

INTERPRETING HISTORICAL SENSE

Someone with a good historical sense, indeed with a graduate degree in history, spoke to me this morning gloomily, in a repetition of stuff in the writings of Larry Dossey, about the massive sickness of humanity and its present cumulative dynamic.¹ I presume that present low of the longer cycle of decline is somehow—yes, this is our problem, isn't it?—familiar (you in the family, in some sense of *in*) to you?

The distracting conversation paradoxically helped me as I moved to consider the task I had set myself, a ten-week climb in horizon-shift for myself and in expression nudging you towards interpreting historical sense, and at this beginning stage to seriously read the odd quaternity of words, *historical sense as data*.

Those four words go with the previous words that I picked out, at the end of the fourth essay, to steer us forward: “analogous to common sense there is a historical sense.”² The trick focal word that I am introducing now is *data*, the plural of datum, the given. I recall on previous occasions writing about it in the context of that strange difficult chapter 13 of *Insight*. I quote the relevant passage immediately. “The given is defined, not by appealing to sensitive process, but by the pure desire regarding the flow of empirical consciousness as the materials for its operation.”³

That sentence is one horrific challenge of reading! Think of the deepest **what**, elusively in you, guarding and regarding, within your present horizon, the unknown field.

But back to the morning's distraction in the works Larry Dossey. There was the apparently simple question for me of, well, settling on something within the two extremes of

¹ I shall touch on Dossey's works later. A point to be made here, now a fairly regular thing, is that the notes add complex contexts that help those pushing forward. But for interested struggling beginners, the notes may well be skipped on a first reading. The challenge now is to brood communally over the need to get some personal grip on the horizon of serious scientific thinking.

² *Insight*, 587.

³ *Insight*, 407: end of section 1, on “Experiential Objectivity.”

making this a massive single essay or breaking our climb, my horizon shifting and its footscape to you, into: well, a succession of three-page ventures. The latter idea is concretely imaged for me by my recalling a little book that had precisely that structure: *Introducing Critical Thinking*.⁴ Musing further over Larry Dossey helped me. A book-length essay would no more help you, methinks, than Dossey's recent work, *One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of a Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters*.⁵

Is that claim about Dossey not a rather arrogant one? Yet I would extend the claim to an increasing flow of writing that weaves good and bad suggestions about life and history around truncatedly identified data, a massive tangle of initial meanings. The tangle provides comfortable comforting support for common sense's settledness in the same zone. Is this what Sorokin meant by *sensate culture*? But my interest is not in further tanglings with initial meanings, like meshing Sorokin and Dossey and the human genome project and so on, but in you noting a fulsome ethos that makes it pretty impossible for your common sense to be anything more than an increasingly minimally-sufficient mode of thinking and talking in these end centuries of the negative Anthropocene Age. We need to pause, to be forced to pause, over the horrors of this reign of common sense in parishes and parliaments, in schools and saloons, if we are to begin to find enlightened courage to replace historical sense by heuristically-supported historical understanding. Perhaps it helps to think of what I am doing as putting the reading of the beginning of *Insight* chapter 6 after the reading of chapter seven, after Lonergan's nudge to taste present decay. Indeed, the "after" can helpfully be made very particular, in that the end of chapter seven presents us, if we are now a little attuned⁶ to think as we read, with a discomfiting meshing of initial meanings. "Common sense relates things to us; our account

⁴ John Benton, Alessandra Drage, Philip McShane, *Introducing Critical Thinking*, Axial Publishing, Vancouver, 2005. The book was written for high-school use, with 52 short chapters.

⁵ Hay House, Inc., 2013. This is truncated subjectivity doing its best. His conclusion talks of the Great Connection, and the book ends thus: "This connection is eternal; no assembly required. Rumi again: 'Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along.'" (*One Mind*, 259). Rumi is right on in the deepest sense. But 'no assembly'? We desperately need *Assembly* (the end word of *Method in Theology*, 249), and a sifting out of false trails. See further note 10.

⁶ In a full luminous existentialism, the attuning is an embrace of one's **what** by history. To it belongs the Christian prayer, "Grace, Grace, Grace: attune us to the Allure of the Scent of a Nomen." Philip McShane, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, Axial Publishing, 2015, 199–200, 223.

of common sense relates it to its neural basis and relates aggregates and successions of instances of common sense to one another.”⁷

Does this not give us a fresh initial meaning for the challenge of those nine words: “analogous to common sense there is a historical sense”?⁸ But the crisis is the need to somehow shake off globally, shed the international snake-skin, break through—yes, a better metaphor!—the chrysalis of thin naming to a butterfly reality of caring understanding that would seriously begin the positive Anthropocene Age.⁹

But, heavens, I might as well be bubbling along in Dossey-speak about shifting global Eras!¹⁰ Such speak does not face the task of finding a luminous relating of aggregates¹¹ and successions of the chemistry of whatting. Where am I, are we, to begin? Well, Lonergan suggests that “study of an organism begins from the thing-for-us, for the organism as exhibited to our senses,”¹² but he does so after a climb of five hundred pages. Perhaps we could make a start after that discomfoting bridge that he thinks of as key to starting chapter 6?¹³ Perhaps we could make a less discomfoting start on some simpler version of the second page of *Insight*, chapter 6, and in doing that be more concrete—if less demanding—about attitude than Lonergan.¹⁴ Instead of assuming nice parenting and schooling all the way up from kindergarten

⁷ *Insight*, 269.

⁸ *Insight*, 587.

⁹ I develop the butterfly analogy in *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, 175ff. The relation of the new systematics to the Anthropocene Age was a later discovery.

¹⁰ See Larry Dossey M.D., *Reinventing Medicine: Beyond Mind-Body to a New Era of Healing*, Harper, 1999. Non-local minding is the topic of the book mentioned in note 5. Era III is the Era of its application. “How can we apply the lessons of Era III in our lives? The first step is to trust nonlocal mind, the principle on which Era III is based” (*Reinventing Medicine*, 119). But would it not be better to trust luminously a known mind? What, then, is mind and minding?

¹¹ Aggregates? The word is the starting point of the next essay. It points to a massive stumbling block for students of Lonergan with no tutored scientific bent. See also note 16 below.

¹² *Insight*, 489. On my website there are 41 essays, titled “[Field Nocturnes](#),” that circle round the single paragraph of which this is a beginning. Some of the essays deal with the issue of aggregates mentioned here in notes 11 and 14.

¹³ The struggles involved in intussuscepting *Insight* chapter 5 “form a natural bridge over which we may advance from our examination of science to an examination of common sense.” *Insight*, 163.

¹⁴ Later work will bring forward the subtleties of Lonergan’s poise. My interest now is in immediate need and possibilities of a shake-up in the fundamental counter-attitude in his disciples.

to post-grad and beyond, let us have the horrid realism of “the longer cycle of decline”¹⁵ up front. So I replace Lonergan’s positive poise, “My dear, you cannot understand that yet” with a sad sequence that has echoes way up through education to conferences of higher learning.¹⁶

‘What is that Mammy? Asks the child visiting the zoo.

‘A Wallaby, dear,’ answers the mother, after a quick glance at the notice under the cage.

‘What is a wallaby, Mammy?’

‘That is, dear.’

‘Why, Mammy?’¹⁷

My recommended effort is a different beginning to the invitation to common sense to rise out of conventional truncated mud on all levels.¹⁸ The rest of the *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, apart from the Epilogue,¹⁹ backed off from the challenge: it was an introductory text.²⁰

Now, fifty years later, I think realistically about the road to lifting historical sense out of the mud and see that same chapter three as a possible beginning, to be followed by a more enlightened plunge into *Insight* chapter 7. I do not want to get lost in detail here: think of the difficulty of avoiding thin commonsense reading of *Insight* 6.2.2, on “The Biological Pattern

¹⁵ The topic is taken up in *Insight* 251. Efforts to come from the [Interpretation](#) forum collaboration will reach a better perspective on decay in the context of studies of the Anthropocene, including ventures regarding human origins.

¹⁶ One illustration must suffice, that represented by the volume *Science and Ultimate Reality. Quantum Theory, Cosmology and Complexity*, edited by John Barrow, Paul Davies and Charles Harper, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Part VI (577–690) is titled, “Emergence, Life and Related Topics”: it is a quite muddled, puttering with the problem of integral aggregates.

¹⁷ *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, 17. It is the beginning of Chapter 3, “The What-Question.”

¹⁸ Recall note 14. My interest at present is in nudging effectively towards a start of the new style of interpretation. Later there emerges the heuristics of nine types of interpretation, the ninth being, e.g., syllabus and classroom effectiveness. Then, e.g., pointers from Lonergan’s reflections on education in *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, become relevant.

¹⁹ *Wealth of Self*, “Being and Loneliness,” 101–15. My first serious introduction of a necessary complexification of expression.

²⁰ My view of Lonergan’s *Insight* as a graduate text is probably known to you. On my regular comparison of *Insight* with Joos, *Theoretical Physics*, see my article “*Insight* and the Interior Lighthouse 2020-2050” in *Divyadaan: A Journal of Education and Philosophy*, 28/2 (2017) 279–300.

of Experience.”²¹ It is brilliantly dense and only makes scientific sense to a reader way past “study of an organism begins.”²² An initial rescue of the Lonergan community from vague historical sense needs the push of the first five chapters of *Insight* that I shrunk into chapter 3 of *Wealth of Self*.

There may be equivalent pedagogical ventures, but generally the introductory literature on Lonergan slips past the horizon of science. No doubt that will be remedied in the years to come.

The venture into *Wealth of Self*, chapter 3, backed by the book’s Epilogue, “Being and Loneliness,” leads quite naturally to my pointing, in the next essay, to the need to face a challenge of symbolization. But here I must end with a doubt about the follow-up on an effort to get methodological thinking into the mediation of science that was a clear necessity for Lonergan, a follow up in some form equivalent to my own, a follow up that I see, concretely, as something that will only be a serious effective invitation to the next generations. We need a small step for mankind by those interested in Lonergan: Lonergan cannot stay in its no-man’s land.²³ My doubt is symbolized in the story of Naaman in 2 *Kings* 5. There is a leprosy in Lonergan studies, a leprosy that resides in a historical sense that flows quite naturally from an arrogant common sense. Naaman was indignant (verse 11) about the notion of bathing in an insignificant river. Need I recall the nudge of the first paragraph of *Insight*? “Too many people felt it beneath them to direct their efforts to apparently trivial problems.”

²¹ *Insight*, 205–207.

²² *Ibid.*, 489.

²³ *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, CWL 6, 121. There is the companion page 155. These references of mine are no doubt all too familiar to my readers. But now pause over the no-man’s-land of interpretation with its present common and historical sense. Puzzle over why I have avoided the topic of universal viewpoint. What, you should ask, could common sense, even with the addition of the tincture of interiority that is reachable without science, make of this sophistication of science?