

CLIMBING THE CANTOWERS

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In his seventieth year, paralleling Ezra Pound's life work of 117 *Cantos*,¹ Phil McShane began a long project of writing 117 essays, a new one to be published on the Web on the first day of every month. So far he has kept successfully to this gruelling schedule.² He calls these essays 'Cantowers', the name involving a multi-levelled pun, partly on the word 'canto' itself, but also hinting at the notion that persons 'can tower' above the partial and confused perspectives of what McShane would describe as our interim 'axial' state, this long dark night in our thinking.³

One of his key underlying metaphors is that of a vortex, one perhaps that is in reverse, expanding upwards and outwards from a compact centre. This image could be said both to guide and to describe the whole endeavour. One must not think of the spiralling and twisting that it involves as some kind of random excrescence.⁴ It is more like the shaping of iron filings on a sheet of paper as a magnet is brought close beneath it. It is our response under the pressure of growth of "the type

¹ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1948).

² The completed set to date can be downloaded (for free) from <http://www.philipmcshane.ca>

³ In a private communication McShane has told me that the idea for these essays was conceived when he was trapped in a snowstorm in Cape Breton! What a gathering of metaphors, fortunate and unfortunate, could be developed from that!

⁴ History is not just 'the play of being', some kind of 'random walk' through the avenues of possibility. It is much more serious, or perhaps more seriously playful, than that. But to say this, ultimately, is to assert that, as the saying goes, the game is indeed worth the candle!

of organism”, and the type of responding, that we are. It is our dynamic ongoing attempt at a solution to the optimisation problem set for us, for better or worse, by the actual limitations of our multiple level reality. It is a solution in the same sense that a flower is a solution to a problem of living in a world set by the limitations of physics and chemistry that apply to it this place and this time and under the current multiply periodic influx of photons from the Sun.

In relation to the content of the *Cantowers*, one can note a number of dimensions. The first perhaps is prophylactic. McShane is unashamedly a ‘spin-doctor’ for Lonergan. He is greatly afraid that people will read his mentor’s works as they might a series of disparate essays on a variety of topics, to be adopted or adapted piecemeal to suit some prior predilections. There is a book on basic arithmetic by Carl E. Linderholm, that is wonderfully witty (but only perhaps to a mathematician!).⁵ It sets out to ‘teach’ the first steps of elementary counting (‘one and one are two’) from a technically sophisticated viewpoint. Immediately one is plunged into a welter of functors and morphisms, for in a mathematical sense these are indeed ‘simpler’ notions than those of, shudder, long multiplication. It serves as a wonderful zen-like antidote to the slew of ‘made simple’ books for which our age is notorious.⁶ McShane can be viewed as aiming at a rather similar endeavour, ‘Lonergan Made Difficult’. The latter author’s ‘clear and lapidary style’, - *Method In Theology* in particular is deceptively simple, and often merely descriptive - can mean that Lonergan has, unintentionally, contributed to the development in his readers of a kind of verbal skill that enables one to speak *as if* one were in truth a follower – never putting a step wrong in one’s terminology or expression.⁷ One can, indeed, even fool oneself, in what McShane used to call ‘experiential conjugation’.

There is also a more purely theoretic dimension. McShane wishes to push the tradition towards a mutual mediation of

⁵ Carl E. Linderholm, *Mathematics Made Difficult* (Wolfe Publishing Ltd, London, 1971).

⁶ Follow my fingers, then copy and paste!

⁷ The distinction is of course that between memorisation and appreciation.

Insight and *Method In Theology*. In one direction, there is a need to pull the descriptiveness of *Method* into *Insight*'s fullest explanatory perspective. This, as I understand it, is essentially a limit notion, based on the idea of the fullest development of the individual sciences (for only then are 'metaphysical equivalents' meaningfully defined). In the other direction, there is the need for "elevating *Insight*", to understand, reinterpret, and re-affirm its whole vast effort within the context of *Method*'s elucidation of functional specialisation. In that much wider context, what was *Insight* 'at'?

A further dimension is propaedeutic. The *Cantowers* could be described as 'one small step', one man's attempt to shift the historical probabilities, be it ever so marginally, in favour of the eventual *implementation* of the vast project begun by Lonergan. In ordinary actuarial terms the whole endeavour is, of course, deeply hope-filled – 117 months of active, creative writing is a long time when one is already almost seventy. But much more profound by far is the hope that permeates the project's rationale. It envisages the concrete possibility of a real solution to the problem of general bias, "an ongoing global spiralling of functional specialisation, sweeping up a creative minority, gracefully making conversions beyond general bias a topic and an embarrassment, seeding over millennia a global lift of communal meaning."⁸ This notion of implementation was of course a long-time central aim of Lonergan's works. *Insight* elaborated the structure of understanding as it occurs in an individual mind. But the concern was not merely, nor even essentially, just such a theoretical elaboration. It was primarily a call to its recognition as merely the first moment, prior to its conscious and deliberate implementation as a reflexive form of control. Personal authenticity is the kernel of the 'conversion' that this entails.

I have come to view the elucidation of functional specialisation that is the core of *Method* as the parallel discovery of the structure of our communal self-understanding of the 'ongoing objectification of the human spirit.' Its task, to which McShane is forever pointing throughout the *Cantowers*,

⁸ "Cantower I," 7.

is once again implementation: a hodic control of hodics.⁹ Since hodics are interpersonal, or better perhaps transpersonal, and their dynamic sweeps men and women along in its path (with their agreement), one must speak instead of some kind of communal and historical authenticity. Whole communities can prosper or they can fall into decline, and the determination is ultimately left to the implacable judgement of history.

Some medieval philosophers pondered on how a higher angel could communicate with one of a lower order, to which all the higher order dimensions would of course be ineffable. The most obvious danger is that the lower will think it can actually encapsulate the higher, that it 'understands' it.¹⁰ In our day this would correspond to the problem of *haute vulgarisation*,¹¹ in relation to which McShane has much to say, some of it in the form of hard words addressed specifically to many 'Lonerganites'.¹² To negotiate these extremes McShane introduced the notion of 'explaining' (originally in *Lack and the Beingstalk*, but referred to again in various places throughout the *Cantowers*).¹³ In a realist way he is therefore addressing the analogous question. It is, for our axial days, *the* question of communications. How can our present hinting at the third stage of meaning really shift the probabilities within commonsense descriptiveness, or even within the intervening merely axial theory, in such a way as to augment the chances for the earlier

⁹ McShane has introduced the word 'hodic' as a more convenient synonym for 'functional specialist'. It mirrors the old builders' hod, a first order tool. But it also serves to remind us of an etymologically false but nevertheless suggestive partitioning of the word 'method' – meta-hod : a tool for the carrying forward of tools.

¹⁰ The danger on the other side would of course be the haughty condescension of some 'philosopher-king/messiah', who would simply hand down doctrinal 'formulae' to be repeated uncomprehendingly and obeyed implicitly.

¹¹ *Haute vulgarisation* attempts to straddle the distinction between common sense eclecticism and generalised empirical method. In so doing it leaves itself out of touch with both adequate theory and sound common sense. See the comments in Cantower XXII, Section 1

¹² See my later comments on contentiousness below.

¹³ *Lack in the Beingstalk*, chapter 3, section 3.6.

<http://www.philipmcshane.ca/books.html>. Among the Cantowers, see, for example, Cantower IV *passim*.

emergence of that very communal third stage itself? How can we proceed so as to improve thereby the possibility of the emergence of what he calls ‘sargawits’? And what would it be to be an ‘elder’ in our day when we have learned, with good reason, to be suspicious of ‘experts’ telling what we should think and leaders telling us what is to be done? How can Lonergan’s discovery of the structure of human collaboration that is hodings actually come to inform its everyday dawnings in specialisations, in the practical division of labour imposed by the vastness of every practical and intellectual field, the fragmentation and loss of encyclopaedic overviews, or even of overviews of what once were quite restricted fields. Who now, for example, would have the temerity to begin in these times a summary of all mathematics, in the manner of the Bourbaki?¹⁴ The task is impossible.¹⁵ In a similar way we are conscious now of a naivety in any writer’s attempt at ‘the history of philosophy,’ or even of ‘a history of philosophy’. As I see it, functional specialisation constitutes the intrinsic structure of human collaboration (just as the four levels elaborated in *Insight* constitute the structure of individual minding).¹⁶ How

¹⁴ There is some discussion of the project followed by this group of mathematicians in *CWL 18* (the name ‘Bourbaki’ is not indexed, but a discussion is to be found on page 48 of that text).

¹⁵ The horizon towards which one was trying to move in search of total coverage is now receding faster than one’s radial velocity. It is not just that one speed is greater than the other, while both remain commensurable. It is the recognition that the measure of the task of coverage will in the limit be uncountably higher than that of the radial, and will ultimately be incommensurable, of a higher order of infinity. (Not just radius to area, but radius to a hypervolume whose number of dimensions is endlessly increasing.)

¹⁶ The relationship between the hodic structure and the individual person seems somewhat analogous to that of a firm in Lonergan’s economics. In that context it is in general not possible to speak of a ‘Basic’ or a ‘Surplus’ firm. The same business can make goods for either economic circuit. Even the goods themselves cannot have any intrinsic designation as Basic or Surplus. The firm may make cars, but it is only the manner in which these are later used that will determine their allocation. Indeed it is even worse than that. The very same car, for example, can be at one time be Basic and at the next Surplus. The distinction is profoundly empirical – how is it ultimately used? In a similar manner, any theoretical work I might do will be variously in one or other, or many, of the functional specialties. It is even

can that transpersonal structure so bespeak itself in individual ‘SensAbilities’¹⁷ as to bootstrap its own emergence? How can we contribute, cooperate, augment? In the absence of that anticipated third stage of meaning (apart from its shadow in the minds of those aforementioned very few ‘evolutionary sports’ who ‘*can tower*’ sufficiently high) how can we *point to it*, not merely contemplatively but effectively? One is, of course, engaged with Lenin’s question: What is to be done?

It would be impossible to give any worthwhile summary of the content of the whole series of these essays. The first and most obvious reason is that the parts do not all exist yet, except perhaps in the most general of outlines in the mind of the author, and it is clear from the content of what he has written to-date that there is an adaptive element in their structure and content. This is not to say that they are merely *ephemera*, passing comments on today’s intellectual news. The central thrust is clear and steady, but it is given added urgency and bite by a responsiveness to current debates, etc.

The second impossibility is more interesting. The essays do not in many instances make precise points that are meant to stand alone. Certainly one could mine them for precious nuggets of wisdom throughout a vast panoply of subject areas, for the author’s mind bubbles forth continuously in novel and profound insights in almost every domain it surveys.¹⁸ But to do only this would be to miss the point. Just when one comes across a really interesting statement, about physics, say, that one might be tempted to just pull out and use in one’s own thinking, one is almost immediately ‘destabilised’ by having it

possible that exactly the same studies might under different rubrics be at one time in one specialty and later in another. There is no sense, however, in which *I myself* am so categorisable.

¹⁷ This, as I understand it, is a neologism introduced by McShane in an attempt to encapsulate the unity in fact and in performance of our molecularity, our sensibility, our wonder. It names the adventurous, hope-filled drive of space-time stardust groping forwards and upwards to become historical spirit. In the context of Lonergan’s ‘extreme’ realism it reflects, humorously perhaps but with a great deal of truth, how we can say that one’s world gets right up one’s nose! On McShane’s use of the notion of ‘sensability’ see, *Lack in the Beingstalk*, 25; Cantowers II and VI *passim*.

¹⁸ The same, of course, can be said of Lonergan’s writings, and especially of *Insight*.

put into some larger context that makes it abundantly clear that this is only beginning to scrape the surface of the question. Such ‘doctrinal’ mining is therefore useful, but somewhat beside the point. McShane does not allow the reader to settle, as a bird might land on a high branch and perch there.¹⁹ In the very manner in which the point is made the branch is shaken and one is pushed ever onwards. Of course one finds a similar ‘destabilising’ style in post-modernist writings, most notably in Derrida’s works. They are often ‘locally’ intelligible, but not globally so.²⁰ One suspects that this is as a result of such writers’ deliberate avoidance of judgement, of notions of fact and truth.²¹ That is clearly not McShane’s reason. Rather, he wishes to stop the reader ‘falling too soon’, settling for the partial insight, missing in particular the reflexivity of the methodological turn. The style is alternately dense, elliptical, full of Joycean puns and self-referential usages. In addition, he emphasises continually the shift of *Method in Theology* ‘behind’ individual minding, a phylogenetic context of the ongoing ‘objectification of the human spirit’ whose structure is one of functional specialisation. This objectification is radically greater than any individual,²² so there is no possibility of it being grasped in a single insight, and so no concept (other than a merely verbal heuristic anticipation) can contain it. A *fortiori* there can be no value in my attempting any kind of summary of a related content. Without any denial of the validity of the notion of truth, we are invited to recognise that we are forever ‘not there’, and instead to relish the relatively

¹⁹ I am reminded of the song: “reaching for the sky just to surrender”, which has always struck me as an important counterpoint to St Augustine’s “our hearts shall ever restless be, until they rest in Thee.”

²⁰ I am thinking of a mathematical analogy here, where, for example, the surface of the Earth is *locally* Euclidean (so that any region can be thought of as being just a ‘plane’ surface with bumps) but is not so in its totality. (Strictly speaking, if one just left out a single point, such as the North Pole, it would then still be Euclidean.)

²¹ Avoidance that stems from a prior anti-theological option.

²² Not just because it is ever ‘not yet’, a future limit, but even in principle, at the end of time. No one person, now or in any future however remote and advanced, can ever know what it is or was to have been human. Only the collaborative mind of all humans is remotely up to such a task (and from a theological perspective, not even then).

infinite openness of even just that component of being that is proportionate to our knowing.

The third difficulty is massively more significant, even though it is in one sense related to the first and the second. McShane's concern throughout is growth and in particular intellectual growth. But wherever this has occurred it has delivered in a person a larger horizon and a concomitant enrichment in the kind of minding, both of which are in some major or minor way beyond anything of which he or she had previously been capable. To the self of this week that of next week is ineffable. If McShane's writing is out of the fullness of such growth then its fullness is beyond even the writer himself at the beginning, or at any stage along the way. So there are two levels of acceleration in the content of the works. One is the ordinary pedagogic one where one begins with the simpler points and gradually introduces more subtlety and complexity. That would be consistent with an overall fixture of message, a foundational viewpoint and body of work. But the viewpoint is also that of a growing horizon (horizon and horizoning – always the object and the subject together), the expression trying to follow a moving target, to encapsulate an expanding vision and an expanding power of encapsulating.

The *Cantowers* are not an easy read, and many times I have found myself longing for the aforementioned 'clear and lapidary' style of Lonergan, or even better, of Fred Crowe. McShane relishes puns, and at times these can be quite excruciating!²³ At others times it can be hard not to find oneself starting to emit an anachronistic 'groovy', such as in response to a title such as that of Cantower 2.²⁴ The author's

²³ See, for example, the projected title of Cantower XXVI; *Refined Woman and Feynman*.

²⁴ *Sunflowers, Speak to Us of Growth!* Cantower II. In fact however this relates to an extremely helpful analogy (such as was used earlier above) for optimised growth under constraints, applied here to plants but equally applicable at all other levels. A relatively simple example would be formation of a minimum-surface soap 'skin' that forms in a closed wire frame (which can curve in three dimensions). To understand this phenomenon adequately requires quite sophisticated mathematics, in the form of the calculus of variations.

frequent neologisms are often very successful,²⁵ but sometimes they can be a little irritating, not least by being overly clever. One fears perhaps that they may occasionally be there more for their intrinsic ‘cuteness’ than for any strict necessity for their existence. Self-referential or reflexive statements, or ones that have a dual purpose, a first order speaking about some object and the need for a second order ‘take’ as speaking about the speaker or listener, are peppered everywhere throughout the text. These are inherently hard to read. But we cannot blame the author for this. It is not in principle a problem with McShane’s (or indeed with Derrida’s) style, but one of fact and historical necessity. Acquaintance with such a manner of speech must indeed become more frequent, and we more easeful in its use, as we try to move into the third stage of meaning.

It would be unrealistic to ignore the occasional contentiousness in the views that McShane puts forward. There is a good deal of ‘sniping’ at other forms of ‘Lonergan following’. This is most notable in regard to the aforementioned *haute vulgarisation*. As a personal comment, I long ago became aware of the emergence in some ‘Lonerganites’ of a kind of group ideological mind, one that saw itself as having ‘the answers’ and could approach other thinkers with the supercilious air of the ‘saved’. For such people *Insight* could almost be viewed as an exercise in philosophical ‘Apologetics’, a manual of ‘answers’ to the aberrations of the unwashed rest! Obviously we must have no time for such a phenomenon. Such casual contempt was never Lonergan’s own response to the great thinkers of the past.²⁶ McShane also repudiates much of the kind of ‘Lonergan and thinker x’ studies which currently abound in the literature. If ultimately the views of ‘thinker x’ are counterpositional then comparison is not the issue, dialectic is.

It is probably important in particular to refer to his issue

²⁵ I am thinking particularly of ‘hodics’ and ‘SensAbility’.

²⁶ The whole experience hardened my resolve not to get involved in that particular scene. It was indeed lending itself to the production of a group of people such as I criticised earlier, with a facility in the use of Lonergan-like language, but with very little real grasp of their own enquiring minds.

(early) of the text of Cantower XXII, which deliberately fires the first shots in a ‘civil war’, even attacking the other pillar of the tradition, Fred Crowe.²⁷ McShane asserts, fairly bluntly, that the latter’s view on feelings, etc,²⁸ are not compatible with Lonergan’s position on being and becoming.²⁹ If this kind of thing were just intellectual give-and-take it would be interesting and indeed amusing (not to mention grist for Dialectic). But the hodic endeavour is not a game, and one finds oneself being forced willy nilly to take sides. For Lonergan either is or is not ‘anti-foundationalist’, and one cannot but take a view on this. He would have been ‘foundationalist’ if he were “guilty of totalitarian hubris”, insisting on “the philosophic effort to dominate cognitively the world and all reality”. I do not believe he fell into such a trap, but even if he did it would not matter. The real issue for me is whether I myself do! And I do not.³⁰ I remark below that there is no axiomatic home in which we can rest. But the essential point from Lonergan is not just the de-facto absence of such a foundation, because of somewhat unfortunate limitations and leakages to the outside. For me it is the explicit and deliberate openness to a millennia long march into that endlessly wider world. Its foundation, if that word must be

²⁷ One is, of course, sadly reminded of Brendan Behan’s crack that the first item on the agenda of any Irish revolutionary party would always be the split.

²⁸ As expressed particularly in a recent article “Lonergan at the Edges of Understanding” *MJLS* 20 (2002). I do not have a copy of the article to hand and so am loathe to comment in any detail. If it is as McShane reports it would seem that the world of feelings is somehow to be viewed as a separate ‘objectification of a human spirit’, different from that of being (but by some unspecified and somewhat mysterious linkage remaining isomorphic to it?). I cannot see that this is not just a version of a bipolar Hegelian idealism, based on some kind of nominalist abstract system. Surely feelings are just one zone of being, and like everything else are to be grasped in their full being only at the end of a long scientific process, one that is scarcely begun.

²⁹ In the Lonergan context this is tantamount to an allegation of heresy!

³⁰ Ultimately I do not think there is such a thing as ‘Philosophy’ (though I would not wish to close down all the Philosophy Departments). There will really only be ‘Science’, but a vastly extended science, a generalised empirical method, one that in the same breath will study in a fully explanatory context the theory and the theoriser, the object and the subject.

used, is the vast interconnectedness of the 'concrete universal' which implements, and so determines, the meaning of what it is to be human.

Need we worry about this war? Obviously there is a sense in which we have to take sides. There is of course a deeper sense in which the ongoing implementation of the hodic viewpoint, whether it be over a shorter or a longer time-scale, will sort the problem out *ambulando*, in the way of dialectic. I believe, therefore, that in the very long term our choice will not matter. [Where now are Irish (or American) civil-war politics?] But our options may affect whether the time-scale is long or short. A wrong-headed position may lead to vast wasted efforts. Better by far if all those coming Ph.D. students worked on something really worthwhile.

Why then should anybody subject him or herself to all this difficulty and hassle? I believe that despite the stylistic difficulties, the sometimes intensely compacted content, and the occasional taking up of arms, the reading is worth the effort. We sell ourselves cheap if we settle for what is merely partial. We are forever endeavouring to build fine structures of doctrinal points related in some form of logical coherence, to make a congenial intellectual home. But such a thing will always remain a rationalisation. We have no such home. Every time we formulate a new and cosy resting place someone will discover a 'limitation theorem', a non-closure, that will not permit the enquiring mind to rest on its homespun laurels, but drives and cajoles it to burrow out through those gaps into an ever-wider world.

But one must, of course, be practical. As in Lonergan's economics, stipulative norms are of little value if one has not first discovered those that are internal to the system's dynamics. We have only so much time to spend, and time as they say is money. Should we 'buy' these essays, or would we be better to switch our time expenditure elsewhere? We are indeed spirits open to infinity, but we are also perhaps busy individuals with pressures that may even be contractual (related to our jobs or our marriages, for example) that restrict us mightily. We cannot simply spend resources as we please, not even those of time and intellectual 'stamina'. In such a

context, is it worthwhile to give the necessary block of attention to such a very general, future-oriented and to be honest, discomfoting, work as these *Cantowers*? Really, concretely, as a contribution to the future of the human, might we not be better to ignore all this undoubtedly worthy prolepsis in favour of work at the immediately to hand? As when one engages in care of the actually poor as distinct from efforts to counteract poverty? Perhaps yes. This, after all, is the concrete meaning of functional specialisation. Some people will ‘merely’,³¹ do the spadework of ‘research’, say. So these writings may not be of immediate intellectual use for many who may nevertheless be significant contributors to mankind’s ongoing self-understanding. But perhaps even for such people there is a ‘flavour’ of openness that is to be gleaned from reading McShane’s writings, one that remains of real value, at least contemplatively as a felt unrestrictedness that is the savour and taste of mystery, and of the huge extent of our many forms of resistance to its reality. And I do not simply mean a kind of ‘poetic’ grasp, though that does indeed apply. I include an intellectual component, in the form at least of a heuristic generality that contextualises differently whatever first order work one might be engaged upon.

It would be wrong to finish without addressing the religious dimension of these essays. McShane’s *Cantowers* are Christian, and for some readers this is a problem to be surmounted. There are many students of Lonergan who must read his theological works in a kind of ‘as if’ manner; as if they in fact were able to buy into the whole perspective. They do this, of course, because they find value in much of what he says, a depth and adequacy that is not to be found elsewhere. Whereas Lonergan would recommend ‘despoiling the Egyptians’ they could be said to be following the reverse procedure of pilfering from the cathedrals! It seems to me that the main reason for the ongoing vehemence of rejections of religions has been their failure to take history seriously. For most of them the goal was seen as being some kind of personal salvation or enlightenment, to be achieved of course against a

³¹ I do not, of course, agree with the apparent pejorative slant that the word ‘merely’ seems to carry.

background of history. But that background itself was largely irrelevant. If, to put it in extreme terms, there were to be a nuclear war next week, and we were thrown back into a stone-age existence, this would in truth not matter to the predominant kinds of religious beliefs. The individual would still have to work out his or her personal salvation (or whatever) in that new context. There is no sense of caring for history itself, or for the global community, as a community, that is mankind.³² What is appealing in the perspective offered in these *Cantowers* is the true incorporation of history into the religious perspective. It is not, in fact, 'written' what man is to be. There is a need for fantasy, such as will guide and channel our dreams, and cajole our hopes out of a view of the past as 'better than it was' towards a future that is more than it might otherwise end up being.

Neither, for the Christian, is there any real sense in which the Word is already spoken, out there in history. Its expression in symbols is indeed complete in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But such symbolisations are only vibrations on the air, marks on paper, movements of molecules and the interweave of nerves and the tides of feelings, and we have to struggle mightily to find even portions or signs of these that remain. The content of that expression, on the other hand, will forever be shifting with the enrichment of the context we bring to bear. Above all, perhaps, there is a need for courage in that formation of context. For in our terrifying freedom we shall be the ones who will form it. As McShane emphasises, there is another transcendental: we are called to 'be adventurous'. For the atheist, the ideal, perhaps infinitely distant, terminal expression of the ultimate meaning of what it will have been to be human will be identical with itself, and we will be our own final 'word'.

But more questions remain. Can we offer a 'Heuristics of Ultimate Cosmopolis'³³? What will be left 'after' the

³² I have often wondered why, or even whether, in these traditions, genocide was (as most decent people actually see it) in any sense a worse crime than the simple killing of the same number of individuals, randomly selected.

³³ The projected overarching title of the set of *Cantowers* for the years

astronomical ‘big crunch’? What indeed is left after our own individual death? Can we fantasize? Can we risk some “serious contemporarily-informed shot at the heuristics of the real geometry of eternal life”³⁴? For the Christian in particular the belief is that we shall in the end be astonished. The selfhood we shall affirm shall be as nothing in comparison to what we shall be enabled to admit ourselves to be, and to have been all along. The ultimate mind-killer is the fear of taking the risk of joy; we have so often been let down. If the older expression of “the pure desire to know” has been expanded to an individual and communal ‘pure desire to care’ for being can we not begin to tolerate a non-infantile version of its neglected other side, a pure desire to be the object of care.

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³⁴ Philip McShane, “Elevating *Insight*: Space-Time as a Paradigm Problem,” *MJLS* 19 (2001).