

## Field Nocturne 36

### Desire and Distance

We return now, turn forward, with some further background in the practice and problems of reading **study**, from our venture into **Neuroscience** on the topic of seeing. It would be a mistake to think of the intervening effort, in our culture, as being greatly significant in shifting our understanding of plants or people, or progress in understanding either understandings. But we are nearing the end of our small climb in these essays and it is time to sum up, **up**, but not with **upwords**: that is a culture of the future. The best we can do here is to move along strategically by first tackling the answering of the question, "why is this?", that I posed in *Field Nocturne 32*, and postponed facing there.

Why is Lochlainn a better dialectician in physics than Renaud is in the phenomenology of mind? First, physics is an easier and therefore more developed science. It took four centuries to get on its feet: how long might it take mind-study? Give it perhaps a millennium?

This assertion, I hope, stirs your fantasy, but mixed in there is most likely astonished doubt. Might I move you from doubt to seriously creative fantasy? I do not think so, except in the case of you being a potential evolutionary sports. Yet I should add more pointers, if only for these sporting few.

I am pushing for sympathetic vibes with the notion that both ontogenetic progress - adult growth - and phylogenetic progress, are normatively accelerating dynamics. Might your imagination be helped by the tadpole image? The Axial culture resists that help with vigorous paternalism. Do we not mature in our twenties? Has humanity not come of age?

But back to Lochlainn and Renaud and their four books: there is a little help there. Is Lochlainn better, even apart from the difference of the two sciences? Not a simple point. Let us start with dates, simple biographic stuff. Lochlainn's two books

have dates of publication which approximate end-points of their creative thinking: **LORDawn** (1997) comes after **LORGauge** (1986). His brilliant dialectic work comes a decade after his foundational/systematic work. The brilliance of the dialectic work is grounded in his massive foundational assurance.<sup>1</sup> The simple science of physics has made notable if wobbly progress: some wobbles, like a structured thing-less spacetime, are within the range of commonsense detection when it manages to shake off superposed systems of silliness.<sup>2</sup>

What of Renaud, a brilliant figure in the area of phenomenology? The dates of French appearance for the two books are: 1991 for **RenaudMP** and 1999 for **RenaudDesire**. The first book can be considered as a shot at dialectic which displays implicitly a foundational stance; the second book can be considered foundational or systematic, even though it is titled "introductory". What is the calibre of the second book? The English translators - best quote them fully here - note that "*Desire and Distance* demonstrates, we think, a remarkable originality. Perhaps Barbaras is the first new voice in France since the 1960s. In *Desire and Distance*, Barbaras presents a critique

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<sup>1</sup>I worked with Lochlainn in our graduate year together in mathematics and mathematical physics. He had a spontaneous critical bent, but never ventured seriously into the realms of interiority, although he knew of that perspective from our occasional meetings later. He eventually occupied a chair in the Institute for Theoretical Physics, where Schrödinger had worked. O’Raifeartaigh found his place, with people like Hamilton and Schrödinger, in *Physicists of Ireland. Passion and Precision*, edited by Mark McCartney and Andrew Whitaker, Institute of Physics Publishing, Bristol and Philadelphia, 2003: "Lochlainn.O’ Raifeartaigh 1933-2000" by Siddhartha Sen. A further reflection on his achievements in physics is in note 105 of *Cantower 39*, "Functional Dialectics". His comment on recent theoretic efforts is worth quoting: "The next step in creating a more unified theory of the basic interactions will probably be much more difficult. All the major theoretical developments of the last twenty years, such as grand unification, supergravity, and supersymmetric string theory, are almost completely separated from experience. There is great danger that theoreticians may get lost in pure speculations"(L. O’Raifeartaigh and N.Straumann, "Group Theory: Origins and Modern Developments," *Reviews of Modern Physics* 72 (2000), 15.

<sup>2</sup>For some details of the problems see P. McShane, "Elevating *Insight*. Space-Time as Paradigm Problem", *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 19(2001), 203-29.

of the phenomenological concept of perception. Husserl had defined perception in terms of fulfillment, of a bringing close, and intentionality in terms of need. Thus the phenomenological concept of perception for Barbaras involves no distance. In order to be able to understand the distance that defines perception, intentionality, in turn, must be redefined through desire. This idea - desire and distance - opens the way for a reconsideration of the concept of life, a 'cosmobiology,' as Barbaras says.<sup>3</sup> Yet such a cosmobiology 'is rooted' in a reflection on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy,<sup>4</sup> a reflection presented precisely in *The Being of the Phenomenon*. If we are right, therefore, about the originality of Barbaras's recent thinking, then it is important not to read *The Being of the Phenomenon* as if it were merely another 'secondary source' about Merleau-Ponty."<sup>5</sup>

The full quotation gives food for thought, indeed grist for a later fuller dialectic analysis as sketched on page 250 of *Method in Theology*. And it is as well to recall here that this analysis is to be omnidisciplinary. So, for instance, Renaud is to meet Lochlainn in their disciples' meeting. And it is here that, perhaps, you may best get a sense of the tadpole nature of present phenomenology, psychology, philosophy. The difficulty with these latter is that systems that I named silly above are cancers internal to commonsense and its language: physics presses on mind and language through its revelations. What is revealed in the three latter zones is primarily the dominance of an overreach of rich description.

So, despite his relative innocence of Lonergan's work on Space and Time, Lochlainn would have no serious problem with Lonergan's finding and suggestions, except perhaps with the final section, section 5, on "The Concrete Intelligibility of Space and Time." But then, that short section, with its hilarious start to the final paragraph -

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<sup>3</sup>**RBD**Desire, FR, 163.

<sup>4</sup>See the 'Preface to the English translation.'

<sup>5</sup>**RBD**Desire, xvi. The previous two notes here are in that text: I added only the page in the English edition.

“the answer is easily reached” - is a trouble spot for our entire culture, pointing as it does to the issue of the relation of primary relations to secondary determinations, to an issue then that needs the refinements of the fuller metaphysics that Lonergan wished to state later in the book.<sup>6</sup> As the footnote indicates, the relevant refinements are a topic for later work, work of the next few generations. But we cannot avoid some doctrinal fantasy here. We are within the discomfiting sketches of *Insight* chapters 16 and 17.

“The classical method reveals the primary relativity without the secondary determinations of concrete relations; it provides an abstract relation field, say, for the positions and momenta of masses.”<sup>7</sup> We are already in deep trouble here, even if we stay, impossibly, with physics. Real geometry, after all, is boosted by negentropic realities, the infoldings of energy that are, indeed, the objects of the heuristics of our paragraph **study**. That problem of real geometry is that it calls for a massive - indeed might I say unforeseeable? - lift to e.g. topological creativity.<sup>8</sup> We are dealing with acts and aggregates of acts, and layers of informed, energy-infolded, acts that themselves need secondary determinations. “From this feature there follows its [mathematics] dynamic character, for it contains an invitation to mathematicians to explore the

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<sup>6</sup> “..... to prepare our statement of the integral heuristic structure that we have named metaphysics”( *Insight*, 458[ ]): the remark is made only when Lonergan reaches the last section of chapter 15 of *Insight*. One should recall that at this stage of his writing he had been put under pressure to finish the book. Chapter sixteen might well have emerged as an altogether more substantial push forward. As it is, it is compact and opaque, as of course is chapter seventeen. I intend to return to those two chapters in the final two essays, *Field Nocturnes CanTower 116* and *117*.

<sup>7</sup>*Insight*, 494[517].

<sup>8</sup>I am talking here of things quite unimaginably beyond present symbolic imagination. How, for instance, might you reach towards envisaging the heterarchic structures of neuromeshes in a manner that brought us forwards towards controlling the meaning of “the flexible circle of the schemes of recurrence in which the organism functions” (towards the end of our paragraph, **study**). The symbolisms of the metawords, *Wi*, beg for massive complexifications. So, as you may note below, we leave way behind “Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on space”: but, as we glimpse in the *Field Nocturnes* to follow this, we are thus to reach effective levels and meshes of mediations to generate answers to his interrogations.

possibility of setting up the series of deductive expansions that would do as much for other empirical sciences as has been done for physics.”<sup>9</sup> We are certainly here in fantasy land, puttering neuromentally round the sunflower seed or the tadpole when we have never encountered a sunflower or a frog.<sup>10</sup>

What is needed, frankly, is a large-book version of chapter 16 of *Insight* that would generate a series of books and a series of conversions orientating the tadpole of history. Is there any point, then, in us dropping in on the **dead centre** of *Insight* 16, “The Unity of a Concrete Being”?<sup>11</sup> Well, let us, **whathere**, view some middle-print: “The relations of things to our senses and imaginations are included within the far broader sweep of the relations of things to one another, but they are not included as sensed nor as imagined nor as describe but as explained.”<sup>12</sup> Suppose a human, in a billion years or so, reached “an all-inclusive act of understanding.”<sup>13</sup> That act “would account no less for past and future sensation and images than for the experiences of the present; and inasmuch as it accounted for present experiences, it would be independent of the experiencing for it would consist in assigning laws and probabilities to instances labeled with the ultimate conceptual determinations named ‘here’ and ‘now’.”<sup>14</sup>

That print was originally out-typed by the **comeabout** man, who typed about the

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<sup>9</sup>*Insight*, 314[359].

<sup>10</sup>I recall here the titles of *Cantowers 2*, “Sunflowers, Speak to US of Growing” and 56: “Tadpoles, Tell us Talling Tales”.

<sup>11</sup>*Insight* 16, section 4.2. It is, in fact the centre pagewise. **Dead Centre**? There is the nudge towards noticing that , so far from being seriously understood, this chapter and its centre are a dead loss. Think in terms of our previous reflections on **herewhat**, but now in the presence of the print of section 4.2. Think too of the unity of the concrete being that is Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>12</sup>*Insight*, 513[536].

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

**comeabout** person on the next page, about knowing what it was all (about)<sup>3.15</sup> The **comeabout** man, an evolutionary sport, is in a world quite strange to us - and to Merleau-Ponty. And to the non-comeabout man Barbaras of the 'cosmobiology'.

This is all too remote, I know. But return now to that paragraph written by Barbaras about Merleau-Ponty:

"Merleau-Ponty's reflections on space, which several paragraph's of 'Eye and Mind' provide, is implied by his interrogation of vision. Vision alone gives me access to what is not me, to what is 'fully and simply'. To see is not to coincide blindly with the object, but to unfold an interiority. Insofar as they are seen, the things do not rest in themselves at an absolute distance, but they nonetheless remain far away, thick. They recede into a distance which, measured from me, is nevertheless proximity. Spatiality is then synonymous with the 'being-there' [*l'être-la*] of the thing, with its appearance as thing. The attempt to conceive spatiality is an attempt to draw a little nearer to the heart of the experience, a little nearer to the carnal chiasm."<sup>16</sup>

We have been, have we not, "interrogating vision" in these past two *Field Nocturnes*? The interrogation, my **whathere** common sense tells me if interrogated, "gives me access to what is not me", indeed to a Noah's ark of sight-seers.

But now we are off in another world from Merleau-Ponty and Barbaras. It is a world that they inhabit, if they are to interrogate. The focus of their interrogation, however, is not that world, but the psychic-skin world of the given, "wild being" perhaps, of which one might say that "spatiality is then synonymous with the being-there". But in human history there is another given, if only metaphorically given within my identification of "the given."<sup>17</sup> And that **whathere** is the root of "the attempt to

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<sup>15</sup>Perhaps you are already familiar with this oddness? There is a section in chapter 2 of *ChrISt in History* on it.

<sup>16</sup>**RBMP**, 204. It is the first paragraph of the subsection of the chapter "Originary Spatio-Temporality", with title "Philosophy and Space".

<sup>17</sup>See section 4 of *Field Nocturne 21*, "Observing Brains".

conceive spatiality". It is indeed - but in a sense that escapes entrapment in a psychicskin world - "an attempt to draw nearer to the heart of experience, a little nearer to the carnal chasm".

What is that escape, that escapade of all our **whatheres** together? It is our home,<sup>18</sup> but its luminosity as home is a distant objective, at a distance from desire, crippled by not being acknowledged as such.<sup>19</sup> The tree of life that is to be an effective comprehension of our cosmic trail is not yet the sapling of the fourth stage of meaning, the new "Unity of a Concrete Being" that is a minder, but luminously so for those of the Tower of Able.

But what of the present? We will muse over that and its concrete probabilities in the final *Field Nocturne* of this series, the 41<sup>st</sup> essay with title "Policy", so paralleling the 41<sup>st</sup> essay of the Cantower series on doctrines and policies, from which convergence we may climb and stumble on through 76 essays to the final *Field Nocturnes CanTower 117*. The title of the converged series is not too elusive. Field Nocturnes are the members of the Tower Community, no longer of philosophy or of theology but of a community of culturally-expressed culture. They are to be a community of luminous darkness, with the characteristics sketched by Lonergan. Can they Tower effectively? Will they do so, good-will they do so, with the universe's multibillion-year "dynamic joy and zeal."<sup>20</sup>

Still we may ask here, What of the present?, and compactly reply to ourselves, with some growing glimmer of that reply, that we are not ready. Some of us can rest in a home that is a common sense; some of us can rest in a nominalism of home and home-going; some of us can rest spontaneously in common sense yet have a mind in unrest: I

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<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Cantower 21, "Epilodge". See *Method in Theology* 14, 350-1.

<sup>19</sup>"What is lacking is knowledge of all that is lacking and only gradually is that knowledge acquired." (*Insight*, 536[559])

<sup>20</sup>I am repeating, of course, that favorite quotation of mine, suitably ending the Pauline "In the thirteenth place", on charity, in *Insight* 700[722]: "Good will wills the order of the universe, and so it wills with that order's dynamic joy and zeal".

think here of Husserl's cry that perhaps we can share each in our own way: "How I would like to live on the heights. For this is all my thinking craves for .... I am now forty-five years old, and still a miserable beginner."<sup>21</sup> And, finally, a few sports can reach a **comeabout** in which a Poise of Desire empowers flesh and bones and gives the rest of us names and hope.

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<sup>21</sup>I quote from a letter of Husserl to Franz Brentano, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1904 (see H.Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, vol. 1, The Hague, 1965, 89.