

Phase 2 Case Study into “Fake News”

Day 1: Anticipating Emergent Levels of Meaning

Note: All that follows is not to be taken as gospel truth, but only a starting point that eventually could lead to insights into reality. As noted in phase 1, there are two methodical paths toward determining what is true: Lonergan’s transcendental method, which applies to the individual, and his functional specialities, which applies to the collective. In both cases, one starts where one is, and then through the application of these methods gradually inch toward what can be reasonably affirmed as being true. The end result would be a virtually unconditioned judgment.

It is taken as given that all “news” comes about because someone has deliberately spent time and money to put their point of view out to the public via mass media or emerging web sites. Furthermore, to narrow the investigation we focus on fundamental institutional changes taking place at the global level since this area is likely to generate the greatest amount of news on areas of interest likely to affect everyone at more regional and local levels. Our first task is to identify the key players, stakeholders, and participants at this institutional level recognizing that while individuals may be very important in determining what does or doesn’t take place, their power is expressed through institutions that provide power.

The first analytical set of tools provided by Lonergan is his world view of emergent probability, his notion of development, and the bringing of both to fruition in his genetic method. The first question to consider is: What are the levels of emergent order involved at this global level of fundamental institutional change?

We propose three levels:

1. The global ranging institutional level with its own “spirit of an age” or existing state of the good of order,
2. a conditioning “economic” level that supports the existing institutional level, and
3. a sublating transcendental realm of meaning that evokes the theopolitical at the global level.

The idea behind each level is a reminder that the existing global set of institutions are not only conditioned by the existing state of civilization itself, especially its technical achievements and knowledge based reality, but sublating by a transcendental realm in which individuals seek to escape the reality of their own death by attaching themselves to something transcendent to their own limited lives. It is in recognition of this transcendental level that individuals give their assent, i.e., decides to trust and give their allegiance to this or that institution, this or that individual.

Note that the transcendental level is also the primary power behind human freedom, a Divine Mystery that stands in opposition to the lower level's preoccupation with power, authority, and influence. This tension between the conditioning and sublating levels of being is one of the primary sources of fundamental institutional change.

Note that this has nothing to do with a "clash of civilizations" per se, although what we will pay attention to is the world view or fundamental orientation of all the parties concerned. This will necessarily involve conflict, but it will also at the same time involve cooperation.

Note that we do not enter this study with an unbiased or empty mind, for that is in itself an illusion. What is important is not our starting point, but the willingness to change our beliefs as evidence derived through the application of Lonergan's transcendental method and functional specialties. We may start from different positions, but if we attempt to be open, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible we may well end up at the same point. This is not assured, however, because fundamental differences in intellectual, moral, and religious conversion will create different histories and these histories will contain fundamental conflicts that have their root in the presence or non-presence of actors engaged in ongoing conversion.

Furthermore, this study includes the reality of a transcendental level in humans that is very much a part of being human and not something external imposed upon us. Although different religions have emerged at different times and different places in human history, we accept as trustworthy only the two monotheistic revealed world views of Judaism and Christianity. Although different, they are closely bound together—if only for the simple reason that if Judaism is considered false or otherwise deficient, then so too is Christianity. The separation of the two has distorted both, leaving Judaism exposed to an excessive legalism and Christianity prone to excessive self-flagellation. Our study is explicitly Christian in origin as it is Western in orientation.

The Conditioning Level

The existing global institutional level does not come into being out of the blue. It has emerged from a number of factors, including technological development, industrialization, a wealth-creating economic system, population growth, and the clash between traditional societies grounded in a cyclic notion of time and developed societies whose mode of being is grounded in a linear approach to time (colonialization). This shift started with Judaism, was enhanced by the Greek invention of mind, and reached its current stage with the development of the hard sciences as well as the industrial revolution that took advantage of this growth in knowledge.

This linear way of existing in time also plays out at the global institutional level, with progressive "advanced" societies on one hand and traditional societies on the other. The impact of industrial societies on traditional collectives that started with the spread of Western modes across the globe is still playing out as both mediate in the lives of the other. This involves a fundamental institutional change for both parties, something that can be observed in the

clash between that most traditional and totalitarian of all institutions—Islam—and the rest of the world.

As conditioning levels becomes more and more complicated, as it becomes a wide-ranging network of recurring schemes of operation that form a complex, non-linear system, it approaches levels of complexity that exceeds the human capacity to understand much less model. There are two consequences of this, both of which are part and parcel of the fundamental institutional changes currently being played out at the global level. The first is that the global level has become increasingly unpredictable as new schemes of operation emerge seemingly at random. This has left “leaders” more as responders to unexpected consequences rather than leaders in any traditional sense (statesmen), caught up in affairs that they no longer understand. The second is that thinking based on linear “stimulus-response” patterns no longer hold true as expected consequences of well-thought out plans and policies have unexpected consequences.

This leads to a further dynamic at the global level: those institutions unable to meet the demands of a more complex, non-linear, system will fall behind those that manage to make the transition. This may mean a reduction in complexity at this level, which will have its own impact on the global system of institutions as the resources for global level institutions fall away.

Another major factor may well be the creation of vast mutually self-mediating networks that span the globe. These networks provide a steady stream of goods, be they electrical power systems, transportation routes, money flows, a cascade of ideas, housing, etc. These extensive networks are often of more value to individuals than the political state to which they are bound by geographical identity. The reality of such interlocked and mutually dependent networks is that it shifts the goals of global actors now constrained by the need to protect and enhance these steady streams of goods to the people nominally under their control.

Then one must never discount the perversity of human nature, which when told not to do something go ahead and do it for the simple satisfaction of thumbing their nose at power. There’s also the reality of those who simply don’t care about things, but like the continental Op in Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* who is quite satisfied to create chaos with the belief that he will be the last man standing.

The Sublating Level

Politicians may have no interest in theology, but theologians have an interest in politics. Too often the analysis of current institutional changes consider only the material interests and concerns of those involved, something which omits any understanding of how the transcendental realm of meaning plays out in reality. The point is that some idea of perfection, some hope of belonging to something that will outlive our own short lives, drives human behavior once basic needs have been met. This means the more affluent a society is, the more its members turn to the transcendental in order to meet these deeper levels of meaning. The

problem is that a political system that forgoes the Divine Mystery in order to exercise its own power without external constraint is playing with dynamite. Such a system is tempted to assume divine prerogatives, providing a utopian vision to unite a populace in support of their own drive for power and control. The unexpected consequence of this may well be a populace that no longer has children, for children carry individuals into the future—a form of immortality.

Unfortunately, the human drive for unconstrained power and control is addictive. Once sought, its “believers” are willing to go to any length to promote their vision of the human good. As has often been said, it is necessary to break a few eggs to make an omelet. So one element that sublates the global institutional level is a division between two fundamental perspectives: the unconstrained and the constrained vision of what it means to be human [Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (Basic Books, 4th edition, 2007)]. In short, the transcendental level of being is at fundamental odds with the practicality of being human bound by both time and space. This conflict in visions plays itself out among institutions having global interests as a battle between recurring schemes of operation that promote the freedom of life as opposed to other recurring schemes that are anti-life where slavery and dependence are preferred and life itself despised.

The influence of the transcendental on human life is exercised through the heart, in the sense that the Divine Mystery operates in such a way as to promote love across the board. It is the root of all charity, of all faith in a reality greater than the proportionate being of the human species. It operates as a constant reminder that a human being is more than the sum of his or her interests and concerns. It is a reminder that there is more at stake than the alleviation of human guilt at failing to meet the demands of one’s society, for the reality of sin is that it is a failure to live up to one’s very self, one’s very being as a source of the Divine in the world.

This sublation alters the individual’s perception of both themselves and the world around them. This change lies at the root of religious conversion, that falling in love with the Divine Mystery that totally changes who the person *is*. From this comes the necessary support toward moral conversion, a sustained ability to follow what needs to be done regardless of the personal interests and satisfactions of the individual. From this comes to need to understand what it really means to understanding—not a form of naïve realism, empiricism, or conceptualization but of critical realism grounded in Lonergan’s transcendental method.

All of this does not occur overnight. Instead there are long periods where individuals engage in the world, find discrepancies, and eventually change their orientation. This is a constant process within every person, although some are quicker to gain the point than others. The point is that not only do spiritual changes take place within the individual but each person has an inbuilt drive to engage in or at least be willing to engage in a life whose values are set over long spans of human history rather than the expedient actions that can be taken now.

What this means is that there is a need to support those religious institutions that provide the basic resources for those who are interested in moving into the transcendental realm of their

lives. For these institutional resources facilitate any interior movement toward the transcendental; without them, individuals are bereft of a source of considered reflective understanding of how the Divine Mystery can and does operate in human affairs.

Recognizing a sublating level of intelligibility involves a shift at the primary level to accepting that there is a higher level of authority that places constraints on what can and can't be done at the global institutional level. This is very much a constrained rather than unconstrained vision of what it means to be human, a tragic rather than utopian perspective on human affairs. This sublating effect operates to destroy individuals and groups that act as if there were gods, i.e., by their belief that they are the master of their fate. Eventually, they run into reality that tells them that this is not so.

Another sublating factor is that the higher transcendental level tends to create brave people willing to stand up and be counted in the belief that they are responding to a power greater than themselves and through extension any other person.

The Primary Investigative Level

What battles are being fought across the public domain of the media and alternative media? What interests are being sought? What visions promoted? What ignored or downgraded? These media exchanges hint at the underlying fundamental institutional changes taking place at the global level.

There are two basic types of people required for a successful organization or institution. The first group are those who readily adapt to the roles and tasks of that institution, taking on the special assignments of personal status and associated resources that encourage individual participation in the collective task of providing a steady stream of goods. But if these responsible and dependable people are the only ones that run the institution, then eventually that institutional will fail. Circumstances change, and with changing circumstances come the need to find new solutions to new problems. And for this to happen, the organization requires people with a creative twist of mind, people who "think outside the box" but just enough so that they are no longer comprehensible. But not only are creatives hard to manage for that very reason, they tend to be weeded out at the lower levels of an organization long before their talents and specialized skills become part of the higher administrative levels.

To top it off, the vast majority of such creatives fail; but when they succeed, they succeed dramatically. Civilizations change when this happens. But power holders rarely like such change unless it benefits themselves, so they place constraints on what is allowed to emerge on the world stage, supporting only those plans and policies that benefit themselves regardless of the interests and concerns of any other group.

What is likely changing is the general attitudinal shift from globalism as a good thing in itself to recognition that those who seek its power are not only arrogant but incompetent when it

comes to managing human affairs. This fundamental shift in the public mind insists on proper governance and not the unrestricted exercise of aristocratic or elite power groups. Once lost, it is hard to regain legitimacy among those subject to their authority. This degrades the good of order, for it diminishes the degree of trust among participants.

A large part of this loss of legitimacy is due to the failure of people of great common sense, people who know how to get things done, to take into account either the conditioning or subverting effects of the adjacent realms of intelligibility. Short term expediency combined with the notion that common sense should suffer no constraints, leads to the fragmentation of the good of order for the simple reason that the rationalizations and justifications used to support a particular plan or policy are localized not wide spread. This means that there soon arise a number of appreciative systems or foundational orientations that are in direct conflict with each other. When this happens, one institution may work directly against what another institution is trying to achieve. If unchecked, the result is either the assumption of power through force by one part that can impose their will or a deadlock in which no one group can act without being immediately countered by the actions of another.

It is important to note that the primary level subverts the conditioning level as it is itself conditioned by it, and that it conditions the subverting level even as it is subverted by it. It is this dynamic that creates many of the problems faced by those whose interests lie with the primary global institutional environment, since they can through their actions or non-actions affect the very networks that exist at the conditioning level. For example, the administrative drive for control over details may well disrupt the very conditions that allow the administration to survive and thrive.

Equally important is the likelihood of the primary level defining its own gods at the transcendental level of being, or even becoming its own god as in a totalitarian regime or progressive movement. Usurping the power of the divine carries its own risks, especially that of pride, arrogance, and hubris.

A work in progress
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