

PHILIP MCSHANE'S AXIAL PERIOD: AN INTERPRETATION

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Part One: Content – The Axial Period

Let's suppose that the Axial Period is a time in history that is a transition between the first time of the temporal subject and the second time of the temporal subject; that it is the second stage of meaning: a troubled time between a first stage of meaning, characterized by a spontaneously operative consciousness in 'early' culture, and a third stage of meaning constituted by at least a dominant authority of a luminous control of meaning and an explicit metaphysics in a 'later' global culture. What this statement means we have now to uncover.

In the first place, then, there are two times of the temporal subject.¹ The 'temporal subject,' is temporal (and distinct from an eternal subject) in that s(he) possesses both an intellectual nature *and* a material nature that is 'mutable,' changing (*DDT2* ms 168). The intellectual nature of a temporal subject, moreover, is only *potential*. It is potential both as 'potency to the intelligible,' that is as potential capacity for understanding what is intelligible, and as a being dependent on a "presupposed sensitive living." In the latter case, the temporal subject only arrives at understanding and judgement through

¹ Bernard J. S. Lonergan, *De Deo Trino II: Pars Systematica* (Rome: Gregorian UP, 1964), Question 21. My copy of this work is a first draft translation of Michael Shields, photocopied by him for me in 1999. Please note that the page numbers I use here very likely will not be the same in the volume soon to be published by University of Toronto Press (hereafter *DDT2* ms).

asking 'what is it?' and 'is it?' in regard to the sensible. Without that prior sensitive living which provides the sensible data, there would be no further questions, no further understanding or judgement; it is only *through* the sensible that the intellectual nature of a temporal subject is "actuated" (ibid).

Further, the intellectual nature of the temporal subject operates first and primarily on the basis of a natural spontaneity. That is, it happens that the subject asks questions, reaches understanding and conception, judges and wills only *spontaneously*, simply in accord with the immanent norms and exigences of her or his own temporal nature. But it is possible that the temporal subject can *become aware* of this spontaneous operation, can come to understand it, affirm it, and chose to live by its known norms and exigences. And it is through this "exact and very difficult knowledge" (*DDT2* ms 169) of intellectual process that there arise the two times of the temporal subject:

there is an earlier time in which it is on the basis of natural spontaneity that [s]he is the subject of his [her] actuated intellectual nature; and there is a later time in which [s]he is the subject of his [her] own actuated and to be actuated intellectual nature, not spontaneously, but knowingly, willingly, and through his [her] own intention. (*DDT2* ms 169)

Now, given that there is a first and a second time of the temporal subject, there must be a transition between these two times. As a first point, then, the Axial Period can be associated with the transition between these two times of the temporal subject, between a first time in which the subject operates in a state of natural spontaneity, and a second time in which the subject operates in accord with the immanent norms and exigences of her or his own intellectual nature.

In the second place, there are three stages of meaning (*Method* 85-99). From the point of view of history, the stages of meaning fill out and complement the two times of the temporal subject. In terms of the stages of meaning, for instance, distinction is made between *undifferentiated* and *differentiated* consciousness, rather than between the *natural*

spontaneity and the *actuated intellectual nature* of the temporal subject. In the first stage of meaning, consciousness operates on the basis of undifferentiated common sense. This stage of meaning is characterized by the emergence and development of early language with its blend of myth and magic. It is also characterized by tremendous developments of practical understanding and technology that yield the ancient high civilizations (*Method* 86-90).

In the second stage of meaning, humanity's increasing proficiency in practical technique overcomes magic to give way to "religious supplication" (*Method* 90). In a parallel development, expanding literary traditions make way for reflection on language itself, on human feeling and thought, knowledge and decision. In Western culture, for example, there is the process of the 'Greek discovery of mind' (90-93), while in Eastern culture there are the ancient speculative traditions of India, China, Iran and Palestine.² Also in this second stage of meaning, there is the emergence of "modern science" which gives rise to "troubled consciousness" in its questions about the apparently opposing worlds of common sense and theory (*Method* 84). Meaning "splits" into the two realms of common sense and theory, and those who have reached the differentiation of consciousness characteristic of the second stage of meaning are able to operate on the basis of both undifferentiated common sense and of theoretically differentiated consciousness and logic (93-94). Lastly, in a third stage of meaning, scientific theory becomes a specialty for the advancement of understanding, the sciences become autonomous, and philosophy takes its stand on the further differentiation of consciousness that operates in the realm of interiority (85; 94-95).

It is interesting to note that these three large historical divisions of meaning are *temporal*, and not chronological: "one has to be in the first stage to advance to the second and one has to be in the second to advance to the third" (85). The temporality of these stages means that many people can remain undifferentiated even though a culture has achieved a second

² Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1953), 2.

or third stage of meaning, and again, many people can remain in a second stage even though a culture may have achieved a third stage of meaning (85). Given that there are these three stages of meaning, then, meaning as a historical development *must* be temporal, that is, transitional and 'on the move.' As a second point, then, the Axial Period can be associated with this temporal, and thus transitional, character of phylogenetically expanding meaning.

In the third place, one can ask how the two times of the temporal subject mesh with the three stages of meaning. A rough correspondence can be discovered between the first time of the temporal subject and the first stage of meaning, so that there is in human history "a prior time dominated by a spontaneity found best in compact consciousness."³ Again, there is a strong correspondence between the second time of the temporal subject and the third stage of meaning, so that there is "a later time with at least a dominant authority of the mediation of generalized empirical method" (*MKMM* 11).⁴ Given this correspondence, the second stage of meaning must be a phylogenetic temporal transition between the first and second times of the temporal subject, and between the first and third stages of meaning. As a third point, then, the Axial Period can be associated with the second stage of meaning as a phylogenetic temporal transition to a third stage of meaning in history. What, then, characterizes this second stage of meaning?

In the fourth place, and in answer to this question, there are the implications and conditions of the temporal transition to the third stage of meaning and to the second time of the

³ Philip McShane, "Middle Kingdom, Middle Man," in *Searching for Cultural Foundations* (New York: U of America P, 1984), 1-43, at 11. (Hereafter referred to as *MKMM*). The question that I have raised here, of how the two times of the temporal subject and the three stages of meaning mesh, does not appear explicitly in McShane's documents. His 1984 chapter on this topic, however, makes it clear that he is asking that question, though in the wider context of attempting to draw together not only Lonergan's works but also those of Karl Jaspers, Arnold Toynbee, and Eric Voegelin under the question of 'total history.' See especially 9-11.

⁴ See McShane's footnotes there on *authority* and on *generalized empirical method*.

temporal subject. Because the transition *is* temporal, there is the survival of undifferentiated consciousness in the later stages of meaning (*Method* 97-99). In particular, there is the fact that it is not the philosopher, nor the scientist, who “does the world’s work” (97). Governments and economies, schools and businesses, all operate within the realm of common sense. While it is possible for a commonsense culture to be lifted up appreciatively in support of a later stage advance in meaning, it is also possible that “theory fuses more with common nonsense than with common sense, to make the nonsense pretentious and, because it is common, dangerous and even disastrous” (98). Ideally, the novel ideas of a progressing philosophy and science can filter down harmoniously to common sense so that a community can share, to some lesser degree, in the advancing concerns and interests of differentiated meaning. But on the other hand:

Such ideal conditions need not obtain. Discontinuities may arise. The better educated become a class closed in upon themselves with no task proportionate to their training. They become effete. The less educated and the uneducated find themselves with a tradition that is beyond their means. They cannot maintain it. They lack the genius to transform it into some simpler vital and intelligible whole. It degenerates. The meaning and values of human living are impoverished. The will to achieve both slackens and narrows. Where once there were joys and sorrows, now there are just pleasures and pains. The culture has become a slum. (*Method* 99)

The implication here is that there arises a widening gap of cultural distortion and fragmentation between those who live and operate in a dominantly commonsense realm of meaning and those who operate in theoretically or interiorly differentiated realms of meaning. Likewise, there is a significant gap between theory and interiority that leaves the sciences in fragmented and truncated confusion about knowledge, objectivity, and reality.⁵ Moreover, these gaps,

⁵ Refer to McShane, *MKMM*, 8, for an account of the distortions of

fragmentations, and distortions are likely to advance through the layers of a society in accord with increasing advances of modern science and philosophy (*Method* 98-99).

Such continuous breakdowns in cultural development lead to divisions among the many groups and layers of society.⁶ The secularization of drama in ancient Greece, for example, marks a beginning of one of the primary divisions within civilized social structure.⁷ Again, the once highly respected role of the primitive Elder, as one who genuinely grows in wisdom, fades, so that, to repeat a phrase, Elders increasingly are “a class closed in upon themselves with no task proportionate to their training. They become effete” (*Method* 99). In the Axial Period, then, genuine adult growth is sadly and monstrously replaced by a contracted and increasingly unintelligible reigning practicality.

Again, there are conditions for the transition to the later time of the temporal subject (*DDT2* ms 170-171). The later time, for instance, will be achieved only communally, through the development of a richly layered common culture, and only to the extent that there is a community of subjects who willingly and responsibly accept and embrace a commitment to live “knowingly, willingly, and through [their] own intention” in accord with the intrinsic norms and exigences of their own intellectual natures.⁸

Add to this fact the “state of fallen man [in which] temporal subjects are greatly impeded from becoming true and

consciousness that disorient modern living and of the fragmented consciousness that dominates and troubles the sciences regarding subjectivity, objectivity, and realism.

⁶ On group bias see *CWL* 3, 247-50.

⁷ See McShane, *MKMM*, 26-8 on the sacred and the secular in modern artistic sensibility. On the same topic in reference to Greek drama, see McShane, *A Brief History of Tongue: From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes* (Halifax: Axial P, 1998), 45 (hereafter *BHT*).

⁸ *DDT2* ms 169: “True manifestation of the... temporal subject... occurs either concretely and symbolically or technically and exactly: it occurs concretely and symbolically inasmuch as human culture is developed... and set forth in mores, customs, precepts, narratives; ...it occurs technically and exactly inasmuch as there occurs scientific and philosophic inquiry into human nature. But it is plain that both objectifications of human nature presuppose the collaboration of many...”

responsible mature persons” (*DDT2* ms 170).⁹ There is the paradoxical situation in which a community cannot live in this new time of subjectivity until it has been voluntarily chosen, grasped, and acted on by those subjects (170). There is the fact that the grasping of such a realm involves “an exact and very difficult knowledge” (169). There is the fact that apprehensions, fears, and other desires interfere with the progression “to an understanding of the objective order of the universe” and to a grasp of one’s role in that universe (170). The advance of the arts and of practical living provides the opportunity for grasping intellectual nature, but those advances are matched by an advancing confusion and obscurity in the many layers of human society (170-171). There is the reality of weak will and of the failure to live up to what one knows one has to do in order to live according to the dictates of intellectual nature. And added to weak will, there is the pull of human friendship and group bias (*CWL* 3, 247-250) that instead of bolstering genuine intellectual life, can lead away from intelligibility and toward the less difficult paths of human mediocrity (*DDT2* ms 171).

Yet further, there is the problem of general bias and the longer cycle of decline (*CWL* 3, 230-269). There is the lag of intellectual development in which humanity’s sensitive ‘animal living’ proceeds faster and more readily than the longer and more difficult development of ‘mind’ (*CWL* 3, 247). Within this reality, there is common sense ‘doing the world’s work’ while being incapable of knowing its limitations. More than that, it is not *aware* that it is incapable of knowing its own limitations and so there is the paradox that common sense needs the higher viewpoint of explicit metaphysics (later third stage of meaning, the second time of the temporal subject) in order to *become* aware of its own shortcomings (*CWL* 3, 254). However, in its minor surrender, common sense excludes the possibility of a higher viewpoint and looks instead to practical solutions to meet increasingly unintelligible social situations (*CWL* 3, 254-57).¹⁰ In its major surrender, common sense

⁹ Compare Lonergan’s *mature persons* here with McShane’s meaning of *adult growth* and of *Elder growth*.

¹⁰ Note the relevance to the social surd.

persuades theory to accommodate its practical demands (*CWL* 3, 254-57), the contraction of intelligibility carries forward with increasing incoherency, the social situation deteriorates cumulatively (*CWL* 3, 253) until theory “becomes effete” and “culture becomes a slum.” From the point of view of trying to advance to the second time of the temporal subject or the third stage of meaning, “one seems constrained to acknowledge that the busy world of practical affairs offers little scope to one’s vocation” (*CWL* 3, 253). If one is to pursue the high road of a self-directed intellectual development that would head one toward the differentiation of consciousness of a later stage of meaning, it seems one must travel against great odds.

The mention of ‘odds’ brings up yet another condition of this temporal transition: emergent probability. “Generically, the course of human history is in accord with emergent probability; it is the cumulative realization of concretely possible schemes of recurrence in accord with successive schedules of probabilities” (*CWL* 3, 252). Placed in the above contexts—of undifferentiated consciousness surviving in later stages of meaning; of troubled consciousness emerging alongside differentiated consciousness; of the human impediments to advancing intellectual development, especially the extreme contrast of the world of common sense versus the world of theory and interiority and the objective order of the universe of being; of general bias in its oversight of insight and its immanent norms and exigences; and of the consequent longer cycle of decline—placed in these contexts, the slim probabilities of human schemes of recurrence leading toward the third stage of meaning, toward the second time of the temporal subject, form yet another condition of the second stage of meaning, of the phylogenetic transition to a third stage of meaning.

With all of these prior details in mind, it is possible to see that the cultural shift into significantly differentiated consciousness of interiority is deeply problematic. It is not, even yet, an achievement of a common majority. It is a difficult and gradual advance, through the world of theory and modern science, that occurs only in accord with relevant human schemes of recurrence and their successive schedules of

probabilities. It is an advance that is vastly ambiguous to large segments of common society, that is open to confusions and obscurities to those who remain theoretically undifferentiated, that is a slow communal climb requiring an “exact and very difficult” development of knowledge that must eventually filter down harmoniously to enrich and lift the general bias and longer cycle of decline that presently characterize the living of undifferentiated common sense. In short, the shift to a luminously differentiated consciousness *does not happen suddenly*. “Communal luminous consciousness is something of the future” (*BHT 2*). Now if it is true that these conditions exist as part of the temporal transition between a first and second time of the temporal subject, and between the first and third stages of meaning, then it is also true that the second stage of meaning must be characterized by these conditions. As a fourth point, then, the Axial Period can be associated with the second stage of meaning as characterized by these temporal conditions of transition to a later third stage of meaning.

In the fifth place, there is the question of modernity:

So, in noting the parallel falsifications of history in the Sumerian King List and Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, [Eric] Voegelin is led to query: ‘And what is modern about modern mind, one may ask, if Hegel, Comte, or Marx, in order to create an image of history that will support their ideological imperialism, still use the same techniques for distorting the reality of history as their Sumerian predecessors?’ (*MKMM 10*)¹¹

Voegelin’s question of the meaning of modernity tends to reflect the validity of the conditions for the transition and development of human meaning in history such that progress is not guaranteed. If this is true, then the meaning of *modernity* itself falls under the conditions of the transitional character of the second stage of meaning. Thus,

What is going forward, I suspect, in a period of

¹¹ The reference is to Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Volume Four: The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974), 68.

fragmented consciousness that I would call modern, is a transition between what Lonergan calls the two times of the temporal subject... Then one may expect the transition period to be one of fragmentation and specialization of consciousness in opaque forays into the second stage of meaning, with concomitant unenlightened displacements of the control of meaning out of historical compactness. Within such forays and displacements is the problematic that invites a mediating integration of hard-won genuineness in the noosphere. (*MKMM* 10-11)

As a fifth point, then, the Axial Period can be associated with *modernity*, where modernity itself is identified with a) the lengthy transitional time between the first and second times of the temporal subject, and with b) the transitional and problematic character of the second stage of meaning.

In the sixth place, then, it is perhaps time to attempt to formulate more compactly the content of the Axial Period. Most notably, the Axial Period is not a major expansion of Lonergan's context but is a 'pulling together' of his various relevant historical contexts. So, the Axial Period is an approximate time span extending from roughly 4000 B.C. through to about 2500 A.D. (*BHT* 38).¹² It is *the second stage of meaning*, a transitional time in history in which a third stage of meaning has not yet been achieved, but in which history is seething towards that later time (*BHT* 2). It is a period of *Inbetween-ness*, (*MKMM* 10-11)¹³ a period of *fragmented consciousness* between the compact consciousness of earlier

¹² This time span includes the emergence of linguistic expression as occurring within the first time of the temporal subject and the first stage of meaning. It also includes "the transition from speech to writing both as a differentiation of human consciousness and as contributing to further differentiations as well as to fragmentation." See 43-4.

¹³ *Inbetween-ness* is associated with Voegelin's *Metaxy*, taken from Plato and expanded by McShane into the Vertical and the Horizontal Metaxy. The Horizontal Metaxy is social and historical process, the global communal effort of intelligent and unintelligent living, as evidenced by humanity's social structures and institutions. The Vertical Metaxy is the divine inner ground of interiority evidenced by human unrest and self-questioning. See Voegelin 6; 11-13.

human living (*BHT* 2; 43)¹⁴ and the fully differentiated consciousness of a later post-axial self-luminous living (*MKMM* 11; *BHT* 2-3). It is *modernity*, a period of some three thousand years or more, up to and including the present and the foreseeable future, prior to the emergence of the third stage of meaning and the implementation of explicit metaphysics. It is a period that is characterized by a deteriorating social situation, of which the educated classes and the academy are a part, by a neglected and truncated common sense and an increasingly pretentious common nonsense, and by a slim nominalism masked in neurotic busy-ness (*MKMM* 5-6). Though it is a time in which there is the emergence and progress of modern science, in the middle of the second millennium, science in the Axial Period is only at a beginning (*MKMM* 8). Furthermore, the fragmentations of neglected and truncated consciousness in the Axial Period make not only science, but also practical modern living, deeply problematic at this stage of meaning in history (*MKMM* 8).¹⁵

Part Two: Context – The Axial Period

2.1 General Statement: Philip McShane and the Axial Period

Philip McShane's work on the Axial Period spans close to three decades. Beginning with the first mention in his 1976 work, *The Shaping of the Foundations*,¹⁶ McShane's context of the Axial Period has been the drive to communicate his view of history that takes in the fact, the implications, and the necessary conditions of a probable shift to a future explicit metaphysics in the third stage of meaning. The original idea of an Axial Period is associated with historian Karl Jaspers (background given later) and was later criticized by historians

¹⁴ Here McShane draws on recent decades of anthropology and uses examples of primitive tribal consciousness to give meaning to this earlier spontaneously integral compact consciousness.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Also, in *BHT*, 2, the self-neglect that constitutes neglected and truncated subjectivity is noted as a prominent feature in present axial modernism and post-modernism.

¹⁶ Philip McShane, *The Shaping of the Foundations: Being at Home in the Transcendental Method* (Washington: UP of America, 1976), hereafter *Shaping*.

Arnold Toynbee and Eric Voegelin. McShane draws on their contributions while giving the Axial Period a larger context.

McShane reconfigures Jaspers's original Axial Period to bring it into the larger context of philosopher Bernard Lonergan. McShane's Axial Period is associated with Lonergan's two times of the temporal subject, his stages of meaning, longer cycle of decline, and with his Christian theological context of the Word and 'total history.' Briefly, it is a large open-ended timeframe between the first and second times of the temporal subject, between the first and third stages of meaning, a time when humanity is immersed in the longer cycle of decline, yet in its 'modernity' is pressing toward a shift to explicit metaphysics in accord with human schemes of recurrence and their relevant schedules of probability. Lonergan's scheme of Functional Specialization is crucial to the shift out of this Axial Period and into a third stage of meaning.

McShane's attention and concern is with philosophers, theologians and academics making this shift to explicit metaphysics and so he addresses himself both to individuals working in philosophy and theology and, more essentially, to the academic community as a whole. I was at first tempted to say that McShane's concern is with metaphysicians rather than with 'philosophers, theologians and academics,' but the metaphysicians, or 'categorical characters,' McShane envisions, at least in terms of an axial shift, are people of the future. Therefore, his talk is necessarily directed to 'the people of today' who find themselves facing at least a potential journey, some few perhaps an actual one, toward that foundational future. Nevertheless, the role of metaphysics and the metaphysician is crucial to McShane's meaning of the Axial Period; these are issues which will be explored later in the article.

In my opening paragraph, I have made a very broad general statement about McShane's thirty-year drive of axial meaning. But what do I mean by this general statement, and more importantly, on what sources from McShane's work do I base that statement? Let me repeat my earlier sentence, emphasizing what I consider to be a few key words:

“Beginning with the first mention in *The Shaping of the Foundations*, McShane’s context of the Axial Period has been a drive to communicate his view of history which takes in *the fact, the implications, and the necessary conditions* of a probable shift to a future explicit metaphysics in the third stage of meaning.” The italicized words, in my estimation, harbour the mainstay of his Axial-Period meaning, nestled within the protective confines of his broader, and perhaps deceptively obvious, ‘axial’ span of time.

It is this ‘mainstay’ meaning, *the fact of, the implications of, and the necessary conditions of a shift to explicit metaphysics*, that I will try to bring out as crucial to McShane’s growing meaning of the Axial Period. These words encompass a depth of detail that can best be handled in the upcoming context. Viewed simply as a time span, the reader can have a deceptive impression of a meaning of the Axial Period that is ‘simple and obvious.’ In actuality, the context of that meaning, spanning as it does the climb of thirty years’ effort, could realistically take years to piece together. So the details of that contextual drive have now to be filled in as best they can in my more limited efforts of months rather than years. Working from the writings and resources of McShane’s work, I hope to begin to answer the question: What is the ontogenetic meaning of Philip McShane’s Axial Period?

2.2 *Biographic or Ontogenetic Span*

I have decided to write this short ‘survey’ of biographic detail in an effort simply to give the reader an outline and appreciation of the ontogenetic span of McShane’s work on this topic. While this outline is helpful in fixing McShane’s meaning within the phylogenetic flow of history it does not actually convey the shifts and climb of meaning that constitute the full context of his Axial Period view. This brief outline is merely a reference to help the reader/historian orient herself or himself to McShane’s ‘axial’ biographic span.

The first mention of an Axial Period appears in McShane’s 1976 book *The Shaping of the Foundations* (88). A second mention appears in his 1980 book *Loneragan’s Challenge to the*

University and the Economy.¹⁷ Both mentions are brief in themselves, though implicitly associated with extensive ideas relating to generalized empirical method, an adequate personal *Weltanschauung*,¹⁸ the relevant context of emergent probability, and, in the 1980 work, the two times of the temporal subject and an epochal shift in the control of meaning. In this later work, while the third stage of meaning and the longer cycle of decline are mentioned (*Challenge* 13 and 16), they relate more to the possibility of what the academic person or community might become in the third stage of meaning than to the axial period *per se*. Further, in these earlier works, McShane has not yet moved to the decisive claim that the Axial Period is associated with the second stage of meaning. At this point, his view of the Axial Period is in line with Lonergan's statement that "the second stage of meaning is vanishing, and a third is about to take its place" (*Method* 96). As is clear from the 1980 text, the Axial Period for McShane is an "immature phase of the third stage of meaning."¹⁹

The next appearance of the Axial Period is in *MKMM*. This work is McShane's first major attempt at spelling out in detail what he means by the Axial Period. Here the above mentioned contexts become explicitly associated with his view of the Axial Period and are complemented and enlarged by a Christian historical context. Between this work and the next mention, there occurs a lengthy gap: the axial topic doesn't appear again, except by reference, until his 1998 book *A Brief History of Tongue*, the first in his Axial Press Series (37-48). The treatment there is further enlarged by the context of linguistics. Various shorter appeals to the Axial Period occur in the Editorial Introductions of the following Axial Press Series books.

¹⁷ (Washington: U of America P, 1980), 3-4 (hereafter *Challenge*).

¹⁸ This topic is explicitly addressed in chapter one of *Shaping* which was written for the Florida Conference in 1970. The later contexts of these two books include and enlarge on this earlier context.

¹⁹ *Challenge* 15: "The scattered community of interdisciplinary philosophers in this immature period of the third stage of meaning is in the main characterized by what Lonergan says of 'undifferentiated consciousness surviving in the later stages of meaning.'"

2.3. *Background Context: Karl Jaspers, Arnold Toynbee, Eric Voegelin*

The original idea of an Axial Period in history was first put forward by historian Karl Jaspers, in his work *The Origin and Goal of History*. It was later taken up, criticized and expanded by Arnold Toynbee,²⁰ and again criticized by Eric Voegelin,²¹ prior to McShane's work. McShane reconfigures Jaspers' original Axial Period to bring it into the larger context of philosopher Bernard Lonergan. The present article is concerned with McShane's view of the Axial Period. However, since these earlier views form part of McShane's context, as well as providing the background of his content, a brief summary of the movement from Jaspers through to McShane will be helpful.

In his book, *The Origin and Goal of History*, Jaspers' suggests an axis in human history in which human consciousness becomes 'aware of itself.' As McShane notes, the period identified by Jaspers' as the Axial Period "is not, however, strictly a historical period but rather a period specified by a transition from compact consciousness to luminous consciousness" (*BHT* 1). Jaspers' idea of an Axial Period is a limited time frame within which there occurs the event of 'consciousness emerging to consciousness' in history. This event constitutes the time in history from which humanity takes its 'modern' beginnings. In Jaspers' words:

This axis would be situated at the point in history which gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be, the point most overwhelmingly fruitful in fashioning humanity; its character would have to be, if not empirically cogent and evident, yet so convincing to empirical insight as to give rise to a common frame of historical self-comprehension for all peoples – for the West, for Asia, and for all men on earth, without regard to particular articles of faith. It would seem that this axis of history is to be found in

²⁰ *Mankind and Mother Earth: A Narrative History of the World* (London: Oxford UP, 1976).

²¹ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*.

the period around 500 B.C., in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 B.C. It is there that we meet with the most deepcut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the 'Axial Period.'²²

Jaspers' perspective is broader than the typically Christian perspectives of Western history. He includes in his Axial Period all the influential philosophers and thinkers of the era: in China, there is Confucius and Lao-tse as well as all the schools of Chinese philosophy which come into being at this time. India has the Buddha and its Upanishads. In Iran there is Zarathustra and in Palestine there are the Hebrew prophets. In Greece there is Homer, the tragedians, and the philosophers.²³ Jaspers' view of the Axial Period, then, is humanity's discovery of itself as speculative, this discovery occurring between 800 and 200 B.C.

Later in his book, Jaspers raises the question of a second Axial Period.²⁴ He discusses our present time in history and notes it as "a period of catastrophic descent to poverty of spirit, of humanity, love and creative energy" (96-97) brought about by and in this great Age of Technology. From this state of human affairs, Jaspers suggests a possible turning point of a second Axial Period that would lift us out of present descent: "This new Axial Period, which perhaps stands before us and which would constitute a single, world-embracing reality, is beyond our powers of imagination. To anticipate it in phantasy would mean to create it. No one can know what it will bring." (97). The second Axial Period, he suggests, could only come about in the future.

Arnold Toynbee, in *Mankind and Mother Earth*, takes issue with Jaspers' view of the Axial Period as being too narrow and thus in need of expansion. His expansion to Jaspers' original Axial Period is on the basis of the need to include those "two mighty epigoni," Jesus and Muhammad. Toynbee justifies his expansion as following on the long

²² Jaspers, *Origin and Goal of History*, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96-100, specifically 97.

traditions of Zarathustra and 'Deutero-Isaiah,' already included in Jaspers' view. With this inclusion, Toynbee expands the Axial Period to a duration of about seventeen centuries. For Toynbee, the Axial Period should run from 1060 B.C. to 632 A.D., ending with the death of Muhammad.²⁵

In his fourth volume of *Order and History: The Ecumenic Age*, Eric Voegelin takes issue with both Jaspers and Toynbee.²⁶ While he agrees that there is, in fact, a shift from what he terms 'compact consciousness' to 'differentiated consciousness' during this timeframe, he criticizes these two historians (and others) for what he considers to be their *linear* views of history. That is, while Jaspers and Toynbee accept the notion of an Axial Period as a (or *the*) significant event in history leading down through time to their own present, Voegelin moves to a "fuller view of the historical process" (MKMM 9-10), one that is not bounded by the view of a linear flow of events. His meaning of history constitutes an implicit shift from the 'outer events' of history to the 'inner context' of the historian, and to the role of meaning as constituting the movements of peoples and cultures in history. As such, Voegelin denies that there is a single flow of events which all lead smoothly to the historian's own present. Instead, he notes that a historian who confines himself or herself to such a perspective excludes the meaning of many significant societies in history, ones that may not necessarily line up with the historian's own attempts to arrive at a linear view of history. As Voegelin remarks, historians appear to have a horror of the richness of meaning in human history and of the idea that history is actually "a mystery in process of revelation."²⁷

McShane, following on Jaspers, Toynbee and Voegelin, draws on their views and incorporates them into the context of philosopher Bernard Lonergan to arrive at his own view of the Axial Period. Having provided a summary of these earlier views, I can now attempt to formulate the context of McShane's Axial Period.

²⁵ Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth*, 178.

²⁶ Voegelin 2-3; also MKMM, 10.

²⁷ Voegelin 6.

2.4. *McShane's Axial Period - Context*

McShane's work on the Axial Period brings the meanings of these three historians within the larger context of the work of Bernard Lonergan. From that initial context, his meaning enlarges and expands increasingly up to the present. All along, his growing concern and understanding is a process of figuring out the implications and the necessary conditions involved in the probable shift to an explicit metaphysics as defined by Lonergan. How, then, has McShane's context grown?

In keeping with the aims of a scientific interpretation, I will try to convey not simply the results of the different stages of development in McShane's 'axial' meaning, but also the operators that moved him from one stage to the next. What were the questions, events, contexts, issues, that led him forward from one stage in his meaning to the next? What concerns moved him forward?

As I already mentioned in the opening statement of the article, McShane's concern, all the way through, is the association of the Axial Period with the long-term shift to, and gradual emergence of, explicit metaphysics in history, not as an isolated occurrence, but as the possession of at least a global minority. Further, the shift, or the emergence, has conditions. For instance, one of its conditions, among others, is the personal understanding and control of Generalized Empirical Method by individuals and as a communal possession. McShane's attention, then, is directed towards the implications of such conditions. Over the years, his thinking about explicit metaphysics and about the conditions and implications of its emergence expands, so that his idea of what constitutes the Axial Period also expands.

The first expansion of his meaning is found in the work between 1976 and 1980. In the first mention of an axial period in 1976 (*Shaping* 79-95), though his eventual long-term goal is clearly communal, I would say that his appeal is primarily personal. He is speaking to individuals, mainly in philosophy and theology but here also to those in zoology, about their need to turn personally, concretely, to scientific self-attention. He makes this personal appeal clear in his opening page: "My hope, rather, is to move the general philosophic reader towards

a more precise appreciation of his or her own nescience – and therefore of his or her own humanity – and also to introduce the animal psychologist to the possibility of transforming that science, where by science I mean not the content of laboratories or libraries but primarily the content of the scientific mind” (79). McShane presses for the emergence of interiority as a personal and communal methodological possibility, something that comes about as each individual takes up his or her own personal quest of interiority (88).

In the personal turn to scientific self-attention, the need for an adequate methodological *Weltanschauung* is emphasized,²⁸ as is the personal foundational climb involved in attaining such a perspective (87, 89, 94-95). The re-orientation and integration of one’s common sense and one’s science are a condition of the adequate self-knowledge invited (88), and McShane takes issue with the situation of the contemporary culture and the modern academy in which scholars, philosophers and theologians in particular, have little or no competence with modern science (88).²⁹ In this 1976 work, the personal climb toward the scientific self-attention of interiority, the communal possibility of a context of interiority, and the consequent reorientation and integration of common sense and science, is identified as what would ground a contemporary Axial Period (88).³⁰

In this work, then, McShane has identified and reconfigured the Axial Period so as to associate it with the both the personal and the communal possibility of scientific self-attention. The significant point that McShane makes in this re-configuration is that Jaspers’ Axial Period had never actually

²⁸ An adequate *Weltanschauung* is the topic of his 1970 paper, “Image and Emergence: Towards an Adequate *Weltanschauung*,” prepared for the Lonergan conference held in Florida that year. It appears in *The Shaping of the Foundations* as chapter one and it must be taken as ‘qualifying context’ for his discussion of this topic in the present work.

²⁹ The drive of this entire chapter is to communicate the importance of a future relationship between philosophy and modern science within an adequately developing *Weltanschauung*. This message is especially evident in McShane’s concluding words on pages 94-5.

³⁰ “Scientific self-attention alias methodology as communal possibility marks what Jaspers calls an axial period.”

ended – with the events of 800-200 B.C., it had only just begun. In other words, McShane makes the point that there *wasn't* a sudden leap to differentiated consciousness in history. There was simply a scattered beginning that now needs the efforts of many individuals to arrive at a time in history when at least a global minority would be adequately differentiated.

In the 1980 work (*Challenge* 1-27) I found a shift in speaking – from personal appeal to communal appeal. Here McShane's context enlarges from personal invitation to communal appeal and he points now to the responsibility of the academy. Why? He is clearly thinking more vigorously about the role of the academy in the shift to explicit metaphysics. I think his own shift in thinking is brought on by a constellation of factors, all of which emerge in this chapter: a struggling with Lonergan's work on the Trinity, *De Deo Trino*, with emergent probability in *Insight*, and with the relatively new idea of Functional Specialization. Consequently, his view of the Axial Period takes on the implications of this larger context also.³¹

Where first the Axial Period was associated with the individual's reaching for scientific self-attention, and with a communal reorientation of common sense and science, now it is associated explicitly with “the possibility and probability of *an epochal shift* in the control of meaning” between Lonergan's two times of the temporal subject (3-4). While this ‘epochal shift in the control of meaning’ seems clearly to point to and intend a *communal* possibility and probability, the context here does still retain the personal appeal of the 1976 tone of writing. That is, McShane is still emphasizing the fact that the epochal shift is grounded by the successful personal incarnation of interiority, involving a life-long self-attentive climb. But his view of the Axial Period now is ‘leaning forward.’ Along with it being grounded by the personal climb, he is now indicating that the Axial Period involves an ‘epochal shift,’ something that can only point to a *communal*, as well as

³¹ *Ibid.*, see the concluding words to chapter six on page 110 of this book: “The love of God, the third stage of meaning, and the second million years are on our side.”

a personal, reality.³²

While it does not appear explicitly in his talk of the Axial Period, nevertheless I think the academy is now McShane's focal point, as seems clear even from the title of this chapter: "The Psychological Present of the Academic Community." It is more apparent in the opening sentence: "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..." (*Challenge* 1). The first part of this chapter was actually written in 1976, though not published until 1980, and it seems evident to me that it takes in the main context of the previous work of 1976, as above, and moves to enlarge on it. How so? The chapter is divided into three parts, only two of which appear in this book. The first part has seven sections, each with initial 'summary points' that provide the context of that section. When I reviewed these points together, I found they could be taken as echoing the message in the 1976 work, though with one major difference: they are leading now to the larger context of academic responsibility and obligation, rather than to the previous individual appeal (2, 4, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16).

Consider some of the relevant passages. In the introduction, there is a first obvious indication of his larger context when he speaks about this first chapter:

The title I have chosen, however, serves a more complex purpose. It indicates clearly, honouring his 75th year, the initiation by Lonergan of what I regard as a profound cultural shift. It specifies his challenge as being, not to small groups of philosophers or theologians, but to the academic community. (vi)

There is, too, the indication that this challenge is both novel and unacceptable to present culture, associations that later become explicit, though here they are merely indicated.

Further into chapter one, McShane's concern about the role of the academy comes to the fore. Now he moves to make the point that adult philosophic growth, of which he has been

³² Refer also to Lonergan, *DDT2* ms, 170-71 on the necessity of community in the shift to the second time of the temporal subject.

speaking throughout the chapter, is not enough:

Undoubtedly the basic possibility of the specification [of adequate psychological presence in the philosopher] is rooted in the solitary searcher's *anamnesis* and *prolepsis*. But the more than random recurrence of successful search requires the linkage of community, and the basic shift in schedules of probability of adult philosophic growth requires the emergence of complex supporting schemes of recurrence. (15)

And on the following page:

That paramount task is not one for some community of interdisciplinary philosophers: it is the evident task, it seems to me, of the academy. It is a task of academic self-definition and self-constitution. What is involved is a sophisticated functionally-differentiated *Wendung zur Idee* that, quite precisely, goes beyond present dreams. (16)

McShane is leading now to the larger context of Functional Specialization within the worldview of emergent probability. So his meaning of the Axial Period in this chapter is *pointing* toward this larger communal and historical context. Part two of his chapter one supports this claim. In it, there is criticism of the contemporary academy, there is an emphasis on generalized empirical method as requiring academics to develop competence in the realms of science, and there is a 'metaphysical move' from implementation to Praxis within a new notion of value (16-27). McShane's shift in meaning, then, from *The Shaping of the Foundations* to *Loneragan's Challenge to the University and the Economy*, is a shift from the personal reorientation and integration of one's common sense and science, to the communal implementation and the need for the academy to embrace Loneragan's challenge of interiority and generalized empirical method. This shift can be seen as reflecting McShane's developed understanding of Loneragan's own shift from *Insight* to *Method in Theology*.

I shift now to the 1984 work, "Middle Kingdom, Middle Man." The leap in meaning of the Axial Period from his

previous work to this work is immense. For the first time, McShane spells out in detail what he means by the Axial Period. For the first time also, he makes the strong definitive statement that we have not yet begun the third stage of meaning. This statement, in fact, is the crux of his axial meaning. In this larger context, the Axial Period is the *second stage of meaning*. It is a period of *Inbetween-ness* associated with Voegelin's Metaxy (*MKMM* 10). It is *modernity* (10-11), a period of some three thousand years up to and including the present and the foreseeable future prior to the emergence of the third stage of meaning and the implementation of explicit metaphysics. It is a period of *fragmented consciousness* between the compact consciousness (11)³³ of earlier human living and the interiorly differentiated consciousness of a later post-axial living. In this later time, a minority (and perhaps someday a majority) of 'self-luminous' people would constitute self-appreciatively their own ongoing living (11). The Axial Period includes the emergence of science but McShane is adamant that science, emerging in the middle of the second millennium, is only at a beginning: there was no scientific revolution (8). Furthermore, the fragmented consciousness that characterizes this stage of meaning in history makes science problematic in the Axial Period.

The great leap forward (4)³⁴ in McShane's meaning here is his Christian context intertwined as it is with the question of total history. Now the burden on the academy in this Axial Period (the message is addressed particularly to theologians in the academy) is extended and enlarged by being placed within the context of Lonergan's insights into God's subjectivity (6). With that context, there is a consequent call to "contemporary Elderhood" (4) that includes the call to science, to living at the level of one's times (4-5). McShane draws on the general categories of *Method in Theology* to ground his claim that academics are invited to engage in a Foundational Climb. In

³³ Also see Voegelin 1-2.

³⁴ The *Great Leap Forward* is a theme of this article. McShane uses Mao Tse Tung's *Great Leap Forward* in China, weighed against Lonergan's 'Great Leap Forward' in the West, as a means of opening up and including the East in his Christian historical context.

line with the Christian context of this work, McShane notes that “the heuristics of Foundations are concrete, providing the inner word of a worldview by which one thinks of the realities of mind and grace within the fullness of the emergent probability of meaning” (1) The Axial Period becomes for McShane the three thousand and more years up to and including present modernity in which human beings, the academy in general, and theology in particular, are floundering in “a cultural swamp” of neglected and truncated subjectivity, immersed in common sense eclecticism (2), and blinded by the illusion that clear statements and ‘plain speaking,’ or ‘telling,’ equal understanding (6). Part of McShane’s context becomes, then, the need to speak to theologians with a measure of bluntness about the contemporary practise of theology and the mess of modernity. Such speech allows him to raise the *problems* of modernity, specifically those of truncation and commonsense eclecticism, *as problems*.

Between the 1984 work and his next published mention of the Axial Period, in *A Brief History of Tongue (BHT 37-48)*, there lies some fourteen years. During this span, I think two factors in McShane’s development are of crucial importance: 1) McShane’s growing understanding of the Christian Trinity as something fundamental to the philosophic meaning of total history; and 2) his continued attention to the earlier identified problems of modernity. The 1984 work left off with the message that the academy, and theology in particular, are in need of a lift into the realm of Lonergan’s interiority and his explicit metaphysics. This lift, however, not only imposes on the academy the need for foundational climbing, but also raises the concrete problem of how to communicate such a need to individuals working in the academic system. Traditional ‘summary’ efforts³⁵ at communication are blocked for the reader by the fact of truncation and by the illusion, generated in the reigning realm of modern commonsense eclecticism, that ‘telling’ equates to ‘understanding.’

³⁵ See McShane, *Shaping* 81: “Yet what is a man to do who settles down to summary printed expression of the fruits of his labours? Should he not rather write an autobiography?...”

The book *Process*,³⁶ written in 1988-89, is, to the best of my knowledge, McShane's first attempt at writing in a specific mode of expression which attempts to address these problems concretely. This book is highly relevant to his context of 1998: it provides evidence for my claim that in these years McShane, for the first time, is grappling concretely with the problem of *linguistic feedback*.³⁷ The problem of linguistic feedback emerges in McShane's 1998 work as *fundamental* to the axial transition period itself, as will become apparent. In this later context of meta-linguistics, McShane embraces concretely, as a specialized expression of his axial context, the need to begin to implement Lonergan's notion of linguistic feedback in order to pragmatically lift metaphysics to a later, third stage of meaning (*BHT* 47). Nearly thirty years after his initial grappling with the philosophic meaning of words,³⁸ McShane's context now incorporates and vastly enlarges on his earlier context, transforming it into his much more refined and specialized, 'thirty-year grown' context of meta-linguistics.

In *A Brief History of Tongue*, the needed transformation to linguistic feedback is actually 'written into' McShane's expression. That is, the impossibility of "telling," coupled with the modern illusion of a 'clear understanding' that purportedly

³⁶ Philip McShane, *Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Readers*, 1989, available on the website www.philipmcshane.ca

³⁷ The problem of linguistic feedback as linked to the axial period is a problem that has been with McShane all the way along. In *Shaping* (98-9), there is the following passage concerning a link to be made between interpretation as treated in *Insight* and linguistic feedback as noted in *Method* (p. 88, footnote 34): "In the present stage of the axial shift to which *Method in Theology* belongs we are a long way from adequate signs and symbols of studied interiority, but that very point cries out to be made." In this later context of *Process* and *BHT*, McShane has begun to act on these words.

³⁸ *Shaping* 113 and following, "Instrumental Acts of Meaning and Fourth Level Specialization," on the triple correlation involved in experiential conjugates, in naming, and to page 10 and following on his earlier struggle and concern with "the menace of experiential conjugation" in philosophy. This latter note takes us back to McShane's work of the late 1960s and its emergence at the Florida Lonergan Conference of 1970. The edited works resulting from that conference are also relevant here, as can be seen in the following note.

results from this telling, is tackled by McShane in the advent of an explicit 'problem-solving' style. Going back to the book *Process*, the seeds of this new context can be found; in chapter two, especially, McShane raises and explicitly attacks the modern illusion of 'clear' and 'easy' communication, referring back to his earlier works expressing the same concerns.³⁹ In that chapter, by presenting a series of exercises and problems geared to lead the reader toward genuine acts of understanding and toward a self-awareness of the ever-deeper layers of meaning involved in a growing understanding (88-90), McShane enlarges his context so as to include this practical attempt at a solution to his earlier identified problems of contemporary communication.

By the time he gets to *A Brief History of Tongue: From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes*, the Axial Period is itself now presented for the first time as a *puzzle to be solved*. "This sequence problem is not at all a simple problem. Indeed, in the fullest and deepest sense it is the 'whole' problem expressed in the title of the book. This is a first shot at an answer to that problem, and the first shot is precisely to see it as a puzzle, like the other sequence puzzles of this chapter." This strategy of 'puzzling' is carried throughout the entire book and McShane contrasts it with his earlier efforts of "telling" the axial problem (*BHT* 43 and ch.4).

Jumping ahead for a moment to his 2002 work, *Lack in the Beingstalk*, this strategy of 'puzzling' continues. Now, though, it is applied to the larger and more evident data of

³⁹ *Process*, 60-1. In reflecting on his earlier article, "Instrumental Acts of Meaning...", McShane notes: "It is an elusive convoluted article: somehow, I was trying to stop people reading." Criticisms of his writing style as compared to Lonergan's eventually led McShane to reflect on the ease with which Lonergan's work can be read but not understood (that is, a *nominal understanding* can be achieved relatively easily, but such possession often blocks the way for the reader to the fuller theoretic understanding with which Lonergan wrote). In response to these criticisms, he proposed the question, "why did Lonergan write books that people could read?" This question grounded his shift to the new writing style. Please note that I am using a typed manuscript from 1989: the page numbers on the website may be different; therefore it is well to know that the reference here is to the beginning four pages of chapter two.

'grammatology' within the meta-linguistic context.⁴⁰ Here McShane is pointing to the core foundational data, the elements of meaning to-be-discovered in the "surface aspects of writing." His manner of bringing attention to these surface aspects of writing "can be paralleled to Lavoisier's bringing attention to surface aspects of combustion." In other words, note that his aim is not 'clear explanation' or definition, but is the more "humdrum description of a homely approach to a phenomenology of language" which nevertheless "eventually blossoms into a powerful heuristics of deep structure" (*Lack* 169). McShane now is presenting language itself as a puzzle through which to discover one's own 'core data.' In fact, by drawing the reader's attention to both "the data in front of your nose" (i.e., the sentence types and grammatical structures) as well as the "data behind your nose" (the elements of meaning to be discovered), McShane is very neatly embracing Lonergan's later definition of generalized empirical method within his own pragmatic strategy of presentation.⁴¹ Compared to his earlier attempt, in the first chapter of *A Brief History of Tongue*, the presentation of the elements of meaning within this linguistic field is much more subtle and encompassing.

Returning to *A Brief History of Tongue*, McShane's context of the Axial Period now, as is clear from his presentation of it in this book, not only incorporates his heuristic meaning of the emergence of speech and written language, but also addresses pragmatically the problems of fragmented modern speech and communication, identified by him in his earlier works. McShane's expression of the Axial Period in this work, then, is not a summary presentation. Here the Axial Period is presented as a large historical 'problem' that is merely 'alluded' to. It is presented as a puzzle in need of the reader's extended efforts at solving. The pictorial image, as seen below, is complemented by various textual hints and indications for follow-up in the reader's problem-solving effort

⁴⁰ See chapter five, section three, of *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giant's Causeway*, 2002, available on the website www.philipmcshane.ca (hereafter *Lack*)

⁴¹ *Lack* 163-71 for the full context mentioned here; pages 170 and 163 respectively provide the exact references.

(*BHT* 38ff).

$\dots t T^1 \dots t_{ra} \dots t_r \dots t_a \dots t_s \dots \quad t_n \dots \quad t \dots T^2 \dots t_x$
4000 B. C. < > 2500 A. D.

Major differences between his expression of the Axial Period in 1998 and in 1984 can be seen in this work. For instance, where McShane in the 1984 work has a dense paragraph outlining his idea of the Axial Period,⁴² his puzzle presentation of 1998 identifies the Axial Period simply as “the Big Bang in human history,” alluding to something significant without attempting to explain it. In place of dense ‘telling,’ McShane uses pointers and hints to cajole the reader forward into curiosity and problem solving activity. For example, the word *bang* not only is a key word in the title of the chapter but is drawn on repeatedly throughout the chapter. It refers first to the occurrence of insight (*BHT* 15-28), next to the double-layered “shift from babbling to talk” which constitutes the “language bang” (28-37), and finally to an axial/post-axial shift of method: “a cultural bang that grounds adequate speech about language, its acquisition, its universals” (30; 37-48). These hints are but some of the many available for the reader to follow-up.

Hints outlining the levels of meanings of the various **T**'s and **t**'s in the puzzle sequence are also spelled out. The **T**'s and **t**'s in the axial puzzle sequence are doubly indicative of McShane's larger meta-linguistic meaning of the Axial Period. In this much larger context, McShane's meaning embraces the fact that one of the necessary conditions of the probable shift to an explicit metaphysics is a shift in types of talk. His own shift

⁴² McShane, *MKMM*, see the paragraph beginning on the bottom of page 10 and flowing into page 11. This one dense paragraph manages to include McShane's definition of ‘modern,’ Lonergan's context of *De Deo Trino* and the two times of the temporal subject, Lonergan's later context of generalized empirical method as well as his stages of meaning, Voegelin's context of compact and differentiated consciousness meshed with McShane's notion of fragmented consciousness and with Lonergan's context of displacements of consciousness, Lonergan's notion of genuineness as ontogenetically and phylogenetically applied, and finally, a transformation of Chardin's *noosphere*.

in expression from ‘telling’ to this strategy of puzzle-solving is the first indication of his larger context and meaning here. But the various *t*-letters within the puzzle are themselves the second indication.

Here McShane makes use of the symbolic representation of capital letters, lower case letters, and subscripts to indicate in pointing fashion the elements of his axial context. His symbolic representation follows the tradition of scientific formulation where the dense image merely indicates a definitive meaning yet-to-be-discovered. Within his presentation of the axial problem, for instance, McShane uses subscripts to point to the range of types of “differentiated talk” that have emerged in history: religious ‘talk,’ artistic, scientific, and so on. Filling out these subscript-pointers are textual hints and footnotes leading to the larger dense heuristic issues of differentiation and speech lying behind the symbolic expression (43-45).

The “main interest” for McShane in this context is, in fact, *not* to ‘tell,’ as he himself states. “This is all very sketchy, and necessarily so: there are large varieties of differentiations of consciousness and of language... [examples given] All I’m attempting to do is to present a puzzle with some adequacy, and the hint of a solution.” The puzzle-solving strategy is now *part of* McShane’s larger meta-linguistic context. It is his pragmatic attempt to elicit “the emergence in you of large scale puzzlement...” (46). In his view now, the historical emergence of ‘large scale puzzlement’ is key to the transition toward post-axially differentiated talk: “Understanding the full solution to our present sequence problem involves a venture into the territories named by t_x and moving beyond them to some personal glimpse of the meaning of $T^2 \dots t_x$, something which is not yet a historical reality” (46). For McShane, the emergence and cultivation in history of humanity’s genuine puzzlement is a basic starting prerequisite for shifting out of the Axial Period and into post-axial territory.

Having presented his axial puzzle sequence, McShane immediately compares his own earlier writing on the Axial Period with this present context. His analysis leaves no doubt about his present shift in context, nor about his *own awareness*

of that shift (46-47). In this larger context, the shift he has made is a fundamental shift to *pragmatism*. McShane points out that in his early work, he spoke of a needed “massive shift... in the mind and heart of the academy...” (*Challenge* 1). In this later work, though, “That massive shift I now identify as a slow change to how-language...” (*BHT* 47). The pragmatism of this ‘how-language’ is evident in its ‘how’ title, as well as in the content of its chapter.

As I followed it up, the ‘how-language’ indicated by McShane indeed pointed to a pragmatic perspective. In its issues of core grammar, language universals, causality, syllogizing, ‘noun-ing,’ upper levels of consciousness involving planning and decision-making, of emergent probability, and of linguistic feedback leading to the post-axial transformation of the control of language,⁴³ it became clear that this how-language had for McShane, at the very least, a double-edged pragmatic meaning. “To deal with the long cycle of human decline [i.e., of the Axial Period] in an effective redemptive manner calls for the massive restructuring of human searching that is the topic of the next chapter” (78). The ‘next chapter’ flows into the topic of Functional Specialization. So the ‘massive restructuring of human searching’ that McShane envisions not only includes his own new pragmatic strategy of expression and communication, designed as it is to elicit *the emergence in you of large scale puzzlement*, but also includes the larger communal geo-historical strategy of Functional Specialization. If that were not enough, the concluding words to his chapter on ‘how-language’ should be convincing: “The key factor here is the achievement of a genuine efficiency of evolution, emergence, revolution, grounded not in policing or class war but in a gentle persuasive move towards a democratic and luminous liberation of human sensability” (79).⁴⁴ McShane’s context here clearly implies and includes the *pragmatism* of strategies for implementation that will lift evolution, lift history, out of the Axial Period and into the explicit hope of the third stage of meaning (*BHT* 116-

⁴³ *BHT* 51, 55-6, 57-64, 64-71, 71-75, 75-79 respectively.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79. Sensability is intentionally misspelled, a pragmatic strategy pointing the reader toward her or his own operations of mind.

125).⁴⁵ In this context of 1998, McShane reveals the fact that he has himself shifted from a position of “telling” to one of “doing,” to a personal incarnation of Lonergan’s claim that identification is performance (*CWL* 3, 582).

A Brief History of Tongue, then, marks a new mode of pragmatic expression in McShane’s work, and indeed, a new *context* of pragmatism in his view of the Axial Period. It also marks a shift from his earlier concern with the academy to his now larger concern of lifting the full global population and culture toward Functional Specialization,⁴⁶ or Hodic Studies, and ultimately into a third stage of meaning. His pragmatism is a key element in trying to nudge global culture forward, and his works since *A Brief History of Tongue* reflect that context.

Looking to the works since *A Brief History of Tongue*, McShane’s context of pragmatism is, I would say, of vital importance to his meaning of the Axial Period. *A Brief History of Tongue* is the first in a series of volumes for which McShane is the general editor. The series is called, notably, *Transaxial Series: A Series Within Axial Press*. McShane’s context for this series is thus founded explicitly on his view of the Axial Period, as the title implies, as well as on his shift to pragmatism. The meaning of *transaxial* pivots on the new pragmatism, as McShane makes clear in his opening introduction: “The book focuses on the problem of *beginning to move beyond* what I call the ‘Axial Period’...” (1, italics mine). With this series, McShane’s view of the Axial Period is, then, a view of history that, in its concrete pragmatism, has the potential to *lift* history.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ McShane’s axial context explicitly includes his three heuristic words of metaphysics, found in this section of chapter four. The third word contains reference to the explicit hope of Lonergan’s Trinitarian context. With these heuristic words, chapters one through three of this book are lifted into the uncompromising explanatory heuristic context of this chapter (four). Moreover, the heuristic words presented here are symbolic indications of McShane’s steadily enlarging, ontogenetic context of the meaning of history.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, *BHT*, chapter three, 81, footnote two.

⁴⁷ See his Editor’s Introduction in McShane’s *Economics for Everyone: Das Jus Kapital* (Halifax: Axial P, 1998), 4-5, concluding words on axial hopelessness and transaxial hope. The Editor’s Introduction to his

I am convinced that the shift to pragmatism at this point in his work is a result of McShane's evolution of grappling with the problem of "implementation" as it appears in Lonergan's definition of metaphysics.⁴⁸ From the beginning and throughout his work, McShane has pointed to Lonergan's later discovery of Functional Specialization as the answer to the problem of implementation 'left hanging' in *Insight*.⁴⁹ The present problem for McShane, then, is a practical *how-to* problem: how to 'get the Functional Specialization ball rolling'⁵⁰ in an axial culture that resists such a turn.

In his work since, and including, *A Brief History of Tongue*, McShane meets that question in what I would call a three-pronged strategy. The first prong is key: McShane now takes the Axial Period as part of his 'foundational stance.' The Axial Period is the present historical basis, the 'now' reality out of which culture and history must gradually move forward and into a THEN⁵¹ reality.⁵²

From that position, McShane's second 'prong' rises. The second prong, as I see it, is his decision to 'tackle' axial culture, something McShane has done all the way through his *opera omnia*, but now does in an increasingly explicit manner.

Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics: A Fresh Pragmatism (Halifax: Axial P, 2002), 1, is a more explicit context of pragmatism which is now being expanded by McShane in his Cantowers, available on the website www.philipmcshane.ca.

⁴⁸ *CWL* 3 415-21, with the definition stated at the bottom of page 416.

⁴⁹ See, for example, *BHT*, chapter three, 82, note 8: "The manner in which Lonergan's discovery of functional specialization solved the problem of 'implementation' as a component of metaphysics is implicitly our topic throughout this chapter;" and, in the same book, chapter two, 78, note 32: "The question of the efficiency of metaphysics is an axial problem, but in the context of Lonergan's work it may be identified as the problem of the unidentified cosmopolis of *Insight*, chapter 7, the weakness of the notion of 'implementation' as a component in metaphysics, the slimness of the treatment of the last three specialties in *Method in Theology*."

⁵⁰ McShane's favourite chapter title (see *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics*, 66) on this topic is "A Rolling Stone Gathers Nomos," chapter three of *BHT*.

⁵¹ The title of Cantower V is "Metaphysics THEN."

⁵² Particularly relevant here is Cantower XVII, 10, footnote 20, citing the axial perspective as central to the psychic context of long-term hope and optimism.

That is, McShane points to problems, or *lacks*, in present axial culture which need to be identified *to* axial culture precisely *as* lacks. The book *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giant's Causeway*, as the title suggests, carries this explicit message. So his context of the Axial Period enlarges to become an explicit message of cultural deficiency in need of pragmatic solutions. One of the most significant problems in culture is the lack of *efficiency* in a now global academic enterprise. By pointing to a *Giant's Causeway* of Functional Specialization, McShane's context now includes an effort to *shift the statistics* of axiality, through the vehicle of Functional Specialization, toward a third stage of meaning. So making Functional Specialization an "unavoidable topic" (153) becomes for McShane the vital 'catalyst' of his axial context.

The third prong in McShane's approach, as touched on above, is the attempt to initiate his own strategies of linguistic feedback. Here he pragmatically alters his own mode of expression and communication in order to address the axial deficiencies he has himself identified. Introducing the puzzles and exercises of *Process* and *A Brief History of Tongue* was a first move in this direction. But in these later works, there are further additions to those initial strategies. Not only, then, has McShane's context of the Axial Period become again larger and more explicit, but also it now incorporates his own context of pragmatic action within the realm of linguistic feedback, as noted above.

Before identifying the strategies McShane uses in his new pragmatic style of writing, I think it will be helpful to bring out at least some of the major cultural deficiencies McShane now explicitly associates with the Axial Period. Let me begin by saying that there are several interrelated 'axial lacks' to which McShane explicitly points. So he identifies as axial and problematic, the present cultural state of extreme *nominalism*; a secular-oriented modern attitude of 'busyness' which tends to exclude genuine *Mystery* from its horizon; a widespread cultural neglect of *theory*; a common global reality of *neglected and truncated subjectivity*; and, finally, a consequent lack of appreciation for and achievement of genuine adult, or

Elder, growth.⁵³ All of these axial facets have been part of McShane's perspective and work from the beginning but now he is moving into a much more explicit mode of specification.

Consider a handful of quotations from some of his later works which serve to tie together the above-mentioned 'lacks.' The 'Bacchus pages' of *Lack in the Beingstalk* address most explicitly the lack of Mystery and Elder growth in axial culture. Included here is the 'eye of the storm' diagram, re-quoted from his 1976 book ("It is only in the eye of the storm that one can name the Mystery"). In the earlier work, the 'eye of the storm' is used to illustrate *intentio entis*, or the intention of being, which is "at the centre of the vortex of method and at the centre of any person's storms of finitude;" the same 'eye' is drawn on in Faith, only now it is experienced as Mystery. McShane's linking of the axial period to the larger *notion of being* and to a Christian context of Trinitarian theology and total history, is carried forward and enlarged here. In the second Bacchus page, for instance, notice that Mystery is now much more subtly and personally conveyed as the "Upanishadic or Zulu desire that twists around all our genitaled molecules." By drawing on classical Indian and African sacred traditions and beliefs, McShane opens up global cultural appreciation and resonance beyond Western Christianity. He is finding cultural parallels to extend his message to a larger and yet much more personal global community. Further, to make mention of "our genitaled molecules" he is drawing the notion of being 'back' into its full and proper personal genetic home, while pointing to and hinting at the full aggreformic structure of that desire.

More than that, the second Bacchus page comments on his earlier work, and his comments now are in the explicit realm of pragmatic need. So he specifies his own foundational growth in meaning since his writing of the 1976 work. While in his earlier works Mystery and adult growth were topics, they weren't explicitly identified in this context as cultural *lacks* in need of pragmatic attention. Further, as well as specifying the

⁵³ I have not included individual references here as they are too numerous to begin to cite. These topics can be found mentioned in all of McShane's works, from the earliest on up to the present.

pragmatic need of both ontogenetic and phylogenetic growth in meaning, McShane now also makes the distinction of the need for *heuristic clarification* of that growth. His own ‘growth curve’ ($y = x^2$) offers an instance of *how-to* meet the latter heuristic need, at least as a starting point here. Finally, McShane’s larger axial context now invites *pragmatic personal decision* regarding one’s own stand toward authentic Mystery and Foundational adult growth:

But that I and that storm are in an Axial Pericular sea.
 You are incessantly invited to settle down. You are
 invited to call for plain meaning in a necrophiliac
 obviousness. You are invited to expect to meet
 yourself of last year, of twenty-five years ago, as an
 obvious equal.

You would be older, but not Elder.

What does your eye desire? (Lack, Bacchus page,
 concluding words, italics mine)

As this quotation makes clear, his message of axial lack and his own context of pragmatism now used to meet it, is an explicit aspect of his context here.

Also in this book is a hearty critique of an axial culture steeped in nominalism and lacking in genuine theory. Lonerganism itself is critiqued as merely nominal, as avoiding the call to Mystery, to theory, and to genuine Foundational growth (ch. 4). This critique brings out the dialectic of views between McShane, in his position for Mystery, and other Lonergan scholars calling for clarity of expression and meaning.⁵⁴ Ultimately, McShane’s analog of Husserl’s life work (in mathematics and phenomenology) is put forward in order to make the point that it is not only the fields of mathematics, phenomenology and logic that require the cycling and re-cycling of Functional Specialization. Such axially dialectic views, surrounding both Husserl in phenomenology and McShane in philosophy and theology, will only be authentically aired when the cycling of Functional

⁵⁴ See here McShane’s account of the editorial disagreement regarding his Appendix to *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 319-21.

Specialization begins its efficient churning: “You may well have expected some such [random comparison and debate] here... But what might the value be? You can peruse... and read... and come out somewhere in the middle, but it would not constitute efficient hodic progress” (*Lack* 45-46). By making “hodic conversion an unavoidable topic” McShane is hoping to identify this collaborative possibility as the “central lack in the beingstalk” (53). His critique of a nominal axial culture is lifted now into the pragmatic zone of the need for the spiralling of Functional Specialization that will give that culture a lift.

There is also the article “Towards a Luminous Darkness of Circumstances” and Cantower XVII, section one, on Mystery. Both works convey the message of axial lack and the need for pragmatic solution. In the first article, he writes:

I am inviting you, more concretely than Lonergan, less eloquently than Ortega, to discover the call [to genuine adult growth], its presence or absence, the shade of its nature, above all the slow rhythms of its reaching.

There is then, adult growth in mathematical physics, a growth that can reach beyond graduate studies... It has parallels in the more difficult fields of chemistry, botany, zoology, etc. Much of contemporary culture takes a stand against such adult growth... Instead of an openness to the unknown there is established a bogus nominalistic essence that can crib you into acceptable graduate studies...

How can this rigid handing down be unseated?

What is important to notice here is the manner in which the cyclic structuring of inquiry [of Functional Specialization] shifts the statistics of the successful reading of the book *Insight*. ...I speak of possibilities, perhaps thin probabilities, of the next millennium. The emergence of the third stage of meaning, in which luminous extreme realism becomes a core dynamic, depends upon a willingness towards hodic

logic in a creative minority.⁵⁵

And there is Cantower 17:

My quest, then, remains the quest for some few evolutionary sports... “Evolutionary sport” is to be understood, in your own elderhood perhaps decades hence... Then ... you will remember the Proustian climb through arts and sciences and suffering soaked into one’s straining molecules.

My quest now is more precise and more hopeful: how is this sensability [of authentic nescience] to be acculturated against the current mythologies?

The task for us all is to muddle along, twisting around the dynamic of major and minor authenticities, with as much growing luminosity and honesty as possible... What I look towards is the genesis of a culture that would intussuscept the orientation of W1 in such a fashion that the next global generation would grow up with the mood of unfamiliarity that it invites.... The words that I introduce here may grow to have the same vibrancy of meaning, distance, invitation: relations to us... of cosmic yearnings.⁵⁶

McShane’s context of pragmatism regarding the present Axial Period of which he writes envisions a future lift of global culture toward which *his own efforts of linguistic expression* reach.

With the mention of W1 in the above quotation, it seems a good time to return to McShane’s ‘third prong’ pragmatic strategy of altering his own mode of communication in his writing. It is through these strategies, like that of puzzle-solving mentioned earlier, that McShane addresses pragmatically the axial lacks he identifies. In other words, not

⁵⁵ McShane, “Towards A Luminous Darkness of Circumstances,” available on the website www.philipmcshane.ca, 8-9; 10-11; 12; 19 respectively.

⁵⁶ McShane, Cantower 17, pages 3, 9, 11, 13 respectively; W1 will be discussed shortly.

only does he make these 'lacks' a topic by writing about them, but also his manner of expression, his *way* of writing about them, is such that he *challenges*, pragmatically, the specific problems or lacks he has identified. And this stylistic *challenging* is now an integral part of his context.

Take W1,⁵⁷ for example. By introducing complex *symbols*, such as this one, McShane challenges his reader to confront the axial cultural tradition and problem of nominalistic understanding. Through this tradition, mere familiarity with words passes for 'serious understanding.' Symbols and signs such as W1 make use of the denser images which are regularly found in the realms of natural science and mathematics. McShane uses them to evoke the long, slow-growing process of understanding that such realms of meaning require and invite, and to make the point that a parallel perspective (on growth-of-meaning) needs to enter into the realm of the human sciences, particularly philosophy and theology. His various *diagrams* create the same kind of cultural challenge against nominalism (esp. *BHT* 108-10; 124). They also introduce a respect for the density of growing meaning. Dense diagrams, such as the 'Turn to the Idea' in *A Brief History of Tongue* (124), raise the point that humanity will need increasingly complex images as (and if) it gradually moves toward a larger control of growing meaning.⁵⁸

Slogans and Pragmatic Principles⁵⁹ are another strategy which McShane employs in his writing as part of his context. In his pragmatic *Childout Principle* ("Teaching children

⁵⁷ This 'first word of metaphysics' was introduced by McShane in *Wealth of Self, Wealth of Nations: Self-Axis of the Great Ascent*, published in 1977 and now available on the website www.philipmcshane.ca. Cantower 17 names two further words of metaphysics created by McShane.

⁵⁸ See also *BHT*, 123-24, footnote 27: "The diagram is an invitation not to take fright: as humanity progresses, images necessarily complexify as invitations both to control and to reverence the density of growing meaning. Instead of the notes of birds we have the melodic and symphonic notes, manuscripts of musical genius, mightily beyond our own sensibilities. A good diagram, like the printed image of a piano concerto, calls us, if not to actual reading at least to admiration."

⁵⁹ See, for example, his 'minimal foundations' of *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics*, chapter three.

geometry is teaching children children”), he points readers, and especially teachers, toward questions and problems of “truncated subjectivity” and invites them, in concrete fashion, to discover Lonergan’s definition of generalized empirical method, particularly the later definition. His *Minimal Foundations* are yet another avenue for pointing readers toward both generalized empirical method and Functional Specialization.⁶⁰

The key to all of these strategies lies in the fact that McShane does not attempt to *explain* his meaning.⁶¹ Each of his pragmatic strategies of linguistic expression in this later context offer only pointers and leads for an interested reader. Such linguistic strategies direct attention to the *attitude* of the reader. McShane attempts to evoke the reader’s curiosity and interest, on the one hand, but by doing so, he realizes “it most likely means [for the reader] a straining of present habits, of truncatedness foisted on you by present literature...” (*Lack* 163). So his manner of expression is likely to disturb the reader’s axial-rooted expectations of what it commonly means to ‘read’: for example, the reader may experience impatience, resentment, or annoyance when confronted with McShane’s strategies of *not telling*, but hinting, of inviting the rather novel experience of having to slow down and spend days, weeks, or months ‘puzzling a thing out.’ To offset these reactions, McShane makes axial-rooted expectations themselves an explicit topic. He deals with such expectations by talking explicitly about the ‘axial’ feelings of annoyance and resentment that might typically be felt in reaction to his words. Further, he also makes a point of raising the broad cultural topic of needing to “read differently,” “eyes off the page” and “without prejudice.”⁶² This topic of ‘reading,’ in fact, is one

⁶⁰ Another ‘strategy’ increasingly used by McShane, though not exactly a ‘strategy,’ is to identify as *doctrinal* those statements or works which invite a more or less long-term personal climb of understanding. Lonergan’s *Insight* is the most notable work identified as *doctrinal* by McShane. (And the manner of expression in this article itself falls under that category.)

⁶¹ *Lack*, chapter three, section six, for his more recent meanings of explaining, explaining, coplaning, and suplaning.

⁶² See especially *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics*, chapter five, 64

that McShane has written into his work for nearly thirty years, bringing it round now to this larger, more pragmatic context.

By introducing these pragmatic linguistic strategies into his writing, McShane is attempting to turn the axial tide toward a distant post axial future. In doing so, he is attempting to deal with generations steeped in nominalism, secularization, and truncation, and lacking in respect for Mystery and genuine adult growth. So he is building into his pragmatism, by a purposeful obscurity,⁶³ by a twisting of the usual (*Lack* 154), both an awareness of these lacks and of the distant possibility of their redemption. He is also attempting to convey to global culture the *need for* lifting history forward. In taking this pragmatic stand, he hopes to elicit a glimmer of respect for the slow-growing meaning that his words, puzzles, slogans, principles, and diagrams point to. If successful, McShane's work on the Axial Period may result, some time in the future, in a shift of global statistics towards reading *Insight* successfully,⁶⁴ lifting culture some way forward to the distant goal of third stage meaning that he envisions. At the very least, it will no doubt reveal future enlargements to what has already been a "giant-stilts"⁶⁵ climb.

where McShane quotes Descartes' advice on reading: "I would advise none to read this work, unless such as are able and willing to meditate with me in earnest... and likewise to deliver themselves from all prejudice."

Elsewhere, however, he makes use of Gaston Bachelard's recommendation in *The Poetics of Space* that one is reading properly only when "eyes are off the page." See McShane's earlier work, *The Shaping of the Foundations*, chapter four, 98, footnote 11 for an earlier reference to this quotation.

McShane has drawn on this quotation for nearly thirty years in his effort to encourage an appreciation of mystery, of 'boned in meaning,' and of the slower pace and painstaking process of understanding.

⁶³ Having talked briefly about "the distantly future version of the *hodic* enterprise," his concluding words to chapter three of *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics* go on to ask: "What is this distant pragmatics that I barely hint about? Very superficially, it can be suggested that it would replace the grammar of descent... with a grammar of ascent that would decolonize desire's expressions. This, *I fear not but savour*, tells you little or nothing." *Pastkeynes*, 73 (italics mine).

⁶⁴ McShane, "Towards a Luminous Darkness of Circumstances," 19.

⁶⁵ From Marcel Proust's *Remembrances of Times Past*, conclusion. Proust's 'man on giant stilts' is an image which McShane draws on repeatedly as his own context grows.

Part Three: Personal Context

I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that the process of writing this article has been an expansive and rewarding experience. It has been my first attempt at doing a scientific *interpretation*, one that aims, as much as possible in these early stages, to be in line with Lonergan's ideas and suggestions. The fact that my attempt at an interpretation, along with the efforts of the others in this journal volume, is, as far as I'm aware, something of a first attempt, means that there are bound to be struggles and ambiguities in how to proceed. For this reason, it seems important that these struggles are shared in order to try to ease the way for future efforts. My own way of dealing with the struggle of doing this interpretation was to keep notes on the questions and problems and ideas that arose for me along the way. It is mainly from these notes that I now write my personal context in the hope that my struggles may help others in their own similar tasks.

I began work on this article in earnest in September, 2003. Aware of my commitment to do some kind of interpretation for this volume, I had asked myself what topic I might possibly consider. Perhaps because trying to understand Lonergan is a primary focus in so much of what I do, I initially thought that I might tackle an interpretation of some aspect of his work. I jotted down especially topics that I wanted to learn more about. Right away, though, I saw a major problem with this line of thinking. In my journal I had written: "Trouble with this though – not an interpretation but merely a learning... so how to go about the article? Can only start by spelling out my missing contexts, which are huge, and try to get something out of it..." But this isn't an interpretation in an efficient functional sense.

So I went on to consider other fields (music, feminism, maybe psychology?) in which I have some experience. From my degrees in music and musicology I considered doing an interpretation on music and meaning. Also, following my recent book on philosophy and women, I thought of tackling Betty Friedan's notion of the 'feminine mystique' and how it might relate to Lonergan's notion of the pure desire. Likewise, I considered looking at some of Abraham Maslow's ideas on

growth psychology from a similar light. The topic of music seemed the most likely, while the latter two topics seemed too involved and complex to be successful first attempts at interpretation. These last two topics had to draw on the major issue of human development and, consequently, rested in large part on a competence in the genetic heuristic structure, so there was again a good chance of my falling into that problem of 'merely learning' instead of properly interpreting.

When the topic of the Axial Period was suggested to me, I was immediately interested. It was a topic I had explored and included in my recent book on women.⁶⁶ In its relationship to large questions about the meaning and process of history, it had very much piqued my interest. Further, it had the advantage of being a single 'contained' topic that was 'handleable' for a genuine, and hopefully successful, attempt at an interpretation.

What is important in all this personal history is that, within this 'simple' initial process of trying to arrive at a suitable topic for an interpretation, I found that some quite profound questions had already come up. I had written in my notes: "What to use as guidelines for selecting a topic for interpretation? In music, for example, I would try to look for the work of someone who is striving toward a 'self-luminous' view, though without the benefit of Generalized Empirical Method... Susanne Langer, for instance." I would now add that I would want to look for someone whose work I considered to be significant to history. It seemed obvious to me that McShane's work on the Axial Period is significant to history, and it also contained a significant 'self-luminous' content and context. So should any chosen topic have this type of 'lift' in it? If it isn't directly related to Lonergan's work and ideas, should it always be something that can benefit from, or be lifted by, Lonergan's perspective? Does this assume that all interpreters are familiar with Lonergan and his work? "What," I wrote, "of those in other various disciplines who do not have Lonergan's context? What then is a 'significant topic,' one suitable for an interpretation?"

⁶⁶ Alessandra Drage, ? *Woman What Gives* (Halifax: Axial P, forthcoming in 2005).

In retrospect, I realize that these questions raise the complex issue of personal horizon or individual viewpoint, of 'positional' or 'categorical' stand, even. What would seem a topic of significance to me, may be not at all significant to another interpreter. It seems to me that what we're into here is the need for a universal viewpoint, an acknowledgement of the protean notion of being and of the need to deal with it in an explicit fashion. John Benton has raised this issue of personal horizon in his own article where he talks about "tracking." As I understand it, the primary function of the universal viewpoint is to make explicit the fact of the varying personal positions and horizons of interpreters (*CWL* 3, 587-91). Benton's "track," then, with its colourful rainbow spectrum of differing horizons and zones of conversation, seems a very helpful image in expressing the function of the universal viewpoint.

The need to deal explicitly with the issue of personal horizon, of personal context, at first reaction, however, seemed to me to have more to do with Dialectic than Interpretation. In fact, it is the editor's intention for each interpreter/author to include a somewhat informal version of the positional statement required in Dialectics (*Method* 250). Given the fact that questions of horizon come up right from the beginning, even in the so-called simple process of selecting a topic for interpretation, it does strike me as important for each author to include and make explicit her or his own horizon. This need is in fact stated in the third canon of methodical hermeneutics: the canon of successive approximations. Its first two principles are the demand of a universal viewpoint and of adequate self-knowledge. Where do I, where does each author, stand in respect to these two principles?

I think of my answer as a means of 'introducing myself positionally,' so to speak. For instance, as I was preparing to write this section, it helped me to imagine myself at a scientific conference, a chemistry conference say, where I might stand up and say what field I specialize in, knowing that the rest of the audience takes it for granted that I possess the prerequisite basic position, say, on the periodic table – in fact, surely it would be silly to even mention that assumption at such a conference! But in this field of philosophy, we are at a very

early stage of trying to work scientifically, and so it isn't silly to introduce myself as possessing, or not possessing, this or that basic prerequisite position philosophically.

By way of introduction, then, I have been working at Lonergan's philosophy since 1987. My introduction to Lonergan came, providentially, as I was starting in on a degree in music. My spare hours over the next four years were absorbed in *Insight*, and various other related works, especially Philip McShane's *Wealth of Self, Wealth of Nations*.⁶⁷ In September of 1991, having completed my music degree, and after struggling for four years part-time with "The Inside Out of Radical Existentialism," I experienced the startlingly strange insight that placed me in the universe.

This shift in me became my beginning. So I can claim intellectual conversion as it is written about in *Insight* (22-23) and *Method* (238-240). Since then, I have made a slow struggle to build on that insight, to make an "impossible climb" toward a theoretic metaphysical world, though my progress has been slow and little. By this point, I possess a fair degree of 'Positional' comfort: when adverted to, I am comfortable with the fact that any real person I am talking with is *not* that person out there who I am looking at; that if I advert to real words, then these words on this paper 'disappear;' that when I advert to the real movements of my real fingers on my own my real hand, then the movements out there become a quite wondrous, 'detached' ballet; and so on for as many more examples as one wants to repeat.

I think I can also claim a 'normal' moral and religious conversion, as well as aesthetic conversion. I am, however, missing a crucial conversion to theory, which I believe limits the full development of intellectual conversion. In fact, it is only in the past two years that I have come to realize and embrace fully, in my own inner conviction, the need for theoretical conversion.⁶⁸ During this time, through particular

⁶⁷ McShane, *Wealth of Self*, www.philipmcshane.ca.

⁶⁸ What is becoming clearer to me through the work I have been doing recently, not the least of which is this interpretation, is a crucial distinction between what I might call "sophisticated description" and theoretical achievement. It has helped me to be able to reflect back on a degree I

aspects of work I've been doing, I have gradually come to feel within me and to realize a call toward living fully in the universe of being, a call that makes me responsible, commits me to a climb (foundational or categorial in name) within being, trying to greet the universe in as full a way as I can.⁶⁹ For me, this means tackling what is lacking in my horizon: mathematics, physics, chemistry, not in the hopes of becoming a 'professional' in any of these fields, but in the attempt to bring myself up as best I can to some familiarity and basic competence with these dynamic aspects of God's universe in order to fill out my genuine foundational climb.

For the purposes of this article, I also feel the need to speak of the universal viewpoint. A major question for me through this interpretative work has been to ask myself what is *my* universal viewpoint? I have an appreciation of *a* universal viewpoint as a distant, and in some sense 'impossible,' future goal of functional specialists working together, the possibility of their achieving a genetic and dialectic ordering of all critical viewpoints. But concretely, what is *my* universal viewpoint? It seems to me that, if the UV is the range (potential totality) of genetically and dialectically diverse (ordered) viewpoints, then my concrete possession of that range is very limited, in fact may well be limited to the one view of this particular interpretation that I have just done. Of the total potential range

completed in Kinesiology (1982-86). During this time, I struggled through courses in Anatomy and Physiology taken from the Medical School at Dalhousie University. My experience in these courses, in retrospect, offers a clear example of the huge difference between the "sophisticated descriptions" of anatomy, which were relatively easy to understand, and the functional theoretical relations of physiology, and of our later courses in biomechanics. The latter were *much* more difficult. As trying as they were then, I now find my experiences very helpful, especially in relation to reading page 464 of *Insight*, for instance.

⁶⁹ As I was writing this passage, I happened incidentally to pick up Lonergan's *A Third Collection*. In my reading, I almost immediately came on these words: "Only in virtue of this further level of consciousness [level of reflection] can we set aside myth and magic and astrology and alchemy and legend and begin to live by philosophy and science and astronomy and chemistry and history. It is a decisive stage in the process of self-transcendence when we not merely think of the universe but begin to know what the universe really is." *3 Coll*, 132.

of genetically and dialectically ordered viewpoints, what share do I genuinely possess? Not much!

I can, though, claim a conversion to 'hodies' or Functional Specialization, at least in some basic level of commitment to its future functioning. I think I can also claim some introductory degree of competence and understanding of what this structure is about. At the present time in history this seems to me the best we can do. Like the volume of this journal, our limited efforts at getting Functional Specialization off the ground are only beginning-ventures in what will some day be, I hope, a much more specialized theoretic zone of the control of human meaning.

This brief review, then, expresses my horizon, my positional stand. With this said, I turn back now to the context of my struggles of 'doing interpretation.' My next step was obviously to gather the relevant materials on the Axial Period (here the specialty of Research would have been helpful) and read through them, slowly accumulating insights from his writings into the development of McShane's meaning. Once again, as I approached this reading, some very basic questions arose: "What was I trying to achieve with this interpretation? What was my goal? What information in the documents and texts was relevant and what wasn't? Who was I writing to?" As I went along I was able to answer at least one of these questions, as my notes reveal:

I can see in re-reading this that at least one question is clearer – that of the aim of the interpretation and who is reading it... Strictly speaking, the aim has to remain *functional*. So I'm writing for historians and they are the primary audience. As far as the more specific aim of how to write functionally, that's still in the fog. What I'm trying to do is first piece together the works that deal with the Axial Period – next try to figure out what McShane in each work was saying about the Axial Period. Then (now) try to figure out how the meaning has changed – *grown*, expanded - between each work, or from one to the next. Each expansion seems, at this point, to be what is relevant – and then to ask *why?* Why the expansion? What moved him

forward to the new meaning? This is, as far as I can figure, the process of trying to pinpoint the “operators” – it seems that in doing these steps I’m pivoting between content and context... the one filling out the other.

First of all, then, I had to aim at being *functional* in my task. So I was providing the historian with an interpretation that she/he could use to place the Axial Period, as one particular view of history, within the full range of philosophic views of the meaning of history generally.

Secondly, though, and what this excerpt makes somewhat clear, is the fact that my questions of *how* to proceed functionally were met at this time by a point in *Insight* (594) regarding the identifying of operators. This hint helped me forward to construct the *context* section of my interpretation, which I wrote first. Having written that section, though, I wasn’t sure how to approach the *content* section. How would it differ from the context? What was the aim here? In fact, the last sentence in my journal entry above reveals, perhaps, my confusions at the time about *context* and *content*, something that was to be clarified only later during my struggle to figure out just what my pure formulation of the content should express.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Once I had realized that I was writing to historians in a purely functional manner, I faced the question of *how* to proceed. What I can say now, after the fact, is that I was able to find my way forward only by struggling repeatedly with the relevant texts and documents for my topic (the Axial Period), combined with *Insight’s* chapter 17, especially section 3.6 *The Sketch* (602-603) and section 3.8 *Some Canons for a Methodical Hermeneutics* (608-16) and *Method’s* chapter 7 on *Interpretation*. Only by attempting repeated drafts of my interpretation, noticing my shortcomings and correcting and revising as I went along, did I arrive at some fresh light on the meaning of these two chapters.

It isn’t realistic to think that I could ‘summarize’ my process for you, but it occurred to me that a few words about my struggle to sort out ‘hypothetical expression of pure formulation of content’ might help others in their own future

struggles. My confusion, it seems to me, revolved around page 580 of *Insight* (CWL 3, 602-03) on the hypothetical expressions: how to transpose the content of 'Q's' message (or in my case, McShane's message) from my universal viewpoint "into an equivalent content that would proceed from Q's particular viewpoint. That particular viewpoint is assigned in the pure formulation of Q's context"?

In retrospect, it seems that the main point in this paragraph is the need for the interpreter (me) to come to possess the meaning of author x (here McShane) *as my own*, that this possession would ground my hypothetical expression of content. How do I do that? From my "immanent sources of meaning," that is, in my own experience, understanding and judgement, I have to try to reproduce McShane's viewpoint, the content of his particular message. And in doing so, I have to ensure that my interpretation is as closely "equivalent" to McShane's viewpoint as possible.⁷⁰

Let me see if I can make this a little clearer. I was struggling to figure out just what I needed to express in regard to the content of McShane's meaning of the Axial Period. I came to realize that for the functioning of History, what the historian needs to know is a compact answer to the question "what is the Axial Period?" Now my first inclination was to think that it would suffice simply to repeat what McShane had himself said in his texts on the topic. But of course there is a major flaw in this idea: *it isn't functional*. Or I might say, it's *dysfunctional*. For a functional interpretation, I needed something more than simply a repetition of his words, mimic-like or parrot-like. So what to do?

The breakthrough to this dilemma came for me when I began to consider what the word "hypothetical" implies in this methodical procedure of interpreting. As scientific, it implies the putting forward of a hypothesis or theory just as in any other science. I had been focusing heavily on the question "*what is the Axial Period?*" But now it dawned on me that, for the purpose of arriving at my own hypothesis about McShane's meaning, and in order to move beyond a mere repetition of his

⁷⁰ See the "threefold control" of CWL 3, 603 and relate these controls to the canons of interpretation at the end of the same chapter.

words, I needed to ask myself a further question: *Why* does the author claim that this period in history is the Axial Period? Or more simply, *why is this the Axial Period?*

By answering this further *why?* question, I was providing historians with the *conditions* necessary for verifying the Axial Period: *the Axial Period is such and such because...* In effect, what I was doing was pulling together and presenting what I considered to be McShane's 'final view' of the Axial Period, a sort of 'best view' that wasn't necessarily expressed anywhere in his writings. This was my hypothesis. I was *proving* my case about his meaning of the Axial Period, verifying it in order to pass on to historians an efficient formulation. In my notes I had written: "I need the essential points that together provide the 'proof' of *why* the author (McShane) claims that this period in history is the Axial Period – i.e., proof of why the author's content is what it is... and proof exists in the context, in the documents." For this reason, my 'McShane-close' expression, and also my 'Lonerganian' tone of expression, particularly in the first section of this article, were part of my proof.

My *why?* question opened up a more profound view, though, one that I only realized later after much reflection. My *why?* question asks for the *form* of the Axial Period. In terms of causality, this fact sheds some light on 'what we are at' when we are doing Interpretation. Each interpretation asks about and attempts to arrive at the form of some author's meaning. So my hypothetical pure formulation of the content of McShane's viewpoint of the Axial Period is, then:

- 5) a piece of history that is in need of being actively identified;
- 4) a process of interpretation that was in accord with the efficiency of the design of Functional Specialization;
- 3) a move from Jaspers, Toynbee, and Voegelin, to Lonergan through McShane, and from myself onto future historians;
- 2) part of the form of Emergent Probability;
- 1) revealed (beautifully) by the data

This broader view is, so to speak, a pointer to an unsuspected larger aspect of my original question. My original question was about the hypothetical pure formulation of the content of McShane's message. After my struggles with this problem, as written about above, it seemed to me that not only did the meaning of "hypothetical" fall into place (as a scientific hypothesis of my own meaning of another's genetically-attained meaning⁷¹), but also the canons began to make sense. The canon of relevance demands beginning from the universal viewpoint, which I was trying to do as best as possible at this early stage of scientific interpreting. The canon of explanation demands adhering to the documents and relating to each other the evidence found within the documents; it was in the documents, and only in the documents, that I must find the evidence to construct the 'proof' of the Axial Period. The canon of successive approximations (in its fourth principle) and the canon of parsimony together provide the basis of the virtually unconditioned, which depending on the sufficiency of the evidence found in the documents and texts, would serve to make the interpreter's (my) hypothesis either more or less certain or probable. Luckily for me, the evidence was there in abundance. From countless relevant footnotes and sources, I was able to confirm McShane's meanings and intentions with a very strong degree of certainty. Lastly, the canon of residues allows for the accidental intrusions and mishaps of time and other factors that may hinder the textual evidence and make the verification of the hypothesis more or less difficult. In my own case, perhaps because I was dealing with an author whose work is contemporary, such difficulties seemed to be luckily minimal.

Further to this light on the canons, when I went back over the chapter on Interpretation in *Method* I found that, once

⁷¹ Obviously McShane's 'genetically attained' meaning is ongoing: he isn't dead, even though it may sound that way in this article! Indeed, given the view of growth presented here, McShane's meaning not only is ongoing, but is ongoing in an accelerated fashion. See the Bacchus Pages of *Lack*. I should add that this 'dead' tone of writing is a problem of expression that I have struggled with in this article without yet finding a way to solve it efficiently. For now, the best I can do is mention it as an issue for further reflection.

again, I was able to make much more sense of what previously had seemed quite vague. Judging the correctness of one's understanding of the meaning of the text, for example, tied in with the canons of explanation and parsimony in *Insight*. Then there was 'understanding the object.' In this case, understanding the object was an obvious prerequisite. The Axial Period required understanding some very precise philosophical ideas, particularly those of Bernard Lonergan. Without this background, most of what is claimed as the Axial Period would be meaningless. So I found I was writing my interpretation to a very specific philosophical (Lonerganian) audience,⁷² an audience that, for this topic, could very explicitly draw on the second principle of the canon of successive approximations, the demand for an adequate self-knowledge.

Again, the phrase 'understanding the words' took on new meaning for me. Now this phrase seemed to tie in closely with the canon of explanation, so that "surmounting the hermeneutic circle" was a matter of always sticking to the texts and documents, the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, in order to build up an understanding of the unity of this author's meaning (*Method, passim*, especially page 159). Most notably for me, my work of understanding the author, if not moving me to an actual theoretic conversion (that would take some years of work!), did shift me into a new horizon in which I came to deeply appreciate the truth of an uncompromising need for theory in the realms of philosophy and theology. What was particularly important in this shift was that I had moved from a position of belief, that is, of acceptance or denial of this notion simply "because McShane says so," to my own position and verification of what is, quite simply, there in the evidence, in the data, in the references and trails of meaning leading back to Lonergan and others. McShane has brought together this evidence, perhaps in ways that are offensive or annoying to others, but the facts, nonetheless, *are* there for anyone willing to 'understand the

⁷² Recall Benton's "tracking" of personal horizon and the different audiences that would correspond to each of the relevant 'colour-coded' tracks of meaning (above, 170).

author.'

In this first attempt at a scientific interpretation, then, I have tried to state the meaning of 'the text,' or in my case, of the Axial Period, in as complete a fashion as I can at this time. My expression is technical: certainly in much of its language, but also in my efforts to relate and integrate McShane's work with the previous work in the field on the Axial Period, and with Lonergan's work in metaphysics and history. In keeping with the evidence in the documents, I have tried to stay within the language resources available to the author, that is, to McShane in *his* work. And if I have not *always* been happy to proceed slowly and carefully, I *have* tried to do so, following the way of the beginner on more than one occasion (*Method* 170-171)! I hope my effort will find a happy home in some future historian's work.

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