

Introducing a Towering Me to Me

“To see things as comprehensively
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep
As if they touched them. Let us strive for this.”
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Bk. 5, ll. 185-188)

I appeal regularly to Michael Jackson’s song about looking in the mirror to make the world a better place. Recently I have connected this with, so to speak, facing the situation. We are interested “in dialectic as affecting community, action, situation” (Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 358). The primary situation we face here, on this blog, is the brain and body in the mirror. The issue is introducing the new sane economics to oneself as a piece of the road to “affecting community, action” (Ibid.), towards being a “character” (Ibid., 356, line 12) of change. “The treatment of character is, as it seems, a branch and starting point of statecraft. And as a whole it seems to me that the subject ought rightly to be called not Ethics, but Politics.” (Aristotle, the beginning of *Magna Moralia*). The deep issue of the new economics is that common sense needs to gradually grow, bonewise, into the ethos of what Lonergan wrote about in four pages (19-23) of his little book *For a New Political Economy*. “Transformations of Dynamic Structure” and “The Generalized Law of Increasing and Decreasing returns.” He reached a terrifying height of vision as he climbed to his fortieth year, writing of transformations “beyond recognition” (20, line 12) and a new global “gardening” (20, line 21). The problem of the mirror is facing the situation that is identically all situations—does not the situation in the mirror need the galaxy to keep it spinning and weaving?—to have “a vitality of response to situations that can acknowledge when the old game is done for” (21, lines 2-3). How well dressed are you when you face the morning mirrored situation? The seminar is to be a reaching into the molecules of you looking in the mirror that is to reveal, back of your eyes, that you really don’t have this poise in your panties, in your boxers or bra. Nor am I straying here into witty lasciviousness. First, there is need for more women in the mirror. “From an **ecofeminist** perspective, Mies and Shiva (*Ecofeminism*, London, 1993) argue the need for a new ‘vision’ which promotes greater self-reliance and environmental sustainability through new forms of economic activity based on more traditional and informal work, grassroots democracy, common responsibility, and subsistence technology.” (Robert Potter and Sally Lloyd-Evans, *The City in the Developing World*, Longmans, 1998, 195). The Bob-and-Sally book stays close to the brute and brutal facts of increasing urbanization. The ecofeminists seem closer to my mad vision of a billion half-acre gardens—only one sixteenth of the globe’s arable land, and I am not pushing here for fantasy about the water and underwater possibilities.

But, secondly, there is a much deeper issue of the blossoming of sexuality towards underpinning, fermenting and embracing a new economics, a new world order. It is to go massively beyond present gallant struggles, e.g., for the rights of women. There are deep disorientations in the Muslim tradition and obvious madnesses in the Catholic tradition, but there are the still deeper misapprehensions—are they not ancient and transcultural?—of the evolutionary and everlasting dynamics of “an infinite craving” (Lonergan, *CWL* 4, “Finality, Love, Marriage,” 49) that has lodgings in boxers and bra cups.

This, however, is not the place to sketch a treatise on the neurosexology of *The Everlasting Joy of Being Human*. (the title of a recent book of mine). Nor would it do to put forth a chapter on sex that parallels, say, Lonergan's magnificent chapter on art. ("Art", chapter 9 of *CWL* 10). Yet he ends that chapter with nice musings that weave our questions into these last horrid centuries of economics and education, and so I think it worthwhile to quote fully his conclusion there.

"What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable again is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness. Normally, we think of freedom as freedom of the will, as something that happens within consciousness. But the freedom of the will is a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness, and that flow is not determined either by environment, external objects, or by the neurobiological demands of the subject. It has its own free component. Art is a fundamental element in the freedom of consciousness itself. Thinking about art helps us think, too, about exploring the full freedom of our ways of feeling and perceiving."

And I twist that final sentence of his: thinking about sex helps us to think, too, about exploring the full freedom of our ways of feeling and perceiving.

Might that thinking become a confession to the person in the mirror, rising perhaps to Hegelian heights? "As the labor of introspection proceeds, one stumbles upon Hegel's insight that the full objectification of the human spirit is the history of the human race. It is in the sum of the products of common sense and common nonsense, of the sciences and the philosophies, of moralities and religions, of social orders and cultural achievements, that there is mediated, set before us in a mirror in which we can behold, the originating principle of human aspiration and human attainment and failure." (Lonergan Archives, A697, p. 14).

There is the shock, then, to you here now, of this fullness being fermentingly hidden in the image in your mirror, inviting you to take a stand, in a present vague fullness, on global functional collaboration as grounding the climb to **beholding**, to take a stand on a personal climbing.

Nor am I asking you to muse over the possible further shock regarding the image's strange situation in your psyche. You can feel that in my *Cantower* 9. And you will wend your way to and through that feeling in decades ahead to find a strange luminosity of what seem now to be simple ultimates.

For starters you could accept Lonergan's overture to confess—and to review the confession communally—that is his discomfiting lines 18-33 of *Method in Theology*, 250. "**Behold!**" you say, to yourself and then, in the final guidelines, to others. You

might need to write to yourself, a beginning of righting the situation's sexuality, and may even feel the need of doing the Rousseau thing, produce a 700-page *Confessions*. Did his "ways of feeling and perceiving" sexuality warp his view of nature, of Emile's education, of his odd liaison and marriage, of his abandoned children? Certainly, sexually, he was not a happy man. (I quote immediately, but randomly, from *The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Modern Library, Random House). "Until I was a young man, I not only had no distinct idea of the union of the sexes, but the confused notion which I had regarded it never presented itself to me except in a hateful and disgusting form" (15). "For the first time I found myself in the arms of a woman, a woman whom I adored. Was I happy? No; I tasted pleasure. A certain unconquerable feeling of melancholy poisoned its charm; I felt as if I had been guilty of incest" (203). Etcetera, abundantly.

But these are only titillations and misdirections, making you perhaps pause over the horror of self-revelation that I seem to suggest. Imagine giving an account of your first probing sexual encounter?

This imagining may serve to help to face the larger horror of accounting for your first probing science-minding encounter and the minding climb to a position or a poise that followed—or failed: a horror of self-exposure for contemporary academics, including it would seem, for many of those who follow Lonergan. So, you might face that personal venture in the mood of Rousseau: "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man is myself." (the beginning of the *Confessions*).

The undertaking, described by Lonergan in those lines 18-33, is hitherto without precedent, a unique communal self-exposure reaching for a trans-luminous luminosity of the mirror-imagined. It is, however, to find imitators in the future history of confessions, grounding slowly a successful statistics of economic democracy and aesthetic and sexual liberty. "But we are not there yet", and we are paradoxically blocked by the disciples of the man who wrote *Insight*, the vastly profounder 700-page confession than that lightweight ramble of Rousseau.

Enough strange nudgings! Best that I leap now towards winding down to a conclusion of this brief doctrinal ramble: a ramble that can be read, as Lonergan's few pages from *CWL* 21 can, or his 25 pages on art can, either with and towards the high remote meaning of functional doctrines or in a beginner's commonsense mode weighed down by convention. The point of my pointing is an identifying of the long road to the character, the incarnate meaning, the situation, who typed "but we are not there yet" (20, line 22) seventy-five years ago, and went on to note the extinction of the tiny-brained titanothore. Large-brained humans of our time, cozily embedded in brutal commonsense cultures of West, East and South, putter along with the AS-IS, leaning especially on the simple advances of the simplest science, physics, not seeing the tied-up line-up in the photo-mirror of, say, the G-20. We seem, sadly, shockingly, to need to go on into the unbreathable future to sense what the situation provided in 1942: "Nor will it suffice to have some higher common factor of culture, to accept the physical sciences but not bother with their higher integration on the plea that that is too difficult, too obscure, too unsettled, too remote.

That was titanothore's attitude to brain, and titanothore is extinct" (21, lines 22-26).

Might you look in the mirror, with "a vitality of response," during this next decade and see, seize, share, a new cranium, a new culture, a strange new caulding of humanity?

For me this is a new view, a new cranial message of today, quite remote from last month's meaning of me. I know that it does not intimate sufficiently, effectively, the life-climb, but a 700-page confession is beyond me:

"To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture!"

I repeat those lines of Robert Browning's *Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came* from the end of *Cantower 4*, "Molecules of Description and Explanation" and thus bring us round to my initial quotation from his wife, which is at note 82 there. Thus do I bracket my little ramble in a longer, 30 page, version of the same situation of situations written more than twelve years ago, a much more elementary glimpse of you and me and giants of the past, most of them women.

"You are meant to gently, darkly, climb and twirl into the fellowship and sisterhood of giants, beyond those giants, in Then-Enlightenment."

So ends that *Cantower*, but as I close I realize that, yes, my long ten-volume *Cantowers*-confession of that past decade could be a beginning for you, twirling into *Cantower 5*, "Metaphysics THEN", of the next month, with Samuel Beckett's last two poems:

"go where never before
no sooner there than there always
no matter where never before
no sooner there than there always"

"go end there
where never till then
till as much as to say
no matter where
no matter when"