence. This, I would warrant, was strange to you, unless you had been already decades into this oddness.<sup>4</sup> So I introduced you to Merleau-Ponty, in his dedicated last years of interest in this oddness. Pause now: turn your **whathere** to the phrases bedded down in you brain-

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<sup>3</sup>The issue here is the nature of the exigence (see the index to *Phenomenology and Logic* under *exigence*) that is the apex of comic striving, of "that order's dynamic joy and zeal" (*Insight*, 700[722]). Is the apex actually ineffable? and the order's dynamic joy - *jouissance* (see the index to **Colette** under *jouissance*) - an absolute properly-unbounded lonesomeness? "The pure desire to know is ineffable": Lonergan's view, expressed in *The Incarnate Word*, thesis 12. Add the issues raised in the final footnote, 20, below.

<sup>4</sup>More on this in *Field Nocturne 30*, "Onwords".

mesh: "The puzzle of its strange givenness", "interest in this oddness". Is the puzzle, the interest, an ultimate oddness?<sup>5</sup> A **whatthere** digesting itself? No wonder Merleau-Ponty took thought to touch, and touching touchings, and reached for a thesis of reversibility: was he battling with the suspicion of a mysterious identity?

But certainly he was battling gallantly, and this perhaps is my basic point in this short essay. I have raised questions for volumes to be written in a new culture. I have raised these questions in a manner that leads us to read the fifth word of study in a fresh way: or should I not rather write, recalling Colette, in a flesh way? "Study of the organism **begins** ...." But the beginning needs to be not only gallant but also strategic. When did the study of the human organism begin? That is not the issue here: the issue is that the study was possessed by a great deal of over-reach and of over-stretched description in this past century. And part of that study is method, also a zone of muddled over-reaching. Where are we to re-begin, without losing the wheat, and without suffering the chaffed mix to grow on messily?

"Since science is the certain knowledge of things through their causes - something that is not very easy or very quickly acquired by human beings - there is an *initial* stage in the development of a science in which the causes are completely unknown, a *final* stage in which the causes are known with certainty, and many *intermediate* stages in which the knowledge of causes gradually increases."<sup>6</sup> But the sting comes a few pages later in that text: "*Only in the intermediate scientific stage are relations divided into predicamental and transcendental, and even in that state such a division is not very suitable.*"<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, *not very suitable* is not very suitable as a designation. Think, for example, of the destructiveness of present economics with its complex statistics built on the sand

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<sup>5</sup>See note 11 below, with its pointers back to the quotations from **Burke**.

<sup>6</sup>Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, 719.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 725. Italics his.

of faulty description, and its fallout of a disastrous mess of global ill-being. Is, then, present economics to be considered as just not very suitable? So, better to use, instead of the negative “not very suitable” the single word “perverse”. And here, again, I am in trouble: for the word *perverse*, in Freud’s treatment of it, slips into the same broad class of perversions.<sup>8</sup>

How are we to avoid such perversions? We are back at the challenges talked of in the first three *Field Nocturnes*. A core long-term feature is an effective global strategy of “self-appropriating the inner parts.”<sup>9</sup> But, tell me, or rather, tell yourself, have we not come some distance towards shaking some personal perversions of inner parts, such as a taking for granted the meaning of “seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting”?<sup>10</sup> So that, for example, hearing is not Hearing, etc? Perhaps, however, you are only nominally released from your perversion: in your heartiness, you knew and know all along what hearing is. And perhaps you are in good company: is there a perversion operative in Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on touch? Certainly there is a sad cultural

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<sup>8</sup>I recall again that third volume of Kristeva, **Colette**, and the two sections that begin chapter 5: “Freud’s Way: *Pere-version* or *Mere-version*”; “Idealization: Latency and the Superego”. You may recall that I wrote, in *Field Nocturne 2*, of the problem of a cultural superego and its blocking of progress. There is much to be followed up here, but not here.

<sup>9</sup>The title and topic of *Field Nocturne 12*.

<sup>10</sup>*Method in Theology*, 6. The point being made throws light on the fundamental problem of the book, *Method in Theology*, expressed to me as he paced his room in the mid-1960s: “What am I to do? I can’t put all of *Insight* into chapter one.” Had he put all of *Insight* into chapter one, then the words seeing, hearing, etc would be qualified by the second rule of metaphysical equivalence. “It is a rule of extreme importance, for the failure to observe it results in the substitution of a pseudo-metaphysical myth-making for scientific inquiry. One takes the descriptive conception of sensible contents and, without any effort to understand them, one asks for their metaphysical equivalent.” (*Insight*, 505[528]) Instead of putting *Insight* into chapter one, or making *Method* volume two, *Faith and Insight*, as he suggested in a letter of 1952, he wrote a tired patchy descriptive book, grounding quite a bit of metaphysical myth-making among disciples.

perversion eating up his minding when it comes to grappling with his **whathere**.<sup>11</sup>

And so I come to my suggestions about beginnings. It is a matter of care about total initial meanings and their strategic ordering. Perhaps I should halt there, recalling an earlier treatment of the topic in which I remarked, speaking of “Elementary Grammatology,”<sup>12</sup> “the place for a critique of Derrida’s perspective on grammatology is, not in the corner of a brief essay, but in the massive collaborative effort to be described in the fifth section below.”<sup>13</sup> Still, a little more pointing is of value.

I began that section, “Elementary Grammatology”, with a remark of Derrida: “ ... writing is not only an auxiliary in the service of science - and possibly its object - but first, as Husserl in particular pointed out in *The Origin of Geometry*, the condition of the possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity, Before being its object, writing is the condition of the *episteme*.”<sup>14</sup> Might one think of Freud’s elementary sexology having parallel talk, leading to ideal objects? Or might I talk of Freud being

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<sup>11</sup>This is not the place for detailed suggestions. But one might start in the manner suggested in the following footnote, with titles and topics of his table of contents in **The Visible and the Invisible**. The word *interrogation* occurs there four times: his **whattthere**, his underwear, is showing. You might now revisit the quotations, in *Field Nocturne 24*, from the article “Listening to the Abyss”, titled **Burke**: see, in that 24<sup>th</sup> Field Nocturne, notes 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 27.

<sup>12</sup>The title of this section of section 2 of chapter five of *Lack in the Beingstalk*, Axial Publishing, 2007, 137-38. This fifth chapter of the book is, in fact, the rejected (by a reader) original Appendix A to *Phenomenology and Logic*.

<sup>13</sup>Lack in the Beingstalk, 137-38. The fifth section there is a derivation of the functional specialties through an analysis of Husserl’s short essay on geometry. The title of that section points toward the elementary methodology: “A Phenomenology of Titles and Topics”. It is of general applicability. So, one can get quite a distance with it by pondering the initial meanings of ordering literary studies by musing over the title of chapters in R. Wellek and A. Warren’s *Theory of Literature*. (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1970).

<sup>14</sup>Jacques Derrida,, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, 1976, 27.

misled, as Derrida is, by the muddles of a superegotic epistemic culture?<sup>15</sup>

Normal science - if normal spontaneity were not culturally warped - normatively begins with the obvious, and “the obvious is that Husserl the phenomenologist and Goedel the logician both write German.”<sup>16</sup> Might we say somewhat the same about Colette and Melanie Klein and their written French?

There are, then, elementary features of the human talking organism that might be “cleared up”<sup>17</sup> before plunging into the subtleties of either grammar or sexology. Again, I can only appeal here to previous elementary putterings of mine, such as the elementary but key pointing of “Bible, Meaning, Metaphysics”: the writing in the bible, in any language, is initial data on the difficult topic of religious humanity: it is a decent strategic start.<sup>18</sup> Where does it lead? It leads to the structures and the correlations that are diagramed in various places,<sup>19</sup> that pick up on the pointers from the study of Helen Keller given in *Field Nocturne* 26.

But I really am, now, getting round to a fresh and difficult - yet so obvious -

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<sup>15</sup>I introduced the topic of superego in *Field Nocturne* 2, and there also commented on the tensions between neuroscientific and analytic traditions.

<sup>16</sup>*Lack in the Beingstalk*, 138.

<sup>17</sup>I deliberately use this perverse phrase to draw your attention to the massive perversity of the English language with which we live. *Conceptual Analysis* was a title of British philosophy until perhaps they found they were short of concepts, so the name became *Linguistic Analysis*. At all events, the problem was to clarify names or concepts. But what is meant by *clarifying* or *clearing up*? Where does such a misleading description fit into the obvious that is the diagramed process from puzzle to poise?

<sup>18</sup>“Bible, Meaning Metaphysics” is the Appendix to my *Music That Is Soundless*, Axial Publishing, 2005 {1<sup>st</sup> edition 1968}. For a fuller version of the same thesis, with illustrations form a range of languages, see John Benton, *Shaping the Future of Language Studies*, Axial Publications, 2008.

<sup>19</sup>They are available in Appendix A of *Phenomenology and Logic*, and in many places on the Website e.g. *Prehumous* 2, or *Wealth of Self* (1974) 15, 48. They are presented and discussed in relevant detail in the following *Field Nocturne*.

beginning of our study of the study of the organism, plant or peon or pervert. The psychoanalyst converses with the pervert: it would be as well, and towards larger wellness, if the psychoanalyst were luminous about what conversation and talk is. And slowly it will be discovered that talk is normally **whattalk**, and that the deeper wish of the organism is not a death-wish but a life-wish.<sup>20</sup> The discovery is to lead, in later millennia, to a cure beyond present fantasy for the perversions of language, of talk, of the study of the language and the reality of science, of sex, and of love.

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<sup>20</sup>What is this life-wish? The question echos the mood of note 3 above. And it also points to a massive task of reversion in psychology and sociology. One might begin modestly by reconsidering the references to Freud and Jung in the book *Insight* and lifting them (cyclically and over millennia) into [a] the full aggreformic context hinted at here; [2] the context of a larger wishing within the cosmos reaching from Big Bang to Big Clasp; [3]; the apex within the pilgrim state as being the seed of a larger eschatological enterprise. Such a lifting would identify the death-wish in all its interpretations as a perversion of finitude's meaning. All this would give a much larger concrete meaning to Lonergan's heuristic of indeterminate cosmic dynamics: "The unconscious neural base neither means nor wishes in the proper sense of these terms, for both meaning and wishing are conscious activities. But the unconscious neural basis is an upwardly directed dynamism seeking fuller realization, first, on the proximate sensitive level and, secondly, beyond its limitations on higher artistic, dramatic, philosophic, cultural and religious levels." *Insight*, 457[482]