

## August 2nd Q And A session: Second of Seminar 3, Functional History by Phil McShane

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### Ramadan Greetings All!

The third seminar is slow in taking off, or in catching interest. These questions and answers may help. Functional history is tough work, but try functional biography, even if only in a slim descriptive sense. One is trying to get to grips with one's own story in the positive way that is associated with good therapy. You need not risk putting that on the BLOG of course, but the Blog could do with puzzlings and pointers. It is certainly worthwhile, however, to note that dialectic [cf. second half of page 250 in *Method*] pressures its members to put their "going-ahead" on the BLOCK: one reason why it is not a popular specialty as Lonergan describes its workings there!

Phil

## August 2<sup>nd</sup> Q And A session: Second of Seminar 3, Functional History

**Q. 37 You concluded a contribution to the Blog [July 25<sup>th</sup>] with a very dense paragraph which you expected to raise questions. I place the paragraph here and ask for further light.**

"I had best definitely halt now: there is a range of subtleties lurking here. The main subtlety is that, in a later mature functionality of cycles, the previous cycle to the current one will have generated a subjectivity of Tower-persons - through the dialectic lifting designated by page 250 - that is already leaning into this third-stage-meaning honesty. What each next cycle is to do is lift the global game to more refined openness and honesty, a new humanity of questing in a how-talk feedback that is quite beyond present fantasy. Does this dense paragraph make sense? It should generate further questions for the next **Q and A Session** of August 2<sup>nd</sup>."

**A.37.**

**Readers had best ramble back to the contribution to see what the issue was. The big issue is that we are to expect, as the global cyclic enterprise matures, that the results are genuinely cumulative and progressive. The cycle starts with some anomaly, some glitch in current affairs. It may be the failure of some progressive plan or idea to reach a particular village or even a particular continent. In**

that case the idea has been circulated already and the eighth specialty did not have full efficiency - a normal occurrence - so there is need for a recycling. But, especially at this struggling beginning stage, it is important to get tuned to the idea and the reality that the cycling is done in the context of the prior achievements. Think of a settled ethos, where that ethos is the result of many cycles through the discernments of *Method*, 250. So, the Tower Community has reached, say by 2311 A.D., a quite sophisticated moral sensibility. Foundations has lifted that sensibility, through energetic fantasy, to further possible and indeed probable refinements. The three following specialties hone that fantasy towards concrete effectiveness. The effectiveness will be within a statistics, so we get glitch-detection in the following functional research. If you like, the achievement is patchy in the non-Tower plane of cultures. But the achievement in the tower is more secure [ through mutual conditionings, conversations, etc etc: we cannot here get lost in details]. So, for example, the mood of *Completion* [see *Method* 250] is to be there, in the lean-forward refinements of current historians. They hunt, then, for a better savoring of the seeds of progress in the present incarnate heuristics that are Tower members.

Perhaps it is useful to contrast this view of refinement with present discussion of moral conversion. The moral conversion is not some simple business in the cyclings and recyclings: it is the virtuous community at a state of refinement way beyond the imagination of Aristotle or the virtues attributed to two millennia of saints. Similarly with other types of displacement: religious, aesthetic, theoretic, scholarly, whatever. So, for example, there are expected to be new luminous patterns of cultures of death and of sexuality that are quite beyond present grim disorientations of e.g. the Hebrew-Christian culture. There will be, as I mentioned in that dense paragraph, "a how-talk feedback that is quite beyond present fantasy."

You may have the sense that this stuff is equally dense, and you are right. Might we return to the problem of the story of one's life, an analogy used in the essay, to help us out here?

You would surely hope, in functional detecting of personal progress, that you were sufficiently effective to not be just stumbling about, decade after decade, in the same old vices, or indeed in the same old virtues? You would hope to become more refined, whether in playing golf or greeting God. More on that in **Question and Answer 40**, below.

**Q. 38. You keep emphasizing chemistry, the chemistry of the Renaissance or the chemistry of the cranium. It adds a complication to your emphasis on physics, and the need to be somewhat up-to-date in these areas, which you describe as the simplest zones of science. But most of us are quite lost in those areas. What are we to do? How necessary is up-to-dateness?**

A.38. This type of question recurs in various guises, and Lonergan has his answer in various places. What might I write here that would be helpful with relative immediacy?

First, don't worry about trying to catch up if you have not a serious interest or need. What I would have you come to grips with is the broader need: the future Tower People are to be in that world of elementary science, and indeed they will be there by shifts in education in the decades to come. But what of us, now? I could be as blunt as Lonergan about the contemporary theologian "he should be able to read Lindsay and Margenau" {*Foundations of Physics*}... a tall order which pushes out of the potential Tower most of his present followers. But please try to be clear on the professional level of Tower work. It is, if you like, the Wimbledon of Wisdom. You don't need to play to be human, but it would be good to admire and support it (Recall *Insight*, 442, on those who reach to embrace the cosmos, and those who might back them up). But for those who aspire to leadership there is the nice exercise of asking, "Am I going to spend the next 40 years, talking in *haute vulgarization* terms of.... Gadamar, Voegelin, Derrida, ..... or might it not be worthwhile to pause for year or so over that very real part of me that is chemical? I haven't done it so far... but then there is the invitation to some contrafactual thinking!!!"

**Q. 39. You talk here and there of contrafactual history: might you pull those reflections together for us?**

**A.39**

**Summary is not a great educational reality except to the already wise. You get an exercise in this contrafactual thinking by following up the story of the dysfunctional family in the next question. Move along from your own spontaneous contrafactual reachings, from simple daily instances to choices of a life-time. There is a subgroup of such contrafactual heuristic perspective that can be made**

**contemporarily relevant: the neglected idea or vocation can be built into the now.**

The topic expands enormously when you begin to think out its role - as suggested in Dialectic - in generating the Genetic Sequence of goodly possibilities, parallel to finding the many life-stages, if you like, of the "ideal" healthy dog. But the parallel fails in that the goodly possibilities in the case of the dog are actual patterns of underlying aggregates conducive to the emergence of form-schemes, whereas the goodly possibilities of our central concern are ideas only tenuously connected to underlying aggregates: think of the relation of ideas to fantasy, and then of the various neuro-chemical patternings that underweave such fantasies. But that is getting somewhat "farout". The importance of contrafactual thinking is seen simply and broadly if one thinks of the structure of English fields and farms as quite different from the agribusiness of Canada and the U.S. [two LA papers of April 2011 were on this topic] : might there have been another way; might there be now another way forward, towards "a billion half-acre gardens"? Stewart's book on a global science talks of the horrors and errors of the industrial revolution: there is a massive amount of creative fantasy to be done to find what those horrors and errors missed.

**Q. 40. Getting a grip on one's own story seems a good way of tackling this third functional specialty. Please enlarge on what you have already said in your recent Blog.**

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**A.40.**

**I raised the topic in my July Blog contribution precisely because, yes, it is a neat way of handling this difficult topic, and also it prepares us to move on to the fourth specialty of dialectic.**

You might associate with this topic the discussion of the dysfunctional family that I used, with decent success, for my first year university students (See *Economics for Everyone*, chapter 5 and *A Brief History of Tongue*, chapter 3.)

Yes, getting to grips with one's own story "seems a good way of tackling this third functional specialty", and indeed I am trying not to be fully open about the weave of history and biography here: perhaps you will gradually bring this weave into a strange unity. And towards that I leave you to brood over

the story of the dysfunctional family: take it as it is, regarding a holiday habit of 20 years, but later think of the dysfunctional family that is the Lonergan community of the past half century or so. Reflection on the group moving forward can hardly be of serious value without reflection of each "I" on how "I" have gone forward - or not. If you struggle on with this you will find that there is a concomitant development of functional luminosity and autobiographic luminosity that obviously [but is it so obvious?!] ties in the with the view of generalized empirical method as given on the top of p.141 of *A Third Collection*. Can you come to grips with the genetics of this: that the tackling of functional history and the tackling of one's ongoing self-appreciation are mutual mediations?

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