

“Refuses”

I have been grappling with the problem of providing an effective *Assembly* for arriving at a group-search for a progressive poise on the title word, the fifth last word of what may well be the longest sentence in Lonergan’s book *Insight*. It occurred to me, delightedly, that I could just take that word of that page and that sentence and that section and that chapter and that book and that life as the Assembled. Then some group of us get into the meaning of that single word as a focal Lonergan contribution to our emergent Standard Model. It would be a bit like settling in on the word *contraction* with the group surrounding Einstein, Lorentz, et Poincaré, around 1905. You needed to be decently in the ballpark of the Michelson-Morley experiment on light travelling to get talking relevantly.

Still, pause with your eyes on the word for a moment. Might you not envisage a group LO-wing¹ the word, *refuses*; thus, travelling down those line of *Method 10*’s Section 5? Indeed, there is no problem in envisaging a general chat, even a grade nine class hovering round “teenager **refuses** groping.” So we move from dictionary to localized topic.

But here we are facing the seeding of the cycle that goes through *Assembly*, and so we have to somehow cope with the *Weltanschauung* of the word-user. Einstein uses the word *contraction* as the tenth word in a mind-boggling lecture introducing relativity: “Today I shall solve the problem of the Lorentz contraction” Parallel that with a Lonergan beginning, heading for the tenth word: “Today I invite you to consider how axial consciousness refuses”

Both lecturers face closures in the audiences, indeed, even in themselves,² giving fuller meaning on both cases to the *Insight* context of the usage of the word *refusal*: “keeps some

¹ I rather like the odd word LO-wing. It refers to what are now known as the *Duffy Exercises*, an effort to put into practice Lonergan’s Overture of *Method in Theology* (end of section 5, chapter 10). Read the word as you like, but the hint is that the initial efforts are a matter of winging it, of flying low.

² This is a deep issue regarding cultural containment, regarding the existential gap between the horizon and field. “The field is the universe, but my horizon defines my universe.” (CWL 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 199: italics Lonergan’s). Lonergan, on the small matter on hand, deals in *Insight* (184-94) with rod-contraction or its equivalent, the “clock paradox” from a self-luminous field perspective. Einstein does not. For a context see chapter 9, “Relativistic Kinematics,” of Cornelius Lanczos, *The Variation Principles of Mechanics*, University of Toronto Press, 1977. Page 299 there claims that “the clock paradox was first posed around 1918 and completely analyzed and elucidated by Einstein. The reference given there is to *Die Naturwissenschaften* 6, 697 (1918). Einstein’s little essay is a muddled view. The muddle persists.

matters entirely to oneself, and refuses even to face others.” But what might “refuses” mean in these two cases of Einstein and Lonergan? Might I not suggest effectively to some of you that it pushes us to read our way down—or rather up, or is it in?—through the long sentence that thus ends?

Are we getting anywhere towards a better *Assembly* and into some effective LOB and LAB work? You have a dictionary “horizon” round and about the word “refuses” and perhaps a good deal more, perhaps from baseball batting or a settled musicality.³

Getting that “good deal more” out into coherent script is a task of the first objectification. Best that I bring out—yes, a repetition—my focal “deal more” re this task here: the level of openness of your “what” to full explanation. Please, no objections need bubble up here about morals or religions: those areas are not at all excluded. But my focus is on explanation, and indeed, it is on-topic in regard to Lonergan’s bogus ten words above, “Today I invite you to consider how axial consciousness refuses” Axial consciousness has space in its goings-on for a range of moralities and religions, but the drive of the bogus lecture is towards a precise meta-explanation of ‘how axial consciousness **refuses**’ complete explanation and the need for complete solutions. The drive would have been towards the explanatory explanation of the ending of that global refusing in the later stage and age of the positive anthropocene. Think of the long-term cheeriness of the end of the second paragraph of Lonergan’s musings on **The Problem**: “if their adaptation to spiritual advance is slow, at least it tends to endure; and so the accepted manners and customs of an earlier time can become abominations, at once incredible and repulsive, to a later age.”⁴

But please do not be led to think of the manners and customs of villas and villages in our present context. We need to think of the adaptation of modern reachings that **refuses** axially the core of that adaptation in the shriveled manners and customs of front-line science. I find it useful to quote here two paragraphs of my odd book, *The Future*, which is a long version of the bogus Lonergan lecture begun above.⁵ The first paragraph is front-line science; the second paragraph is

³ Refusal of horizon-shift is what we are poised over in this essay. You may think of little shifts, like that of moving from arithmetic to algebra, or odder shifts, such as are represented by Dave Brubeck’s *Take Five* or broader shifts like Schrödinger’s equation. I think of Debussy writing to Stravinsky, “For me it is a special satisfaction to tell you how much you have enlarged the boundaries of the permissible in the empire of sound.” (quoted in Donald Mitchell, *The Language of Music*, London, 1966, 22). I am pushing you here towards an enlargement quite beyond any of these.

⁴ *Insight*, 711.

⁵ The book referred to, [*The Future: Core Precepts of Supramolecular Method and Nanochemistry*](#), (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2019) is in fact a rewrite of Lonergan’s Method in Theology.

my invitation to you to read its *refusal*. ITS? I leave that capitalized word dangling, as I leave this essay dangling. What dangles before you is your “Lonergan Overture” effort to carry yourself forward from the *Assembly*, “refuses,” or perhaps Lonergan’s meaning and mine of “history as refusal.” But you will be happy—perhaps—to notice that I append here an aide-mémoire, in the form of two pages of Lonergan in which he points to the core refusal that is general bias.

Here, then, are the promised two paragraphs, followed by the two pages (121, 155) from *CWL 6, Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is the molecule that is responsible for encoding the genetic information that makes life possible. The structure of DNA itself arises from supramolecular interactions. Just one strand of DNA contains all of the necessary information for an entire organism, an incredible feat of biological data compression! Single strands of DNA are comprised of polyphosphate/sugar backbones to which are appended nucleobase residues of four types: adenine (A), cytosine (c), guanine (G) and thymine (T). The sequence of the nucleobases is how the genetic information is held. Triplets of these nucleobases correspond to one of twenty amino acids that assemble to form proteins.⁶

Is that it? Is that you, Supermolecule, to a (T)? A pinning down, with a little expensive help from Pharma businesses, of Thy Mine of life? Have you, flickeringly, an effective counterblast in your molecular doubleyou self, or where might you find, hosted, that blasted powered-up W-enzyme? Time now, methinks, for you to read and breathe those pages of the Introduction that I advised you to skip. In a decent primitive environment Topsy might be only illiterate but sane, and rightly claim “Ah ‘spect ah just grow’d.”⁷ But in the topsy scurvy of our axial times this type of primitive survival is only a statistical sniff.

⁶ J.W. Steed, David R. Turner, and Karl J. Wallace, *Core Concepts in Supramolecular Chemistry*, John Wiley and Sons, 2007, 119–20.

⁷ See note 33 on page xvii of *The Future: Core Precepts in Supramolecular Method and Nanochemistry*. I repeat, nudgingly, its message: Lonergan is recalling the talk of the slave girl in chapter 20 of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Might you befriend those “enslaved by convention” (see my *Music That Is Soundless*, 29, for Ezra Pound’s view), like Eva in the story? Might you befriend your *drifting* (see note 18 above, p. 6) self.

uation of the world of community and common sense, and an emphasis upon eternal objects, in Brahmanism there is a similar phenomenon, in which the world of common sense is also the world of appearances. but the emphasis is not upon eternal objects but upon the absolute subject. the Atman, an emphasis from the side of the subject. And, though it is not too clear, there seems to be in Plotinus's 'One' the contribution not only from Plato on the side of the object but also from the side of the subject.³⁹

Again, there can be acknowledged both theory and common sense but the acknowledgment of theory is a devalued acknowledgment. It is simply through what the French call 'haute vulgarisation.' People have great respect for the great theoretical names – Newton and Einstein. Aristotle and Aquinas, weren't they wonderful people! – but they have no personal experience of the intellectual pattern of living, of what it is to live the way a theorist lives, to have that pure domination of intellect as a part-time mode of one's subjectivity. They do not know by experience what that is, they are not familiar, strictly and accurately, with any field of theoretical objects. They have a very inadequate notion of what theory is, yet at the same time they really are not in the world of community, they do not apprehend the concrete, the individual, the particular, as they really are; their apprehension is mediated by universal norms, laws, criteria, classifications, serial types. and so on, so that they do not know what the concrete is. They are lost in some no man's land between the world of theory and the world of common sense.

It is now time to end, and I have covered most of the ground I intended to. What I have had to say has been, unfortunately, either suggestive or fragmentary. Perhaps in the course of the year you may find some help from it: on the one hand, by going to elementary types of meaning, which I tried to illustrate and communicate if not define (the intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, incarnate, and linguistic) and on the other hand, by seeing in the different spheres that do not integrate (that do not mix with one another but are under the law of a withdrawal and return: a time for this and a time for that) a limitation to the possibility of the grouping of groups – this is Piaget's analysis of development – and a sort of scale on which one can fit, at least in some rough fashion, the different modes of thinking that one meets in an exploration of the realm of meaning, which is a fundamental realm in the existence, the living, of man.

39 Lonergan may be referring here to the interpretation of Plotinus given by Henry Duméry, to whom he refers in his 1959 lectures on the philosophy of education; see *Topics in Education* 191–92; see also below, chapter 6, note 8.

ation of consciousness, an awareness, a real apprehension of the difference between Thales and the milkmaid, between the theoretic life and the practical life. They are two entirely different types of consciousness. And one and the same consciousness can so develop that it transposes from one to the other. This classical ideal, this distinction between the theoretic life and the practical life, is to be distinguished and separated from classicism.

By classicism I mean the fruit of an unsuccessful education in which, first of all, there is no real grasp of theory of any kind – mathematical, scientific, philosophic, or theological. Theory is proposed and studied, but in the subject there is no real serious differentiation of consciousness; all we get as a theory are the broader simplifications offered by a professor to introduce or round off a lecture or a course, or the products of *haute vulgarisation*. But he is never bitten by theory; he has no apprehension, no understanding, for example, of the fact that Newton spent weeks in his room in which he barely bothered looking at his food, while he was working out the theory of universal gravitation.

Not only is there no real grasp of what theory means, at the same time there is no apprehension of the concrete either. Everything is just an instance of the universal, the ideal, the exemplar, the norm, the law, the model. The classicist has no apparatus for apprehending what it is to go beyond the universal law, ideal, exemplar, into the concrete. He does not really apprehend the concrete, the particular, in its endless detail and variety and difference. Thirdly, while he admits that the instances are not perfect examples of these universal abstractions, still the differences do not really count; they are not important; they are *per accidens*. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. If you know the universal, you know all that is of any importance. There is no use getting down to the concrete. Consequently, classicism is nonhistorical, it has no capacity to apprehend history, it has no historical sense – it does not know what is meant by historical sense, namely, the apprehension of a mind at work in an entirely different way from one's own.

Yet he remained attached to the classical ideal of the Greeks and even used the word 'classicism' to speak of it: of 'the emergence of the intellectual pattern of experience,' he says: 'This is what is meant by classicism in its best sense, the Greek achievement' (*Topics in Education* 75). Here, however, three years later in this lecture of 1962, he makes a clear distinction between the classical ideal of the Greek achievement and classicism, a word which he now uses in a definitely pejorative sense (see chapter 9 below, at note 33; also *A Second Collection* 1–9, 98–99, and *passim*).