

AGGREGATES OF PROGRESSIVIST EXPRESSIONS

In note 11 of the previous essay I remarked that this one would begin with the word *Aggregate*. Well, there you have it, with an added *s*. It seems as well to repeat that note here. “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.”¹ The rest of the title links our effort to section 3.3 of *Insight* 17, “Levels and Sequences of Expression,”² but we only touch lightly on it here. Indeed, that is the case with this short essay: it is key, but it is lightly persuasive about us all very deliberately and semi-luminously turning a corner in this search.

I symbolize that corner-turning in an entertaining fashion by recalling my own first reading, precisely 60 years ago, of chapters 6 and 7 of *Insight*. Perhaps you had something of the same experience. After chapter 5, I had hoped that these chapter would be easier reading. I did not find them so. But the shock of really missing the key point only came with the last sentence of chapter seven. “May we note,” indeed!

May we note before concluding that, while common sense relates things to us, our account of common sense relates it to its neural basis and relates aggregates and successions of instances of common sense to one another.³

Now let us pause together over the first line of the previous paragraph. The pause is needed to tune you into the fact that there is a larger corner-turning involved here. It is,

¹ I repeat that note 16 here. It refers to an illustration of a zone of learned discourse that is muddled about aggregates. As usual, I recommend that footnotes be skimmed on a first reading. Note 16, then: “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.”

² *Insight*, 592–95. As you weave round and about this essay’s notes you will merge note 2 with note 22, and perhaps even catch 22. I can only mention here the centrality of the shift to the complexity of expressions, W_i , touched on in my website article [Prebymous 2](#), “Metagrams and Metaphysics.” In note 22 I refer to the center piece, W_3 . It is both a W_{3ing} and a Prayer, “Double You Three in me in all, Claspings, Cherishing, Cauling, Craving, Christing.”

³ *Insight*, 269.

moreover, symbolized nicely by the phrase *Loneragan's 1833 Overture*.⁴ That phrase points to a recalling, an autobiographical effort meshed with others' similar efforts, regularly in a discomfiting manner.⁵ But entertainment eases the pain, as Loneragan notes.⁶

At all events, I continue recalling regarding this issue of the meaning of *aggregates*. The question such recalling brings to your mind is: What is my recollection of my search for the meaning of *aggregates*? My recalling here is, first, for you, perhaps a beginner, but in the full whirl of the new global method it is, first and foremost, to the dialectic professionals.⁷ Think, then, of a subgroup of Loneragan students who are in that mode of inquiry: asking about the inclusion of a scientific meaning of aggregates in the standard model of global inquiry into progress.⁸ That sub-group surely includes my senior colleagues, but it should also include those who aspire to contribute dialectically or foundationally to progress.⁹ Let me go on now, in a loose journey through those 16 end lines of *Method in Theology* 250, as you bear in mind [1] your own elementary challenge emerging here; [2] possible discomforts to the present Loneragan leadership; [3] your and their responsibility to “not to conceal tracks but to lay cards

⁴ Some new readers may not know this odd reference to lines 18–33 of *Method in Theology*. It is the core of the dialect community's challenge to meet each other discomfitingly, autobiographically, historically, perhaps hysterically. They hound each other in struggling to lift the canon of relevance (this is the first canon of Hermeneutics: *Insight*, 609) into miboxing the field (see note 27).

⁵ I have written of this in different ways. In *Futurology Express*, 54–72, the approach is relatively elementary and secular. *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* gives a fuller perspective in a religious context. Perhaps you might take my article referred to in note 9 below as a present “here I stand” on the ambiguous naming and gaming of human aspirations.

⁶ The struggle mentioned in note 4 at times desperately needs comic relief (*Insight*, 647–49). See note 24, and chortle to the mirror with Churchill.

⁷ You, even, beginning, may emerge as being one of them. Sadly, I do not expect those of previous generations to pay any attention to my challenge, or that of Patrick Brown. Your problem of moving authentically forward is surviving the smallness of present Loneraganism. If you are still a student, battling through courses and a thesis, you may well welcome Loneragan's advice to me in 1968: “give the guy what he wants”: survive the thin offerings and secretly climb.

⁸ Such an asking does not occur in present Loneragan circles. It would be an admission of the need for the zone to blossom into a science—a genetic science of multifaced genetic realities—and a need of the resisting elders to face their shabby way of reading the second page of the first chapter of *Method in Theology*. Taking Michael Jackson or Churchill seriously (see note 24) is just not in their ballpark. What in heavens' name do they think they are accomplishing?!

⁹ So, on you may go in present musings, moving from the previous note to the issue of aspiring. That issue can be briefly viewed as the aspiration to get humanity into the positive Anthropocene Age. Recall note 5 and its pointing to trivial and Trivial aspirations expressed in my article, “*Insight* and the Trivialization of History,” *Diyadaan: A Journal of Education and Philosophy*, 28/1 (2017) 105–132.

on the table,”¹⁰ in particular regarding restructuring education; [4] my impoliteness here: “doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company”¹¹; [5] the immediate discomfiting and embarrassing issue: have you a recalling of a parallel foundational climb?¹²

For me, it was not an easy climb: there was neither classroom nor companionable support. I spent a large block of 1962 hovering over the problem;¹³ I returned to it, but now successfully, as I worked towards an article on biology in 1963-64;¹⁴ I spelled out its ramifications in an Oxford doctorate¹⁵; I later wrote inadequate pedagogies of the climb;¹⁶ I arrive now, decades later, at a dialectic stand “when positions are developed”¹⁷ : here, a doctrinal development regarding and guarding a precise “intelligibility immanent in historical process”¹⁸ involving in

¹⁰ *Method in Theology*, 193.

¹¹ *Method in Theology*, 299.

¹² The massive problem here is that dominance of a clerical small-mindedness in the emergence of interest in Lonergan’s work. The ethos was one of commonsense piety in a no-man’s land of dodged science and doctrinal settledness. Old habits of teaching, preaching, living, held and still hold sway. There is no story of a climb through science to a humility in truth. The tribe’s members support each other in each resembling a closed-minded Faraday—which Faraday was not!—faced with Einstein’s version of Maxwell’s equations.

¹³ My later website book, [Method in Theology: Revisions and Implementations](#), draws on that work in Part One, “Method in Botany.”

¹⁴ “[Insight and the Strategy of Biology](#),” *Spirit as Inquiry: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by F. E. Crowe, Herder and Herder, 1964, 74–88. For purposes of our [Interpretation](#) forum struggle, it is worth recounting that during the months of writing that essay I did tackle the issue of insight into coincidental chemicals etc. I still vividly recall doing this in the context of struggling with Thomas talk of *vivens*. I began a scribbled climb with pages named alphabetically and “it” came together when I reached page W or X. I then dumped the pages and wrote a sentence in the article. A sorry loss. But such is the challenge each of us faces, with us now together, in this beginning of a climb to understanding and symbolizing history. The climb, however, can be pointed to briefly here by noting that the achievement of 1964 is later symbolized by a semi-colon, thus: “;”. The climb places that “;” in the fuller imaging titled W_3 . But that is all ahead of us: moving from having a feeble historical sense to being a heuristic character with a luminous historical explanatory psyche.

¹⁵ The original thesis was published as *Randomness, Statistics and Emergence*, Gill, MacMillan and Notre Dame, 1970. The nearest chapter to our topic is chapter 9, “Randomness and Emergence,” but there is little pedagogy there: it is very much “academic disciplines” play, but still with good pointers. The needed pedagogy would not have been welcome in my sliding past examiners.

¹⁶ The key essay is [Field Nocturnes 22](#), “Aggreformism,” but it is as well to contextualize it with such essays as [Field Nocturnes 17](#), “More than Admiring Aristotle,” [Field Nocturnes 28](#), “A Touching of Touching: Getting on your Nerves,” and [Field Nocturnes 32](#), “Seeing is Deceiving.” Obviously the full series of 41 essays, circling the central paragraph of *Insight* 489, provides a larger context.

¹⁷ *Method in Theology*, 250: second last line.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 319, line 5: the heading at the topic of the paragraph is “The Development of Doctrines.”

me a “decision of foundations,”¹⁹ that hopes effectively that we “can go on to a developed account of the human good,”²⁰ the future of finitude.

The effective hope has a short-term [Interpretation](#) forum focus “in the style of a crucial experiment. While it will not be automatically efficacious, it will provide the open-minded, the serious, the sincere with the occasion to ask themselves some basic questions, first about others, but eventually about themselves.”²¹ Simple questions about others are immediate: was I presented a pedagogy of aggregates by my teachers? Questions about themselves, too, are initially simple: did I fail as a teacher; if I have been thus failed by a teacher what now shall I do about it?

I had intended to elaborate further here on a range of contexts, especially the context of our becoming “Aggregates of Progressivist Expressions,”²² but I would be failing you as a teacher in doing that immediately here. So let me focus further in an ambiguously homely fashion.

You are an organism with organs of sight embracing, in some layered way, my strange expressions. You might turn those organs of sight to meet themselves, “sensibly presented organs”²³ to hear Michael Jackson’s message about you in the mirror making the world a better place.²⁴ Your lonely eyes are “systematizing otherwise coincidental manifolds of chemical and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319, line 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

²² I write of “character” (*Method in Theology*, 356, line 12), and in that context of “Meaning and Ontology” (*ibid.*). Are you to become or encourage such an aggregate of characters, driven in W_3 by “a psychic force that sweeps living human bodies, linked together in charity, to the joyful, courageous, wholehearted, yet intelligently controlled performance of the tasks set by world order in which the problem of evil is not suppressed but transcended.” (*Insight*, 745). Here I am at a loss: the context of an initial appreciation of this psychic force is the first section of chapter 17 of *Insight*. When might we read it together and sniff out the solid myth of our contemporary non-living?

²³ *Insight*, 489: ending the paragraph that begins “study of an organism begins.”

²⁴ I recall the 1987 song: “I’m starting with the man in the mirror / I’m asking him to change his ways / And no message could have been any clearer / If you want to make the world a better place.” But what of the effect of the clear message, a question weaved here round notes 5, 7, 9, 12, and 30? I recall Winston Churchill talking of an opponent. “Occasionally he stumbled over the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened” (*Churchill by Himself*, Richard Langworth, 2011, 322).

physical processes.”²⁵ Are our eyes blinkered? My aggregate manifolds of the inadequate expressions of our times do not boost the eye-input to the surrounds of your mibox sufficiently to make you communally a Bell Curve statistic of the cherishing of aggregates, “a harmonious orientation on the psychic level,”²⁶ to your loneliness’s reach for “the field.”²⁷ But might some few of you face, however dread-filled and remote, “the existential gap”?²⁸

Insofar as there is to be a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process, one has to postulate that the existential gap must be closed. In other words, one has to postulate that the people who are seeking to influence history, to put their lever at the vital point in the historical process, are not operating, nor doing their thinking, planning and policy-making, from within the pair of blinkers of a personal and communal horizon. They have to be people in whom the horizon is coincident with the field. If they are not, then all they possibly can do is increase the confusion and accelerate the doom.²⁹

You sense that this is ambiguously homely? I am leading you to dally in the middle paragraph of page 14 of *Method in Theology*. I am asking you about a decision. It is not the dreadful decision to read *Insight* properly. It is the decision to try to read eye-fillingly a single sentence of the book, making up your mind in the process to make an authentic way into or out of intervening scientifically in history.³⁰ I place the full sentence here, but the exercise that is your “bridge of asses” in following Lonergan seriously is contained in the fifteen bold-faced

²⁵ *Insight*, 489.

²⁶ *Insight*, 555.

²⁷ “The field is *the* universe. But my horizon defines *my* universe.” *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 199. I am quoting from his prep-notes: so the italics are Lonergan’s.

²⁸ *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 281: the title of section 2 of the chapter “Subject and Horizon.” The next section (284) is titled “Horizon and Dread.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

³⁰ One may now climb again through the notes above that home in on this one: notes 5, 7, 9, 12 in particular. Each person’s challenge differs when it comes to the question of “an authentic way into or out of.” The old guard—and some of them are, alas, not so old—have to find a way to encourage in their students a discomfiting break forward from the thin farce called *Lonerganism*. Note 7 above talks of the emergent new guardians, dwellers in the Tower of Able. Then there are those who arrived in this area—for example, of theology—through piety or through the search for what we called in my old university, “bird courses,” soft degree-components that, perhaps, tuned into an old-style piety. Science will remain beyond them, yet there is a commonsense calling for them to be on the edge of the eighth specialty. Indeed, to be thus on that edge is, I would say, a prime road to authenticity in us all escaping the toxic waste of Lonerganism.

words. Concretely I am inviting you to struggle towards filling your eye sufficiently with an image of a single-celled entity, like the amoeba or the chlamydomonas.

To this end, **there have to be invented appropriate symbolic images of the relevant chemical and physical processes**; in the images there have to be grasped by insight the laws of the higher system that accounts for regularities beyond the range of physical and chemical explanation; from these laws there have to be constructed the flexible circle of schemes of recurrence in which the organism functions; finally the flexible circle of schemes must be coincident with the related set of capacities-for-performance that previously was grasped in sensibly presented images.³¹

³¹ *Insight*, 489.