

Field Nocturne 21

Observing Brains

1. Introduction: Problems of Contexts

I must immediately invite you to move on to section 2, titled “An Uncomplicated Approach”. The present section is a necessary warning that even that uncomplicated approach is complicated. Be patient with my, with and within our, searchings. We are half-way through what I took to be a reasonably elementary project, but it is not. It is a project that opens out into a future shaping of psychology and phenomenology. I am helped in my project by having been given last night the freshly published book *Shaping the Future of Language Studies*,¹ which is a magnificent context for *Field Nocturnes 31-33*, if I get that far. But it is a discomfoting break from present related studies. So, here, it seems useful, especially if you are a beginner, to notice the odd and difficult break that you are invited to **here**.² I do a little of that in this first section. Section 2 gets us back to our attention to to **WHAT IS HERE**. The third section goes on from this first section to note a few things about phenomenology. The fourth section does the same for Lonergan’s few pages on “the given” in *Insight*. Finally, I ramble a little on the task ahead, in these next twenty essays, in the larger future of the sciences of life: and there the context of the present and future of such sciences is to be attended to all too briefly. But how, now, might I intimate the large context that we edge quietly towards?

I do so by turning us to Lonergan’s efforts to make some sense of phenomenology in those lectures of 1957 in Boston College. The concluding section of

¹The book (Axial Publishing, 2008) is by John Benton, co-author of Benton, Drage, and McShane, *Introducing Critical Thinking*, Axial Press, 2005, which co-authored text he teaches successfully to grade 12 philosophy in West Hill Secondary School, Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada.. He lifts our hope of shaping the future.

²By now you note, existentially notice, that bold face invites you, bold-facedly, to the shocking **heroic** “unrealism” of the **here** behind the eyeballs.

his pre-lecture notes, section 5, is titled “Horizon as the Problem of Philosophy” and in it he raises heavy question of culture, and his affirmation of “a field”³ which gives rise to the issue of ontic evidence, given, in those pages, a type of circumincession of epistemology and ontology.⁴ It seems to me worthwhile to quote the entire last section of the notes, section (e), fully: it points us magnificently towards the future.

“ (e) The prior reality that both grounds horizons and the critique of horizons and the determination of the field

is the reality of the subject as subject.

It is not any object known objectivity, and it is not the subject known objectively, for all objects are known within some stream of consciousness and so within a horizon; and it has been contended that such objects cannot justify and horizon without thereby justifying all horizons.

It is the reality of the subject as subject; for the subject as subject is both reality and conscious.

the subject as subject is reality in the sense that we live and die, love and hate, rejoice and suffer, desire and fear, wonder and dread, inquire and doubt

it is Descartes’s *Cogito* transposed to concrete living

³**Field** is a key topic in Lonergan’s reaching of this year. When I edited the book I traced the word as borrowed from some existentialist, but lost the note: some reader may know about the connection. See my index, both the end of the introductory comments and under *Field*. I enrich the notion of field in the third chapter of *Lack in the Beingstalk*, but you can surely share the suspicion that it gets us away from the shackles of *being*. Lonergan, as far as I know, never returned to this twist of language and thinking. But then he was getting to the end of this surge of creativity round subjectivity. The pressure on him was towards both the massive coverage (and mass classes) of his Roman teaching and the demands of audiences for a broad view of his work. At the recent 50th anniversary Halifax Lectures I shared my musing that those lectures, available now as *Understanding and Being*, were a sort of ending for him of this type of climbing. *Haute vulgarization* was grasping for his heart and, in many ways, he surrendered.

⁴I am only nudging here toward a deepening of the strategy lurking in *Insight*, marvelously hidden in chapter 13, which baffles people who think that the epistemological problem is happily solved by the end of chapter 11, so that we are in an old familiar realm of being when we flow through chapter 12. This is quite not the case.

it is the subject present to himself, not as presented to himself in any theory or affirmation of consciousness, but as the prior (non-absence) prerequisite to any presentation, *asa priori* condition to any stream of consciousness (including dreams).

The argument is: the prior reality is not an object as object or subject as object; there only remains subject as subject; and this *s as s* is both reality and discoverable through consciousness.

The argument does not prove that in the *s as s* we shall find the evidence norms invariants principles for a critique of horizons; it proves that unless we find it there, we shall not find it at all."⁵

Section 2 of chapter 14 of *Phenomenology and Logic* takes up the topic, but one need to face the slopes of chapter 13 and 14 to be with him here with any adequacy, even with that adequacy that is given one by sniffing round one's own existential gap. But the same point is made by him with fresh twists, as it is being made by me with a bluntness added by some twists here of linguistic feedback. "The subject in his living has a certain presence to himself, in some queer sense of the word 'presence' - it is not the same as the presence of objects - that experiences the terror of death, the agony of suffering, and the torture of guilt. That subject is a reality in that ontic sense prior to any ontology, prior to any conception of himself as *there*. 'Here we are': it is true of all."

Here we are, you and I, not asking about truth, but asking in such a way as to be present in an intimate meaning of the three words **WHAT IS HERE**.

2. An Uncomplicated Approach

What is here. *Hier-sein*. Sign on here as hero, ex-stans.

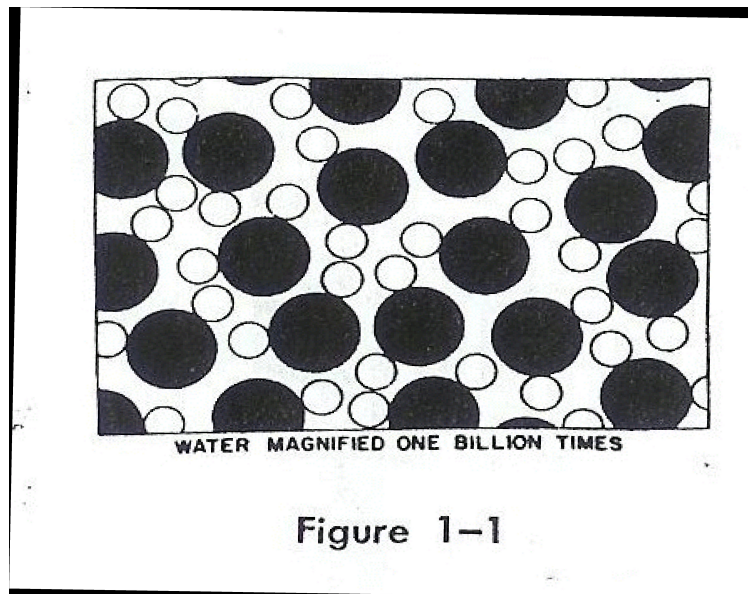
Yes, it is a simple approach, but it is not simple. I am still struggling to get us both to focus in a simple fashion, but that struggle in you and in me involves us both, each in our own way, in battles with fashions that we have developed, that have

⁵*Phenomenology and Logic*, 214-15.

developed in us, that envelope us. But I had best leave that to section 4. And forget the German, except to note that it reminds you of another context: *Dasein* stuff. But here we have the everyday that is invariant in every day, and the everyday of our interest is better expressed as **was is hier**:

WHAT IS HERE.

Recall the lengthy quotation given in section 1 from the end of Lonergan's notes on Existentialism, and re-read the phrase "It is the subject present to himself, not as presented to himself". That, oddly, is our topic. By "that, oddly" I am pointing to the lack of linguistic feedback that cuts us off from ourselves: something that we return to in section 5 below. But now, our task is to find our **what here**, confronted but not indeed confronted with that same old diagram, as a piece of your present given to which we are giving significance.



Without Feynman's or my comments **it** is just an inner ordered neuropattern named⁶ black and white. Note the ambiguity of **it**. But I eliminate that ambiguity by

⁶I slip here over a medley of problems: the fundamental problem of the invention of the process of naming, the looseness of naming, etc. We return to these in *Field Nocturnes 31-34*.

telling you that I am not talking about the marks on the page or in the screen. I am talking about a pattern in you. Your cat or dog, sharing you stare, would have a like pattern, allowing for the variabilities of mammalian ocularity. But your stare, or your relaxed “inspection”, is one of curiosity **about** the pattern, **in** the pattern. *About* means a surrounding, even a cherishing. That is for you to uncover, in its odd givenness. I do not use the word discover: I am trying to keep us close to the givenness.⁷ We may ask, with a discernable but untroublesome ambiguity, what is given to what? The given what is the diagram, to which my talk adds significance, talk of water and its molecules of hydrogen and oxygen. What supports that talk of mine? My understanding of the aggregation of the things that are normal water and of the bindings of its non-thing components. Why do I, might I, might any teacher, talk like that? Because we lean on images to think and to bring others to think.

Does d^2s/dt^2 look like acceleration? No: still it helps us to think. So I say, Think of the black circles as oxygen and the white circles as hydrogen. Why? Because it helps you and me to think of the bindings that we wish to understand. It is a good image, in that there are included isomorphism, similar patterns. But in so far as you and I are in luminous control of the symbolic image, that isomorphism is strictly limited to its topological usefulness. Luminous control: there lies the problem, especially in these early human days, especially in this culture of truncation.⁸ Nor are we going to move forward easily towards that third stage of meaning, that second time of the temporal

⁷This is a tricky business, of holding to Lonergan’s suggestions about the given given in section 4 of *Insight* chapter 3, and yet, bringing you to attend to the what that now whats here.

⁸Have you not already slipped “back” into reading lines that are already out there?, “objectivity spontaneously a matter of dealing with things that are ‘really out there’”(*Insight*, 385[410]). Yet I am thinking of a later Tower Community, mutually supportive, Jack and Jill, Tom and Dick and Harriet, luminously sharing a sort of common phantasm in the darkness of being.

subject, when we⁹ are to be poised to regard, and guard, the real water as the correctly understood water, and lifted towards that reality by the radiance of an adequate aesthetics of water. But, we are again venturing towards deep water **here, what?**

And still, here, you have the need to go now from the round of the oxygen diagram to the round of the circle in chapter one of *Insight*, to the round of a seen face or a diagramed resting amoeba, to the round of your inner glimpse of a sunflower face.

Is this, then, really uncomplicated and simple? I recall the note that I quoted in the previous *Field Nocturne*, an editorial note on “necessary for intellect to convert to phantasm”¹⁰ which said “the expression is strange but the meaning is simple, namely that intellect has a natural¹¹ orientation to phantasm (image), turns to it for its object of study, and through an act of insight finds an intelligibility immanent in the image.”¹² No: I do not find this simple at all. It is the heart, or rather the neuroskin, of the curious cosmic emergent that is you, I, Jill and Jack, immortal diamonds.

3. Phenomenology

So I return to issues raised in the first section. I concluded there that we are not asking about truth. Perhaps at this stage - especially if you have spent a month or a decade at this stage - you have a cautious and wise approach to those three printed words, **ASKING ABOUT TRUTH** ? What about truth: full stop.

⁹Feynman, one of the most brilliant physicists of the twentieth century obviously confused on the issue, would, in those later times mentioned in the previous note, be pressured up into the poise of realism by the sloping and recycling that is to be intrinsic to the culture of the Tower of Able, a pressure to be felt effectively in plain meaning, or the plane of commonsense meaning. The challenge of the Tower “higher” plane of meaning is to “ex-plane” effectively, by parables, poetry, personal lives radiant with genuine mystery.

¹⁰Lonergan, “A Note on Geometrical Possibility”, *Collection*, 96.

¹¹I add my own note here to recall the complexity of a natural that is in fact ineffable. This is a thorny question regarding the natural desire of spirit in any finitude.

¹²Editors’ note on the text on *Collection*, 96, to be found on 272, under f.

Have you at least a sense that we are in the same ball park as in the previous section, but now edging beyond the given diagram or whatever to another ontic given, a given in an odd sense? Truth is a central topic in *Phenomenology and Logic*¹³ and perhaps I might symbolize our struggle by brooding over the title of a failed book it anticipates: “Merleau-Ponty is busy writing a book on the origins of truth.”¹⁴ The book, titled *Le visible et l-invisible*, appeared in 1964.¹⁵ Can I give any decent pointers regarding this question in a few pages? Lonergan might well have gone on, in an added lecture at the conclusion of his two-week workshop, to give a version of the second section of chapter 17 of *Insight*, “The Notion of Truth”. He begins there: “The real issue, then, is truth. Though it concerned us all along, it will not be amiss to bring together at least the main points made on different occasions and in different chapters.”¹⁶ Such an added lecture would have been quite lost on his audience: is section 2 of *Insight* 17 not already quite lost, not to speak of section 3 with its *Sketch* and canons?

Might my few added points here be equally lost? But some few, surely, will get the pointing, and bring forth a re-writing of *The Visible and the Invisible*, live and re-live - and lead minders to live and re-live - the freeing truth, luminous in a global cycle of collaboration? And as I write and think this I find myself giving quite new meaning to the conclusion of my Editor’s Introduction of nine years ago. Might I repeat it **here**? And if so, am I just repeating it? And what do you think is **it?**, **it** is?

“Lonergan’s presentation in these lectures is somewhat accessible to the ordinary cultured reader. But my concern is with the inaccessibility of the content and perspective that mediate his words. It is with the further obscurity of a functional-

¹³See the index there, under both *Truth* and *Yes*. See also my editorial comments, xxi-iv.

¹⁴*Phenomenology and Logic*, 278.

¹⁵Paris: Gallimard, 1964. The English translation was published in 1968: *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, Northwestern, 1968).

¹⁶*Insight*, 549[572].

specialist perspective that crowned his life achievement and that would place Husserl's search for a rigorous science with a collaborative empirical humility. The seriously cultured reader should not miss the challenge to grapple with the existential gap,¹⁷ the existential distinction, between Lonergan's comfortable presentation and his discomfiting pointing to horizons quite unfamiliar to the cultures of the new millennium. These unfamiliar horizons are needed to meet the desperations of our modern and postmodern times."¹⁸

The paragraph bears re-reading repeating: but in what style? I turn shortly to a more general consideration of that problem of reading and re-reading, but let me come to an abrupt halt here with the problem of reading, hearing, a small piece on Lonergan's lectures of 1957. Read with me, then: "In Husserl and still more pronouncedly in Heidegger, and similarly in Sartre, who is mainly giving a new twist to Heidegger's doctrine, the concentration of attention is on the pre-predictive, the preconceptual. They are concerned with the man who is the source of the concept, the man who is the source of the judgment."¹⁹ Here we have Lonergan speaking in a comforting conciliatory manner. To lift it towards the reality of his existential concern you might find it useful to mesh its reading with the reading of the quotation above at note 4, his closing identification of his project and the project of the third and fourth stages of meaning.

Pause, then, with me. Our concern here is with the pre-predictive, with the woman and "with the man who is the source of the concept, the man who is the source of the judgment". Did Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, really share our concern, or share it successfully? Later Lonergan remarks, more bluntly, "Phenomenology is concerned with the evident. The thematic treatment of what is evident is considered secondary: the

¹⁷See *Phenomenology and Logic*, the index under *Gap* or *Existential*.

¹⁸Conclusion of Editor's Introduction, *Phenomenology and Logic*, xxiv.

¹⁹*Phenomenology and Logic*, 225.

phenomenologists merely report.”²⁰ Is this true? And - to come to the core of our present problem - did they report correctly on the “significant”²¹ given, or on the given? What do I mean by given **here**? You find, I think, that I am ambiguous, in that my focus is on **what is here**. The three *Field Nocturnes*, of which this is the second, aim at enlightening you about that ambiguity. Obviously I am interested in the **what** that is you being startlingly and startingly present. But let us return enlighteningly to Lonergan’s brief talk about the given that is **here**.

4. The Given

At the beginning of section 2 I mentioned fashions that have developed, have been developed in us. A very elementary fashion that is included in Lonergan’s broad sweep of what is given in the given, “not only the veridical deliverances of outer sense but also images, dreams, illusions, hallucinations, personal equations, subjective bias”, there is a fashion of reading that is a deeply fixed illusion in our culture, perhaps in you. If it were not some way a given in you then this essay, largely a pointing to the reading of Lonergan’s comments on the given, would be old news. But did you not find our reading of the end words of the section new news: “the pure desire regarding the flow of empirical consciousness”?

So there is the “apparently trifling problem” of misreading: could that problem have been a given from *Insight’s* first paragraph on? There is the “illustrative instance of insight” of page one of chapter one: how did you read those four words?²²

Now you may well say that I go too far, and I suppose I do. What I go to is an

²⁰*Phenomenology and Logic*, 275. I must note that the text above differs from the text as I originally edited, which reads, “” considered secondary, merely the phenomenologist’s report”. That reading is, I claim now, a mis-hearing of a typical Lonergan stumble “merely the phenomenologists report”. [Editors, please take note, for the next edition!]

²¹The word *significant* occurs significantly twice on *Insight* 382[406].

²²The illustrative instance is discussed in detail in *Cantower* 27.

envisaging of a far later stage of meaning when the operation and significance of the task of reading is a luminous possession of - in both senses - culture. It can be a private achievement, an evolutionary sport, but its establishment as a culture is to be the achievement of cyclic tower collaboration. So, my few comments, **here** to your **what** about the **here to your what** that is these couple of pages of *Insight* needs enormous luck to achieve even a little shift. No doubt I am on to an embarrassing topic such as Lonergan mentioned in *Method*: "Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company."²³

5. Future Tasks in Botany, Zoology, Psychology.

Our paragraph of interest is primarily focused on the plant, but it anticipates the rest of that chapter 15 of *Insight*, and we have taken that anticipation as giving us freedom to range around in our efforts and our illustrations. The project that I began back in *Field Nocturne 1*, indeed, centred on a text, not in botany, or zoology, but in neuropsychology. Was I already way off base? By no means. Yes, certainly the project got out of hand, is out of hand, but centre stage was always the neurothing that you are, that I am. The cultural issue is the shift to the from of generalized empirical method that Lonergan describes bluntly and briefly."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 "²⁴ It is a shocking shift in the task of observing brains.

The task of observing brains? We may end, here, with a pause over the five words, *the task of observing brains*. The question mark is removed. What did it mark? If you are at least vaguely with me here, you will, with some delight, acknowledge, in a beyond-notional assent, that the mark marked a networking of your neurozones.

²³*Method in Theology*, 299.

²⁴*A Third Collection*, 141, the top lines.

The task of observing brains is a communal global task of all of us, **observing brains that we actually here are**, where within the observing there is a what, lurking in personal and social disturbances, but neglected in daylight's dark doings.²⁵ The remedy "begins from the thing-for-us", "Study of the organism begins from the thing-for-us,"²⁶ but now you notice the twist of generalized empirical method in its second, or more so, in its third mode.²⁷ The remedy is a new view, a new you, of reading. That, really is the main pointing of these three hundred pages of commentary on that single paragraph, **study**, of *Insight*. And many other three hundred pages might comment on many other paragraphs of *Insight*. But this is an old message of mine.²⁸

The present enormous task is for some few to anticipate the texts on botany, zoology, and psychology of later stages of meaning. I have in mind, of course, texts for all ages, beginning with kindergarten colours and reaching beyond graduate complexities both to elder searchings and to commonsense talk.²⁹ The task requires massive fantasy about how we regard the present and future expression of our humanity's cosmic glory.

²⁵"It tends to be shouldered out of the busy day, to make its force felt in the tranquillity of darkness, in the solitude of loneliness, in the shattering upheavels of personal or social disaster" (*Insight*, 625[648]).

²⁶*Insight*, 464[489].

²⁷See Joistings 21 for the three modes of generalized empirical method. Mode 2 is described at note 25; the third mode shifts attention to the mediated luminosity of the subject.

²⁸I regularly made the point by referring to the dense graduate text, Joos *Theoretical Physics*, a standard text of the late 1950s, a parallel to *Insight*, which however had the backing of a century of good undergraduate texts, while *Insight* was know-man's island.

²⁹I recall my optimism of thirty years ago, still a valid pointing: "If there is to be a massive shift in public minding and kindness and discourse in the next century, there must be a proportionate shift in the mind and heart of the academy and the arts at the end of this century, with consequent changes in operating schemes of recurrence from government to kindergarden." (*Loneragan's Challenge to the University and the Economy*, 1976, 1. The book is available on the usual website.

I conclude with what is no doubt a terrible muddle of puns, but all the more memorable for that. At 77, I am fighting a regard action, one that Lonergan seemingly lost: but only if we fail to see, seize, see-saw, the power of his final non-foundational cyclic saw, his suggested global regard of later stages of meaning, a saw including, and included in, the **eschaton**.