## Eldorede 4

## **Meaning-Growing**

I am not optimistic about plain speaking here. There are various ways that I might go about shifting the slim statistics of existential communication. We are, for one thing, dealing with a huge axial problem, where I mean **axial** in a sense quite beyond Jaspers, something I have pretty clear on for more than twenty years; but that topic needs plain speaking also, since my previous writing and speaking on the topic has generated little interest.<sup>1</sup>

I must first note that I am talking principally about full and fulsome growth in meaning, of the type, then, that Lonergan mentions in what for me is a key statement of the book *Insight*, quoted already in these *Eldorede*, "Theoretical understanding seeks to solve problems, to erect syntheses, to embrace the universe in a single view."<sup>2</sup> I am writing, then, of norms in the new luminous culture of meaning that is to emerge in some future century.

Still, there are analogies to which I have appealed over decades that can help, and I should repeat them as simply as possible here. But first, a plain statement of a normative formula for growth, to which I add the warning that the present ethos, in most areas of culture, is firmly against anything like it.

Please do not take fright at my formula: indeed, I simplify it shortly for communicative purposes. So, here we go. Let the state of growth of an individual be

<sup>2</sup>*Insight*, 417[442], the **Tomega Principle**.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>A plain note may help. Instead of Jaspers' Axial Period of 600 B.C. - 200 B.C. I propose a longer Axial Period, let's say roughly 6000 years, around the Incarnation. The axial period separates the two times of temporal subjectivity mentioned in Lonergan's *Systematics of the Trinity* and also the first from the third stage of meaning discussed in *Method in Theology*. 3000 A.D. may be too optimistic for the beginning of that new control of meaning: the date depends on you.

generally given by  $e^{x,3}$  Then one gets a glimpse of the reality and of the problem of growth by considering the rate of change of that function. It is equal to itself, or in symbols, d/dx ( $e^x$ ) =  $e^x$ .

Might I take some of the possible, probable, fright out of the last sentence by going back to elementary calculus: and at the same time illustrating here and now - there and then to one of us now! - the challenge of growth? I can rename  $e^x$  by using a longer name given by an equation. For those with sufficient mathematical sophistication, of course, there is more than a renaming involved. Here you have it:  $e^x = 1 + x + x^2/2 + x^3/(2.3) + x^4/(2.3.4) + \dots + x^n/(2.3.4\dots n) + \dots$ Even with only a technical knowledge of the rules for differentiation you figure out, by using the rule d/dx ( $x^n$ ) =  $nx^{-1}$ , that d/dx ( $e^x$ ) =  $e^x$ . O.K? In popular terms the rate of change of this thing is equal to its size.

Now before I go on - since this sort of thinking is not only discouraging but perhaps discouraged, disliked, even disdained, by philosophers and theologians - it seems a useful strategy to appeal to Lonergan's use of something similar. How similar? The knowing will smile at the result of getting the value of  $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$  as n approaches infinity, to which Lonergan appeals. But the point is that he, like I, is searching for a way to convey a genetic result; where his problem is phylogenetic, mine is ontogenetic. And do not the problems mesh? The meshing lurks in the knowledge of the result I mentioned. Here, at any rate, is his view at the age of 50:

"The Method in Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating  $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$  as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For those unfamiliar with this odd use of the letter e, I draw attention to the fact that it is not at all mysterious. It is not some general function, some vague mathematical thing. It is a definite number between 2 and 3. Of course, raising it to a power which is "loose" in its meaning is a tricky thing, but at least you can think of something definite like "the square of".

unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God ."4

I ended the previous *Eldorede* with some compact reflections on such manifolds of developing unities in a manner that coaxes towards phylogenetic openness.<sup>5</sup> Here the topic is the norm of growth of the individual.

Further, when I ended the last *Eldorede* a little while ago, I paused and puzzled at my failure to hold to simplicity. Perhaps I should have held to the statement that there is an important type of prayer that is simply hard thinking and leave it at that!

But the pause makes me wiser in my revision of this *Eldorede*. I should have a shot at ending it in four clear pages!

So, let me add a simpler image of growth. Suppose your mind is like a balloon and suppose, further, that the normative rate is a unit of radius (a centimeter, say) per unit of time (a day, a month: it does not matter). Now you don't need even to work out the geometry to make sense of the claim that the larger the balloon the more air it takes in through a one centimeter expansion.

This raises huge questions about human communication, including the communication and progress suggested by Lonergan. But let us keep to one point regarding **telling** or **sharing**.

Start with me or with you. If, this past week, I make significant progress (which, of course, is part of my contemplative norm) then **I** could not tell **me** of last week the content of that progress. Certainly I can help the climb of the likes of me: AND that helping is related to historic progress.

Let me go back now to my favorite analogy for all this: teaching mathematical physics, as I did one year, both to a first year group and to a graduate class. The first year group grew in the relevant meaning through struggling with texts and exercises,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>I quote from a letter of Lonergan to Fr.Fred Crowe in May 1954.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>With that coaxing I have regularly associated the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, entitled "Oxen of the Sun". See "Features of Generalized Empirical Method" in *Creativity and Method*, M.Lamb (ed), Minnedosa Press, Milwaukee, 1982.

week by week. The growing was accelerating: this is a quite accepted fact. In second year they would grow at a faster pace: like the balloon image illustrates. The graduates grew at a much higher pace. And so on: where that "and so on" is, I expect, problematic for you: does the n<sup>th</sup> year of thinking in an area really pace up from the (n - 1)<sup>th</sup> year?!<sup>6</sup>

Dealing with that problem helps us further along : where dealing in the present situation is me talking briefly and you taking a lot more time. This is a difficulty of present cultures of telling and teaching, but let us not complexify what so far seems pretty successful plain, if incomprehensible speaking. Incomprehensible? Well, the words are plain, but I am proposing a strange theorem of incompleteness and openness. And here we are, heading plainly into page four, with a tunnel at the end of this light.

Can you tunnel your way round and through the following parallel? If you don't like it, skip to the last paragraph!

Fermat made a simple statement which he claimed to be true and which can make sense to you as you now read it:

x<sup>n</sup> + y<sup>n</sup> = z<sup>n</sup> is not true for integral values of x,y,z, when n is greater than 2 The Proposal is called *Fermat's Last Theorem*: whether he "had" it or not is a debated issue. But there you "have" it: a nice suggestive pattern of words: x<sup>n</sup> + y<sup>n</sup> = z<sup>n</sup> is not true for integral values of x, y, z, when n is greater than 2. The pattern kept Andrew Wiley busy for 10 years, and talking it out "clearly" took three lectures (June 21-23, 1993, in Cambridge University, England) and 100 pages, both for a very well-up audience.<sup>7</sup>

In the later post-axial culture that I envisage, both Wiley and the audience will be

4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>What then of, say, the 40<sup>th</sup> year? A perspective on this is presented in my contribution to Mike Vertin's "Retirement *Festschrift*": "The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*", *The Importance of Insight. Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 339-376.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>The basic paper is Andrew Wiles, "Modular Elliptic Curves and Fermat's Last Theorem," *Annals of Mathematics*, vol. 142, 1995, 443-551.

in, within, constituted by, a quite larger world of meaning, generated by a Tower commitment to the **Tomega Principle**. And part of that larger world will be a luminous recognition of Lonergan's claim about any particular progress in insight and concept. "The conceptualization of understanding is, when fully developed, a system …. the concept emerges from understanding, not an isolated atom but precisely as part of a context, loaded with the relations that belong to it in virtue of a source which is equally the source of other concepts."<sup>8</sup> We are struggling here with an enlargement of this view, especially within the third definition of generalized empirical method, loneliness, "an infinite craving,"<sup>9</sup> tuned to its source. Then a shift in one zone's insight-system is a ballooning of meaning throughout the dominant inner word and world: one becomes a stranger to oneself of yesterday.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Verbum. Word and Idea in Aquinas, U. of T. Press, 1997, 238. See also Joistings 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>B.Lonergan, "Finality, Love, Marriage", *Collection*, U. of Toronto Press, 1988, 49.