

Facilitating the Building of Our Own Reality

January 26, 2018, Phase 1, Day3: "Rotten with Perfection" (Kenneth Burke)

Most of what we know is based on *trust*, not first-hand knowledge. Out of all that you know, very little of it is through personal verification. Who among us has traveled around the world, mixed with cultures very different from our own, exploring other realms of meaning? I've never been to Japan, and yet it is a real place in my life; so too is the political situation in the States—a place whose conflicts and tensions seem real to me and yet what I know is through the insights and orientations of others whose openness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility is as limit as our own. There are two basic factors: our own decision on what is of value to us (terminal value: the core desire of our hearts), and our judgment on who is or is not trustworthy. Most people simply accept the world mediated by meaning of those around them: to go along in order to get along. But there are a few who delve into the foundations of their world view with a willingness to shift to another orientation found to be better than their own. Usually the existential need to do this arrives at the "pivot" point between the functional specialties of Dialectic and Foundations—but this belongs to next week's presentation on Lonergan's functional specialties.

We make who we are over a lifetime of inadvertently following *Lonergan's transcendental method*; we might do a better job if we knew what we were doing. Our lives—our world mediated by meaning—is a product of the core cognitive operations of the human mind. For the most part, few attend to these operations, whose collective methodology allows for progressive and cumulative progress. This failure leaves us vulnerable to a wide variety of errors that stem from failures to reach up to the transcendental injunctions. The basic pattern of operations are "seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving, formulating, reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging, deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, writing" (*Method*, 1971, p. 6). These are clustered into four distinct cognitive operations, with the lower ones conditioning the higher operations and the higher subsuming the lower, in a process of emergence as individual's progress from sensate experience up to decisions of value. These two processes work in different ways, since the lower condition what can emerge at the higher levels of judging and deciding; but again, the effect of subsumption changes what is experienced and understood. Also, as noted last week, this fundamental human skill in creating symbolic realms has resulted in a wide variety of specialized realms of meaning: common sense, theoretical, scholarship, mathematics, philosophical reflections, or the contemplation of the Divine Mystery.

Authenticity is the fruit of conversion. To be truly who you are, and not self-identify with an artificial self that is a socio-political in nature, is to become integrated as a human person. Most people are fragmented, for example religious believers in absolute truth on Sunday and devotees of empirical methods during the week—two opposing orientations existing within the same person. So too do people change their orientation according to the situation they find themselves in, acting one way at work and another at home, becoming domineering when having control over others and submissive and resentful when subject to the power of others (the prison experiment). Such integration takes time. Furthermore, it cannot be accomplished within the human sphere of power but only when the individual serves something greater than themselves, e.g., the Divine Mystery. Its ultimate expression has its pure psychological roots in the phenomena in Zen Buddhism of *satori*, where the individual wakes up to his true self. But before this can take place, the individual follows his or her own dance with the Divine Mystery, a courtship that begins with falling in love with the Divine, leads to the commitment to value over personal satisfactions, and ultimately involves a shift from naïve realism—or some other epistemology—to Lonergan's critical realism. This reflective unifying process becomes critical the closer one approaches death, when the subject seeks to understand/create the incarnate meaning of their own lives.

Conversion spans the course of *the human life-cycle*, from the emergence of the brain's information processing system, to the emergence of the mind's conscious intentionality, to the final emergence of the transcendental realm of meaning operative within the human soul. When you think about it, the general development of the human is isomorphic with the three levels of the human good: particular goods, the good of order, and terminal value. The first thing to emerge over the course of a human life-cycle is the information processing capabilities of the brain. These are unconscious processes that result in a horizon occupied with objects based in the immediate sensate world. It is a non-conscious mediated world that becomes—when the conscious mind emerges—the experienced level of cognitive operation. As consciousness emerges and matures, the mind takes up the four operations of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. As the individual becomes proficient in these operations, and as the individual matures through the development of operational skills, the individual faces the decision of what is or is not of terminal value in their lives. Reflection on values may lead the individual to consider the question of the existence of God as the primary source of meaning in the universe. This question powers the growth of the emergent transcendental level of being, as the person's "soul" is opened up to the infusion of the Spirit. The fundamental tension lies between two incompatible worlds mediated by meaning: the life affirm Divine Mystery or the soul destroying life denying "satanic" schemes of recurrence. Not only does this power the various levels of conversion, but the resulting dialectic permeates of all human society.

Reflective work on identifying our *individual and collective blind spots*, often due to the human need to be in control; hence the rationalizations and justifications for the search for power over nature and over others. How can one determine one's own blind spots? As the bible states, It is easier to identify the mote in another eyes and not the beam in one's own. One can infer the existence of blind spots by the simple fact that actions based around them don't work out as planned, so when faced with a continuing series of "unexpected events", one can be sure that something has been overlooked. The seemingly relentless drive toward decline again reveals blind spots. Hence there is a need for reflective conversion, for redemption, if these errors are not to be replicated over and over again. And since a primary source of such errors lies in the human desire for power that generates numerous justifications for accumulating control over others, none of which is actually justiciable when compared to the reality of power within the Divine Mystery.

There is a *constant tension* between the individual and collective worlds mediated by meaning. The way in which this tension is negotiated is through the constant process of mutual self-mediation that occurs as individuals come together to pursue particular goods or work together at the institutional level to produce a steady stream of goods. Co-operation and competition are both fundamental features of human existence, and we learn to work in both ways in the development of both positions and counter-positions in a dialectic between "good" and "evil", between life-affirming and life-denying recurring schemes of operation. Once again, this is a question of whom it is that we give our allegiance, and whom we come to trust. To remain within the world of human intentions is to live a fragmented life; to welcome periods of reflective solitude that allows for the individual to free him or herself from the constraints. The problem stems from the fact that each individual faces a number of existential questions taken from the broad issues that resound during the day—issues that are part of the good of order. Faced with the need to take a position on a number of issues, the subject often chooses one path on one while another on another. The result is that the individual lives in a fragmented world mediated by meaning full of disjunctions, contrary orientations, conflicting opinions, and unreliable evaluations and diagnosis of the situation at hand.

Next week: Lonergan's functional specialities as a collective means of controlling meaning.

This week's exercise: spend a few moments each day reflecting on those you ultimately serve, and the kind of people in whom you place your trust.

Russell C. Baker