

Joistings 5

Genetic Systematics

There are three short sections here, doctrinal pointings, and you are now familiar with that claim: mappings to a climb in the dark. Section I seems less painful, begin about what seems to be an object of discussion, a problem in theology: What is systematics? Why have I failed to communicate the answer, that seems to evident to me, in these last decades? It seems to me - and this is continuous with all my efforts to twist forwards the Latin writings of Lonergan - that the problem has to be seen, sensed, as a problem of the heart, at the heart, in the heart, of the theologian.¹ That is the problem talked about in section 2. Section 3 merely repeats the text of my own lift-off in this question: but this new context of it may help a reader to a vision of the new systematics, even towards a vision of how that new systematics is to cycle round within the vortex of a new hodic theology, bringing forth “cumulative and progressive results” that, in the millennia ahead, can change, beyond any present fantasy, the patterns of love and leadership, of street-talk and celebration, of youthful yearnings.

5.1 Sensing the New Systematics

My first sensing of what I call the new systematics came in some very memorable moments twenty five years ago. I had been struggling with the problem since the late 1960s, so I had fretted and fermented about it already for over a decade. My molecules, I suppose, were due a break. My hunt for meaning in those moments was in the Toronto Lonergan centre, grappling with the twists of the passage and the text surrounding it that I give here in section 4. Then all the bits began to bubble together:

¹There is a relevant chapter in my *The Redress of Poise* entitled “Systematics: A Language of the Heart”. *Joistings 6* should lift your reflections - over decades, depending on your bent - towards a startling explanatory level regarding the neurochemistry and the goodnewsbeat of the human heartbeat.

genetic method,² pure formulations,³ reaching out contrafactually towards twisting counterpositions,⁴ getting “something better than was the reality.”⁵ Now, of course, the dynamic global group operations of the seventh specialty are quite evident to me, and quite startlingly removed from the terrible lightweight treatment that Lonergan had to give them in that penultimate chapter of *Method in Theology*.

But, if the pattern of those operations are not evident to you, how do I get it across to you?

This is, for me, a serious and frustrating question.⁶ The pattern seems to elude very serious Lonergan students. Is it perhaps because ‘system’ is tied to some image of the old axiomatic structure of Euclid? Don’t knock that: Thomas found it very useful in the *Summa*. And certainly this is part of the block.

These little essays, up to and including *Joistings 8*, are primarily not pedagogical. But perhaps a delay here over a couple of simple images may help, or help you to help others. So, we start with Thomas’ reasonable success. Here just consider his *Summa* as a single system: then think of it as a system in a sequence of systems. Useful here is to think of getting a summary of the *Summa* into a page, then placing it in a line-up of other like pages. Bonaventure would be in the neighborhood, and Albert the Great.

²The is a central topic in chapter 15 of *Insight*.

³A baffling phrase from the dense page of *Insight*, 580[602].

⁴The text cited in the final section here goes on to talk of this challenge. It is important to face the challenge here of finding out how contra-factual history meshes into the various specialties.

⁵*Method in Theology*, 251.

⁶My frustration with this, however, is exceeded by the frustration that relates to the “psychological block” that I wrote of in *Joistings 3*. But are not the two blocks related? The what-to-do? question in its full operative dynamic is seeking for newness: the present axioms of my life, or my topic, need discomfoting replacement. *Joistings 8* bring that discomfort into the context of the discomfort of Jesus. But you may have more homely reflections by considering a failed night-out, a failed relationship.. See note 9 below.

Back much further would be the system of the Fourth Gospel; forwards would be Suarez and Schliermacher. What you have is a line-up that challenges us to think of a system of these systems. And the helpful image of the tadpole heading for full frogginess. Then Thomas is, so to speak, a slice of the journey. There is a lot more to it than this, of course. The tadpole - or the kitten, if you wish a cuddlier example - can have a sad life: starved, abused. In your systematizing you are looking for norms: how to take care of a tadpole, a kitten. So you have to think out the details of your environment, both 'use' and 'reversed abuse' of the growing beastie (I am thinking of Robert Burns' wee mouse).

Well, at least this gives you leads to a beginnings. The beginnings of course need to push towards that terrible page 464[489] of *Insight* that I have written about endlessly, and to carry forward to those next pages on genetic method. Very tough work this, getting the natural analogue for genetic system into one's mind and psyche. And then pushing forward to see how a global group of systematic theologians might collaborate, and how the entire group might build the best present systematics into a lift in the recycling that is theology. But now I am wandering way ahead. We will return to this problem a little in *Joistings 8*, but the leads are to be dug out elsewhere, and many of those leads are personal to you, to your zone of studies. But perhaps you might benefit from brooding over the series of systems that you were, that you are going to be?⁷

5.2 Growing Strange

I am talking to you about you - (about)³ you indeed, but that is already too strange at this early stage! - about you, then, growing strange.

⁷Note that this is a reading of the book of oneself. Certainly it can benefit from other books, like those of H.S.Sullivan, Progoff, Aresteh, etc etc: but this calls for a solitary leisured self-digestion. I recall a letter of W.B. Yeats as I write: "Why do we honour those who die in battle? A man [or a woman!] can show as reckless a courage entering into the abyss of the self".

The word strange has the Old French root, with the Latin background, *extra*, “outside”. It may bring to mind the literature in various languages and cultures dealing with *The Outsider* or *The Searcher*, and certainly meshes with Abraham Maslow’s depressing statistic: “less than one per cent of adults grow”. The horror of meeting old non-elderness is captured by Marcel Proust in the description of the his hero of *Remembrance of Times Past* meeting such people: “not old folk but young people of eighteen, very much faded.”⁸

Perhaps this last odd paragraph gives you a nudge towards some sense of what we are up against here? I recall now hours spent in those twenty years of introductory classes in Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, brooding together with the young ladies about this sad fact. Of course, the sad fact was most evident to them when they view the young men in their lives: a favorite topic of ours was the search for Cosmo Polis, a Friday-night or a life companion who would be seriously attentive, intelligent, reasonable, adventurous, responsible.⁹

Of course, in the concrete context of their lives, the search had met with a fundamental success: Faith in the “friendly universe,”¹⁰ and for the Christian sub-group in the class, in the friendly Galilean, gave them a life companion. That, however, was not the topic in those introductory courses, based very much on a simplification of the little book *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*. Nor indeed was the search for Cosmo

⁸M.Proust, *Remembrance of Times Past*, Random House, New York, Vol. 2, 1042.

⁹Recall note 6 above. It is helpful to see the beam in the other’s eye, or rather nay, to adventure, to change. This very existential business takes on a global character within the precise demands of page 250 of *Method in Theology*. You can, perhaps, sympathize with my frustration regarding the neglect of the what-to do question when you see it in this larger context. It is **THE** question of progress, of *Praxis*, of the *mood*, the *ethos*, of going forward in fantasy and hope. The problem will eventually - surely in this century? - be solved by the (about)³ turns of the vortex of collaboration. But there is the personal challenge now: what am I to do about the present debate regarding feelings as future-poised? On this see Quodlibet 19: “The Solution to the Problem of Feelings in Lonergan Studies”.

¹⁰*Method in Theology*, 117, line 13..

Polis or Cosma Polis - there were both young men and lesbians in the classes - center-stage. What was center-stage, as the title of the book states, was the search for self.

But you see, perhaps, that the search for self was, or could be more than 99% of the time, trapped in the same culture of non-growth?

One of my reasons for spending our class-time brooding over the search for the significant other was the fact that somehow we could get to grips better with the orientations of the self - already investigated in a preliminary fashion by patient puzzling over puzzles of calculations, crosswords, cooking, courting - by focusing on the other, especially when that other was deficient. And here I come to the kernel of my message in these next few *Joistings*: the need to think and re-think the situation, the topic, through in concrete, and thus imaginative, detail. Our class would work through a Friday evening with Cosmo, together and privately. Your challenge here, alas, and the challenge to be repeated right through these few Joistings, is to take the equivalent time to brood self-attentively over an evening where Cosmo or Cosma is, in the main boring: the transcendental "be adventurous" died as you sat down to dine. Perhaps, even, hope died: you simply went through the motions - and at least he was paying for the meal! - but this guy was off your life-list.

Literature can help us to pause when we have not enough courage or self-respect to take a pause-prise to meet our abused selves. The culture "has made life unlivable"¹¹ and the preacher forgets that the first commandment puts self-love ahead of neighbour-love.¹² Fiction - and you have to back away from academic culture to let it touch you - can lift you back into your own abused loneliness: so you meet yourself in Emma Bovary or Hermine or Molly Bloom or Queen Sondok."¹³

¹¹B.Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 232.

¹²Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 26, a. 4.

¹³You shall "meet" Molly in *Joistings 6*. Flaubert wrote of his book *Madame Bovary*, "La Bovary, C'est moi!" Hermine you can meet, with Harry Haller, in Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*.

In such meetings you find freshly the strangeness that might grow, “against all sorts of mortmain.”¹⁴ And that growth, as Proust intimates, will suffer all the more from glossy abuse in a culture that does not wish, brutally opposes, the adventure of growing to understand one who grows.

But then do you not recall instances where you were the abuser, even unbeknownst to yourself? “If only I had listened”, but the speaker has already left, perhaps leaped disastrously. The abuse, of course, is self-abuse: you are the loser when you friend’s face becomes familiar, when great music becomes domesticated tunes.

5.3 A Key Text for an (About)³ Turn

So: I heard great music when I read this text a quarter century ago, and it has not been domesticated: I can read it now freshly, an old stranger, stranger. But learning to read is the cultural difficulty of axial life. And pausing now, as I desperately and humanly want to do, in a further twisting of expression towards your molecules’ attentiveness, would not - would it? - shake those molecules into new patterns of intussusception. So here, hear, the words of that fifty five year-old searcher.

‘The history of any particular discipline is in fact the history of its development. But this development, which would be the theme of a history, is not something simple and straightforward but something which occurred in a long series of various steps, errors, detours, and corrections. Now, as one studies this movement he learns about this developmental process and so now possesses within himself an instance of that development which took place perhaps over several centuries. This can happen only if

I mention Queen Sondok, who reigned (632-647) in an early incarnation of Korea, for two reasons. First, readers in different cultures find different sources of inspiration: Queen Sondok left behind a star-gazing tower still visible, I hope, in Kyongju. Secondly, a people’s history can help towards fantasy about one’s own life. So, of course, can meditation on a mustard seed!

¹⁴I am recalling Ezra Pound’s poem (“Commission”, *Selected Poems*, Faber, London, 1959, 96-7) against all sort of shrinkage, quoted at length before chapter 1 of *Music That Is Soundless. A Fine Way for the Lonely Bud A.* (Axial Press, Halifax, 2005)

the person understands both his subject and the way he learned about it. Only then will he understand which elements in the historical developmental process had to be understood before the others, which ones made for progress in understanding and which held it back, which elements really belong to the particular science and which do not, and which elements contain errors. Only then will he be able to tell at what point in the history of his subject there emerged new visions of the whole and when the first true system occurred, and when the transition took place from an earlier to a late systematic ordering; which systematization was simply an expansion of the former and which was radically new; what progressive transformation the whole subject underwent; how everything that was explained by the old systematization is now explained by the new, one, along with many other things that the old one did not explain - the advances in physics, for example, by Einstein and Max Planck. Then and then alone will he be able to understand what factors favored progress, what hindered it, and why, and so forth. Clearly, therefore, the historian of any discipline has to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the whole subject. And it is not enough that he understand it any way at all, but he must have a systematic understanding of it. For that precept, when applied to history, means that successive systems which have progressively developed over a period of time have to be understood. This systematic understanding of a development ought to make use of an analogy with the development that takes place in the mind of the investigator who learns about the subject, and this interior development within the mind of the investigator ought to parallel the historical process by which the science itself developed.¹⁵

¹⁵I quote from Michael G. Shiel's translation, *Understanding and Method*, 130-1 of Lonergan's Latin text *De Intellectu et Methodo*.