

A CONVENIENT NAMING OF STAGES OF MEANING

We turn now to an identification of contexts which will seem little more than naming yet, taken in with a stretching sense of positive *haute vulgarization*, can open a fulsome perspective.

Let us first pause over a summary that relates to the “4” in that compact identification of the task of Futurology that was at the heart of the Pentecostal [Vignette 10](#): the compact identification sobers and stretches our reading of that summary. Here you have it:

{M (W₃)^{0ΦT}}⁴

First, then, the summary:

- 1: The stage of compact consciousness.
- 2: The muddles of a second stage, the axial period, still with us, despite evolutionary sports like the Greeks, Thomas, Lonergan.
- 3: The third stage, best identified by the top lines of page 141 of *A Third Collection*:

Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness: it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject’s operations without taking into account the corresponding objects.

It is at present only a seed, an evolutionary sport-zone.

- 4: The fourth stage would be a shift to the self in God from what I call *the tandem focus* of stage 3, but, strangely, that self-focus is to convergingly become a soundly effective mediation of “a resolute and effective intervention in the historical process” (*Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 306).¹

¹ See my “The Fourth Stage of Meaning: Essay 44 of the Series Field Nocturnes Cantower,” *Meaning and History in Systematic Theology. Essays in Honor of Robert Doran, SJ*, edited by John Dadosky, Marquette University Press, 2009, 331–344. See also there, John Dadosky, “Midwiving the Fourth Stage of Meaning: Lonergan and Doran, 71–92. It was listening to a lecture on the subject by Dadosky a few years ago that I was lifted to consider this zone of the field.

The summary is very simplistic. Not only are there sub-stages but there is the geohistorical accounting of such stages that is so vaguely intimated, e.g., by the superscript presence of the angles θ and Φ in the compact identification of Futurology. Think of them as giving a longitude and latitude indication of the location of a viewpoint: T in the superscript gives the historical time as a distance from the center of the globe. Leave that problem aside now and think in genetic simplicity of the stages.

The first simple thinking comes from the undergraduate text on the systematics of the Trinity, where Lonergan writes of two times of the temporal subject.² The first time may be identified as the first broad stage of meaning. What of the second time? I suggest that you think of it in relation to the third stage of meaning.

Let us pause over these suggestions: what is your identification; what are you thinking? This places us, of course, in the context that identifies the Vignette project as hovering round *Method* chapter 10, section 5, “Dialectic: The Structure.” Even though you are not a dialectician you can face up to the challenge of the three objectifications of *Lonergan’s 1833 Overture* in your own way. It is useful, in doing so, to pause over the last paragraph of that tenth chapter of *Method*:

It is to be observed that, while secular man of the twentieth century the most familiar differentiation of consciousness distinguishes and relates theory and common sense, still in the history of mankind both in the East and the Christian West the predominant differentiation of consciousness has set in opposition and in mutual enrichment the realms of common sense and of transcendence.³

The pause is in particular to allow you to ask, with a seriousness neatly contextualized by Lonergan’s two blunt pages about the “familiar differentiation,”⁴ just what is your level of familiarity with this differentiation? Your familiarity may be only some version of a commonsense ethos that lives with technical terms floating round in conversation and journalism. It may have an apparently higher level of familiarity if you are in the tradition of a Fontenelle (Bernard le Bouvier de, 1657–1757) represented by *Scientific American*. Indeed, there is the apparently still higher level that would include you having read *Insight*. Here I do

² *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWL 12, 405.

³ *Method*, 266.

⁴ The two blunt pages are pages 121 and 155 of *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, CWL 6.

not wish to enter into what I mean by apparently: but I do suggest that you take time over the problem of “initial meanings”⁵ and the gap, “the existential gap.”⁶ “It is through this gap that there proudly marches the speculative gnostic and the practical magician.”⁷ Indeed, I would suggest, if you have indeed read *Insight*, that you stop to cherish the discomfort of the gap between your meaning of comparison and the meaning given it by Lonergan in that brilliant paragraph *Insight* 609–10. Common sense can comfortably and richly compare Hegel with Husserl or Heidegger, but getting that stuff into the realms of effective theory: is that, perhaps, foreign to you?

I slide past the other differentiation for the moment: it too has its problems in East, West and South: but I wish to move along more simply.

So I turn to the obvious need—is it not apparent?—for a break between the first time and the second time of temporal subject. You don’t have to be a Thomas Kuhn to figure this time lag. So, above, I mention the Greeks, etc, as evolutionary sports: the shift to seeding a discovery of mind is a shift way beyond the lesser shifts initiated by Newton or Darwin or Einstein. However, I would like you, in this discovery, to muse over my notion of “evolutionary sports.” The musing is greatly enhanced by holding to some commonsense grip on “the hole story” that bubbles along after 13.7 billion years.

The emergence of humanity is the evolutionary achievement of sowing what among the cosmic molecules. The sown what infests the clustered molecular patterns behind and above your eyes, between your ears, lifting areas—named by humans like Brocca and Wernicke—towards patterned noise-making that in English is marked by “so what?”⁸

Sowing what luminously, that is the distant possibility that is to shift from Poisson to Bell-curve probabilities in these next generations (or millennia: that depends on you!) of our crawl out of the negative Anthropocene to the brightness of a positive Anthropocene, of a second time of the temporal subject. “We are not there yet. And for society to progress

⁵ *Insight*, 567. See note 5 there: “an accurate statement of initial meanings would be much more complex.” Indeed! And an effective statement meeting the needs of the topology of situation rooms is an immense task of these next centuries.

⁶ *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 281.

⁷ *Insight*, 565.

⁸ The first paragraph of chapter 1, “Sow What,” of my *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*.

towards that or any other goal it must fulfill one condition. It cannot be a titanothore, a beast with a three-ton body and a ten-ounce brain.” But, on again into the pause: what do you make of this paragraph that hovers round probabilities? Is it not too easy to float on, reading out of the three-tons of initial meanings that surround us with the arms and harms and charms of our bogus civilization. Reading thus, for example, *Insight*, with no sense whatsoever that you are clueless about the serious meaning of probability and of the form of its weave through time.

But let us leave *Insight* aside and catch a glimpse of our miserable reading of the first page of *Method*. To those familiar with my writing this is a familiar nudge. Is it not embarrassing to find that you misread the page in such a gross fashion that you missed the pointing of the entire book? The first paragraph bows to the goodly goings-on of compact consciousness. Toynbee and Sorokin hovered over Lonergan’s dancing fingers. And then, in the second paragraph, there is the memory of Thomas being short-changed by the axial boldness of Aristotle, who cut off 5/8^{ths} of effective human science and eventually let loose the idiocy of academic disciplines.

Turning the page brings you to sniff the need of the massive straining we need to bring us to the third stage of meaning. But back we go again—pause, pause—to the struggle to the horrid self-discovery of our axial reading. Our meaning for the third stage of meaning and its structured 8/8^{ths} is not even an initial meaning.

Did you perhaps float on through the book, grounded in this initial misreading? A happy read it was perhaps, all the way through talk of values and goods and meanings and religiosities. So you missed the kick in the ass of the sentence, your sentencing, that talks of talk of God-love. “To speak of the dynamic state of being in love with God pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of interiority has been made the explicit ground of the worlds of theory and of common sense.”⁹

Let me halt here, though I invite you to go on, pause, pause, even perhaps begin an **Interior Lighthouse** pause. I have merely focused the “all that is lacking” problem in a more discomfoting way. I have sketched an *Assembly* of a positional thesis on the inadequacy

⁹ *Method*, 107.

of the audience of *Method in Theology*. You may wish to risk positioning yourself—the usual triple objectification—regarding that thesis of mine. But are you up to it?¹⁰

¹⁰ [I import here the final note of the next Vignette, a Vignette which, as you shall see, pivots on my decision to end abruptly this promised long series of essays.] Recall my repeated quoting of Lonergan’s appeal for “resolute and effective intervention”; the previous page leads you, I hope, to your own practical possibilities. “The existentialists believe in intervening in this dialectic. And they do not write simply for professional philosophers; they write novels and plays, and they are ready to use those techniques that can have maximum diffusion. . . . Just as each individual can choose to be himself or, on the other hand, merely drift, choose to be like everybody else, so there is a historic authenticity” (*Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 305–6). Think, perhaps, of my website essay, [Prehumous 1](#), “Teaching High-School Economics: A Commonquest Manifesto.” Think of little interventions that could slowly generate a committed community instead of a cargo of some religious orientation. Think . . . But the thinking is your challenge, seeding in your corner, against all present odds, a massive global heuristic of all situations, isomorphic with all psychosocial analyses and their referents, that would uplift with statistical effectiveness the lives of ten billion people per generation in future millennia. Such is the full pragmatic cast of “relevance to empirical human science” (*Insight*, 766). To help you in your struggle with this giant project of the next millennium you could try a reach into the psychosocial problems that belong in the global network of analyses and practices of the pharma industry or the arms industry.