

Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of Knowing

La filosofía del conocer de Bernard Lonergan

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Abstract: The paper gives a general presentation of the profile and philosophical achievements of Canadian Catholic theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan, especially his cognitional theory and epistemology. It confines itself to expounding his views from his main philosophical book: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London 1957, the critical edition: Toronto 1992). To present Lonergan's philosophy of knowing it addresses the following issues: 1. Life; 2. Influence; 3. Works; 4. A general account of Lonergan's philosophy; 5. Knowing as a subject of philosophy; 6. Self-appropriation as the aim and method of philosophy; 7. Basic philosophical questions and a hierarchy of the areas of philosophy; 8. Cognitional theory and the cognitional question: a. The generalized empirical method; b. The dynamic structure of knowing (experiencing, understanding, judging); 9. Epistemology and the epistemological question: a. The aim of knowing; b. The notion of objectivity; 10. The metaphysics of the knowing subject and the metaphysical question: a. The notion of being (reality); b. The infinite desire to know and being an authentic knower.

Key words: philosophy, knowing, self-appropriation, cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics.

Resumen: Este trabajo ofrece una presentación general del perfil personal y de la filosofía de Bernard Lonergan (teólogo y filósofo católico canadiense), en especial de su teoría cognitiva y su epistemología. Se centra en la exposición de sus ideas a partir de su obra filosófica más importante: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Londres 1957, edición crítica: Toronto 1992). Para exponer la filosofía del conocer de Lonergan, se tratan los puntos siguientes: 1. Vida; 2. Influencia; 3. Obras; 4. Exposición general de la filosofía de Lonergan; 5. El conocer como objeto de la filosofía; 6. La auto-apropiación como meta y como método de la filosofía; 7. Cuestiones filosóficas fundamentales y jerarquía de las distintas áreas filosóficas; 8. La teoría cognitiva y la cuestión cognitiva: a. El método empírico generalizado; b. La estructura dinámica del conocer (experimentar, entender, juzgar); 9. La epistemología y la cuestión epistemológica: a. La finalidad del conocer; b. La noción de objetividad; 10. La metafísica del sujeto del conocer y la cuestión metafísica: a. La noción de ser (realidad); b. El deseo infinito de conocer y de ser un auténtico conocedor.

Palabras clave: filosofía, conocer, auto-apropiación, teoría cognitiva, epistemología, metafísica.

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1. Life

Bernard Joseph Francis Lonergan was born on December 17, 1904 in Buckingham, Quebec, Canada. In 1922 he entered the Society of Jesus in Guelph (Ontario), where he went through a novitiate. From 1926-1930 at Heythrop College in England he studied philosophy as well as Greek, Latin, French and mathematics at the University of London where he took a B.A. degree with a thesis on ethics in economics. From 1930-1933 he was a teacher of freshman classes (sciences and classics) at Loyola College in Montreal. From 1933-1940 he studied theology at the Gregorian University, where he finished work on his doctorate *St. Thomas Thought on Operative Grace* in 1940, though his doctoral degree was not granted until after World War II, in 1945. In the years 1940-1947 Lonergan taught theology in the Jesuit college of L'Immaculee Conception in Montreal, and from 1947-1953 at the Jesuit seminary in Toronto. From 1953-1965 he was a professor of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. In 1965 due to serious illness (lung cancer) he returned to Canada and continued his work of lecturing: from 1965-1975 at the Regis College in Toronto, and then, 1971-1972, at Harvard Divinity School as well as from 1975-83 at Boston College. He was a peritus of the Second Vatican Council, and from 1973-1978 a consulter of the Secretariat for Non-Believers. He died on November 26, 1984 at Pickering, Ontario, Canada².

2. Influence

Lonergan's influence spreads beyond theology. His adherents see him as the most important Catholic thinker of the twentieth century because he made, like Aquinas – as they believe – a successful synthesis of theology, philosophy and contemporary science. His main writings in whole or in part have been translated into all the European languages as well as several Asian ones. Many dissertations have been written dealing with his thought. There are many Lonergan research centers, the most important being in Toronto, Boston, Santa Clara (California), Saint Paul (Minnesota), Sydney, Manila, Dublin, Rome and Neapol. They collect Lonergan's archival works and other works which have been inspired by his views,

1 In the first five sections of the paper I refer to my texts: M. Walczak, 2004; 2005; 2006. Some other parts of these sections will be published in: M. Walczak, 2008.

2 M. Lamb, 1998, 324-325.

and publish regular Lonergan journals: *Lonergan Workshop* (ed. by F. Lawrence, Boston 1978), *Method: A Journal of Lonergan Studies* (ed. Ch. C. Hefling, Jr., M. D. Morelli, P. H. Byrne (Boston 1983), *Lonergan Studies Newsletter* (Toronto 1980) and *The Lonergan Research Institute Bulletin* (Toronto 1986). They also organize conferences and workshops, where topical problems are discussed and solved in the light of his ideas. The Lonergan Research Institute in Toronto (see www.utoronto.ca/lri) is directing the publication of his *Collected Works*, which is being published by the University of Toronto Press in twenty-five volumes. Thirteen volumes have been published in irregular sequence thus far.

3. Works

Lonergan's early writings were devoted to St. Thomas Aquinas' thought. His doctoral thesis, *St. Thomas' Thought on Operative Grace*, was originally published as four articles in *Theological Studies* (1941-42), and next as a whole entitled *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (London, New York 1971). It was an historical and psychological analysis of St. Thomas' teaching on grace. Lonergan continued his research into Aquinas' thought in five articles, which were first published in *Theological Studies* (1947-49) and later as *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame 1967, London 1968). This work is dedicated to Aquinas' notion of *verbum*. It not only sets out the basic terms and relations operative in the cognitional theory of Aquinas but also shows how those terms and relations are derived from the human experiences of questioning, understanding, and judging. In detailed analysis of the texts of Aquinas, as well as attention to our own human acts of understanding, Lonergan shows that what Aquinas terms "light of active intellect as a created participation in divine light" is in fact our human capacity to raise ever further questions. The capacity to question and the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know exhibit the potential infinity of the human mind. They allow the revelation that human existence is knowing existence from nature³.

The ideas outlined in *Verbum* were developed by Lonergan's *opus vitae*, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London 1957, the critical edition: Toronto 1992). *Insight* transposes Aquinas' cognitional theory into contemporary contexts. Lonergan considers that genuine human knowledge is a personal self-appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness; he does not confine himself in *Insight* to presenting his own ideas, but he invites his readers to appropriate their own conscious acts of experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. The range of problems taken up by *Insight* is wide and variegated. It contains philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences (especially physics), economics, ethics, psychoanalysis, literature and theology. However, they are connected by the common task of achieving "understanding of understanding" and by the idea of the dynamic structure, the invariant pattern of human knowing that is shared by all its kinds⁴. The program of *Insight* is succinctly stated by Lonergan: "Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood, but also

3 M. Lamb, 1998, 325-326.

4 M. Lamb, 1998, 326-327.

you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding”⁵.

In his next important work *Method in Theology* (New York 1972; Toronto 1996) Lonergan applies the transcendental method worked out in *Insight* to theology and offers a review of the main procedures for doing theology and related disciplines. After treating notions of human good, meaning, and religion, he develops the notion of functional specialties in theology. These specialties are particular theological disciplines that he understands as different but related stages of a process of shifting from data to results. He distinguishes two phases of theological activity; first, when the theologian learns from the past and second, when he or she solves contemporary problems. He also distinguishes four levels of conscious and intentional activities: experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. He uses them as criteria to distinguish eight functional specialties in theology, namely, research, interpretation, history, dialectics, science of foundations, science of doctrines, science of systems and science of communication. The first four deal with theology as indirect discourse, wherein the theologian learns from the past. The last four functional specialties shift theology to direct discourse, wherein the theologian tackles contemporary and future problems⁶.

During the final decade of his life Lonergan’s major project was a macroeconomic analysis of modern production processes and monetary circulation. This had been an early interest of his and in his final years he continued to refine his *Essay on Circulation Analysis*, written in 1944 (Toronto 1999)⁷.

4. A general account of Lonergan’s philosophy

Lonergan’s research is dedicated to an ever more adequate understanding of both human rationality and the mysteries of Christian faith. Their result is viewed as an attempt to reinterpret Aquinas’ thought in the light of the philosophical method introduced by I. Kant and developed in such twentieth century schools of continental, anthropocentric thought as phenomenology (E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, M. Scheler) and existentialism (J.P. Sartre, M. Merleau-Ponty). Lonergan’s philosophy is interpreted as a form of transcendental Thomism, or as a version of phenomenology (self-appropriation phenomenology). His transcendental method is seen as epistemology with the ambition of giving methodological and metaphysical grounds for philosophy, theology and contemporary science and culture. A basic thrust of Lonergan’s thought is toward “methodology”, that is, trying to understand how the human mind works, or should work, in the act of knowing and the process of building up a body of knowledge. He sees the world, human knowing and knowledge as dynamic, and comes out against all views that treat philosophy, theology and science statically. Like Kant, Lonergan tries to answer the question of the conditions of possibility of knowledge and about the role of the human subject in the acquisition of knowledge that claims to be concerned with reality. He looks for answers in the phenomenological analysis

5 B. Lonergan, 1992, 769-770.

6 M. Lamb, 1998, 327-328.

7 M. Lamb, 1998, 328.

of human subjectivity, of the human subject in the entire range of his or her conscious and intentional life. Lonergan wants to overcome the immanentism of contemporary philosophy and subjective conditions of knowledge by adequately understanding them. He believes that realistic analysis of the subject in all its actions, not only in cognitive acts, but also volitional and emotional ones, enables one to ground a realistic and objective philosophy. His own position he calls "critical realism" and thought it the only one that does justice both to human knowledge and to the world that is to be known by it. While taking full account of the "turn to the subject" characteristic of philosophy since Descartes, critical realism reaffirms central elements in the philosophies of Aristotle and Aquinas.

5. Knowing as a subject of philosophy

The main subject of B. Lonergan's philosophy is knowing – a cognitional activity of a particular knowing subject and knowledge as a result of the process of knowing. His primary concern is not the known, i.e. the content of knowledge, but the knowing, an activity resulting in the known. His investigations are dedicated to the content of the known only in so far as it is needed to provide a discriminant or determinant of cognitive acts⁸. The knowing, not the known, is a subject of philosophy for several reasons. The known is too extensive and is only a matter for competent specialists from different branches of knowledge. The task of funding the investigation of knowledge on the known is, in Lonergan's opinion, unworkable. However, the knowing is a recurrent structure that can be investigated sufficiently in a series of strategically chosen instances. The known is incomplete and subject to revision; therefore of more importance is the knower that will be the source of future additions and revisions of the known⁹.

Although the subject matter of Lonergan's philosophy is knowledge, he writes about his main philosophical book, *Insight*: "in a sense, it is not even a book about knowledge. On a first level, the book contains sentences on mathematics, on science, on common sense, on metaphysics. On a second level, the meaning of all these sentences, their intention and significance, are to be grasped only by going beyond the scraps of mathematics or science or common sense or metaphysics to the dynamic cognitional structure that is exemplified in knowing them"¹⁰. Lonergan's concern is not the question of whether knowledge exists, but what precisely its nature is. Its nature is derivative from the process of its generation.

With respect to the genesis of knowledge, Lonergan distinguishes two different kinds of knowledge: personal knowledge¹¹, i.e. immanently (personally, individually) generated knowledge¹² and belief. Immanently generated knowledge is the result of one's own cognitional activity (experiencing, understanding, judging). Belief arises from accepting what one is told by others on whom one reasonably relies¹³.

8 B. Lonergan, 1992, 11.

9 B. Lonergan, 1992, 12.

10 B. Lonergan, 1992, 12.

11 B. Lonergan, 1992, 728.

12 B. Lonergan, 1992, 727.

13 B. Lonergan, 1992, 452.

Because belief is understood as a cognitional activity and a free and responsible decision of the will is a component of belief (the believing process) that differentiates it from immanently generated knowledge, Lonergan faces the problem of how to justify the decision to believe. In trying to justify it, he raises the issue of whether each person should confine his or her assent to what he or she knows by virtue of personal knowledge or, on the other hand, can or should there be a collaboration in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge¹⁴. He argues that there can be and to some extent there is such collaboration¹⁵. Moreover, without belief the advancement of knowledge, including the advancement of science, would be impossible.

In Lonergan's view there exists in principle a distinction between immanently generated knowledge and belief, but it does not follow that there exist two compartments in anyone's mind and that he or she can retain what he or she knows and throw out what he or she believes¹⁶. The mentality of any individual is a composite product in which it is impossible to separate immanently generated knowledge and belief¹⁷. The human mind develops by a self-correcting process of learning, and in that process personal knowledge and belief are complementary. The broadening of individual knowledge includes using the knowledge of others¹⁸. Without some immanently generated knowledge, there would be no development of human knowledge, because it would be impossible to know anything new but only to repeat what is known. Without some belief each cognizing subject could know only by itself and would be forced continually to start from scratch, because there would be no possibility to receive knowledge and human collaboration in its advancement¹⁹.

6. Self-appropriation as the aim and method of philosophy

In his account of knowing Lonergan drives at a practical aim. He does not propose just one more theory of knowledge or another system of definitions, principles and conclusions but invites us on a journey of self-discovery²⁰. His aim is not to set forth a list of the abstract properties of human knowledge but to assist the potential reader of his texts in effecting a personal appropriation of the concrete dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in his or her own cognitional activities²¹. Self-appropriation is a slow and painstaking process²². It is a matter of a series of spirals, movements forward and backward. Self-appropriation is an individual, private, personal process: nobody can do it for anyone else.

Self-appropriation consists in one's own rational self-consciousness clearly and distinctly taking possession of itself as rational self-consciousness²³. The point is to discover, identify

14 B. Lonergan, 1992, 726.

15 B. Lonergan, 1992, 729, 736.

16 B. Lonergan, 1992, 737.

17 B. Lonergan, 1992, 727.

18 B. Lonergan, 1992, 727-728.

19 B. Lonergan, 1992, 736.

20 B. Cronin, 1999, 7.

21 B. Lonergan, 1992, 11.

22 B. Lonergan, 1992, 22.

23 B. Lonergan, 1992, 13.

and become familiar with the activities of one's own intelligence. Self-appropriation consists in learning to discriminate easily and from personal conviction (a disposition, a habit) between one's purely intellectual activities and the manifold of other, "existential" concerns that invade and mix and blend with the operations of the intellect²⁴. Self-appropriation is a process of getting oneself into the intellectual pattern of experience, to realize the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire (drive) to know.

The appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness is not an end in itself but rather a beginning. It is a necessary first step to showing that whoever understands correctly also knows reality. For unless one breaks the duality between understanding and knowing, one doubts that understanding correctly is knowing. According to Lonergan self-appropriation amounts to grasping a criterion of the real. Self-appropriation therefore provides a way to overcome immanentism and idealism, and guarantees realism in philosophy²⁵. In that sense self-appropriation is a method of pursuing philosophy.

Self-appropriation provides philosophical foundations for science, philosophy and theology. They are personal and are not to be found in the formulated propositions of a philosophy or a tradition. They are to be found rather in the dynamic structure of knowing, i.e. the patterned set of mental activities by which we think and know. This set of cognitive activities is universal in the sense that it is common to all philosophies, traditions and cultures. It is also the source of all judgments and beliefs. All people perform these cognitive activities whether or not they are able to identify them. According to Lonergan cognitive analysis of these activities reveals not only the way we think and know, but also the way we should think and know. Implicit in the procedures of thinking and knowing are the norms that are the source of all judgments, including systems of logic and methods²⁶.

7. Basic philosophical questions and a hierarchy of the areas of philosophy

Lonergan tries to answer three basic philosophical questions: 1) What am I doing when I am knowing? (the cognitional, psychological, gnoseological question), 2) Why is doing that knowing? (the epistemological question), 3) What do I know when I am knowing? (the metaphysical question). Lonergan calls these three areas of inquiry cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics, respectively²⁷. They remain in a hierarchy of dependency: epistemology depends on cognitional theory, and metaphysics depends on epistemology. Lonergan, like many modern philosophers, disagrees with most Scholastics who presumed that metaphysics has priority and that epistemology is to be understood in metaphysical terms. He reverses the order (hierarchy)²⁸. Although the metaphysical tradition that Lonergan assimilated is that of Aristotle and Aquinas, he transforms this tradition, placing metaphysics within a methodical context. The methodical transformation of metaphysics means first understanding the way in which metaphysics depends on one's epistemology, which in turn

24 B. Lonergan, 1992, 14.

25 B. Lonergan, 1992, 22-23.

26 B. Cronin, 1999, 6.

27 B. Lonergan, 1992, 362, 414; 1972, 25, 316.

28 B. Cronin, 1999, 12.

depends on a prior knowing of one's own knowing. Metaphysics thus becomes a problem of self-knowledge²⁹.

8. Cognitive theory and the cognitive question

a. *The generalized empirical method*

Cognitive theory tries to resolve the problem: What am I doing when I am knowing? It is a descriptive (empirical) field of study, whose purpose is to examine the human mind in its process of knowing, to observe how people – especially scientists – actually operate when having, formulating and verifying ideas. Its intention is to look at the data, the experience of knowing. In this case the data happen to be how the mind operates in its movement from questions to answers³⁰. Cognitive theory identifies, distinguishes and relates the sets of acts we perform whenever we know in mathematics, in natural and human sciences, and in everyday commonsense living. In its analysis of intentionality it refers to E. Husserl's phenomenology.

Lonergan calls his procedure “a generalized empirical method”³¹, since it is based on human awareness not only of sense-experience and feeling, but also of the other mental acts such as imagining, inquiring, understanding, questioning, hypothesizing, formulating, marshalling evidence, judging and so on³². The generalized empirical method is to the data of consciousness as the empirical method is to the data of the senses. Just as there are data about the material universe that are studied in the natural sciences, so there are also data about the working of the human mind which are studied in philosophy and human sciences³³. Thus, the role of data of consciousness in Lonergan's philosophy resembles the role of data in the natural sciences. They are the starting point for the knowing of knowing, and they constitute its justification.

b. *The dynamic structure of knowing (experiencing, understanding, judging)*

Inquiry into one's own cognitive activity (knowing) reveals the dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in human cognitive activity³⁴. The structure is constituted by three fundamental kinds of acts and levels of knowing: 1) experience of the data of consciousness, the level of presentations; 2) understanding possible explanations of that experience, the level of intelligence; and 3) judging that one such explanation is in each case certainly or probably correct, the level of reflection. The true judgments of which human knowledge should consist are to be arrived at by putting two kinds of question to the data of experience; Lonergan calls them “questions for intelligence” and “questions for reflection”. The first kind of question is related to the level of intelligence and culminates in an act of understanding, i.e. insight. Questions for intelligence are questions like: What

29 J. Flanagan, 1991, 4-5.

30 B. Cronin, 1999, 8.

31 B. Lonergan, 1992, 268.

32 B. Lonergan, 1992, 299; H. Meynell, 1998, 823.

33 B. Lonergan, 1992, 260-261; B. Cronin, 1999, 9.

34 B. Lonergan, 1992, 11, 16.

is it?, Why does it occur?, How often? etc. and they cannot be answered by a yes or a no. The second type of question is related to the level of reflection and issues in a judgment that something is or is not. Questions for reflection are questions of the type "Is it so or not so?" and they may be answered by a yes or a no³⁵.

To the objection that the claim that we perform such acts is not mere mentalism or folk psychology, destined to disappear before the progress of science, Lonergan responds that a denial that we engage in knowing (experiencing, understanding and judging), is actually self-destructive, since we have to engage in it in the very act of justifying such a denial. I can argue for a conclusion that implies that I am incapable of arguing for a conclusion, and all such argument requires us to engage in acts of experiencing, understanding and judging. In other words, it requires us to attend to the relevant evidence from experience, to envisage possibilities that may explain that experience, and to affirm with more or less certainty the possibility that seems the best explanation³⁶.

9. Epistemology and the epistemological question

Epistemology seeks the answer to the question: why is doing that knowing?, i.e. why is performing these acts (experiencing, understanding and judging) knowing? It is a normative area of research that asks about objectivity as a property of human cognitional operations³⁷. However, only after we have obtained answers that are factual or verified by the data of our consciousness about what knowing is – as it occurs within cognitional theory – can we frame the question of the objectivity of our knowing in a way that makes sense.

a. *The aim of knowing*

The traditional (scholastic) question of objectivity centred on the truth and certitude of human knowledge in a metaphysical context, but with Descartes and Kant the question focus shifted to the objectivity of knowing in an epistemological context. Furthermore, in the Lonergan's opinion the proper perspective to consider the question is the first person perspective of epistemology. The answer of the individual knowing subject to the question of the objectivity of his or her knowing depends on what he or she thinks he or she is doing when she is knowing, and the relevant element of the self-knowledge is a determination of the purpose to be achieved. This is why before answering the question of objectivity Lonergan draws attention to the fact that all knowing has a common goal revealed in questioning³⁸.

The purpose of knowing is to know what really is. However, the reality of everything can only be known insofar as the subject reaches the objective that he or she intends when he or she asks the question – is my understanding of things correct? Is it true? The goal of the questioning is correct understanding. If the subject has understood correctly, then he or she really knows something. But he or she also knows that the reality that he or she has

35 B. Lonergan, 1992, 297-303; H. Meynell, 1998, 823.

36 B. Lonergan, 1992, 353-357; H. Meynell, 1998, 823.

37 B. Lonergan, 1992, 399.

38 B. Lonergan, 1992, 404-405.

grasped is a limited truth. It is limited by the limits of his or her understanding, but not by the limits of his or her questioning. This is because his or her questioning transcends any limited correct understanding, and can move to seek a more comprehensively correct understanding. In fact questioning is potentially unlimited, and so Lonergan defines being (reality), not in terms of what one knows correctly, but in terms of the objective to be known when one will know correctly all that is to be known³⁹.

b. The notion of objectivity

Principally, the notion of objectivity that Lonergan uses is contained within a patterned context (set) of judgments, because fully human knowing occurs on the level of judgment. These judgments serve as implicit definitions of subject (does the knowing), object (the content of the known) and the distinction between them. The context of judgments implicitly defines the notion of objectivity. Objectivity arises when one combines the judgment I am a knower with other judgments such as: This is a tree and I am not this tree, etc. The principal notion of objectivity lies in these distinctions. If you accept these judgments, you presuppose the notion of objectivity.

Objectivity does not rest on the validity of a single judgment. It is not characterized by a judgment that something is out there as opposed to in here but is established in the set of judgments in question. The validity of the notion of objectivity rests on the validity of the particular judgments in the set. If these judgments are not correct (true), then the notion of objectivity collapses. It is a minimal and open notion: it leaves the set of judgment open for next judgments, and leaves further questions can be answered by further judgments⁴⁰.

Besides the principal notion of objectivity, Lonergan also distinguishes partial notions (aspects or components) emergent within cognitional process: experiential, normative and absolute objectivity. Thus, the experiential notion (aspect) of objectivity is proper to the senses and the level of experience. The normative notion (aspect) of objectivity appears on the level of understanding. It is contained in the contrast between the detached, unrestricted and disinterested desire to know and, on the other hand, merely subjective desires, fears and interests⁴¹.

The normative notion of objectivity is at the heart of Lonergan's analysis of objectivity, reality and knowing. The human mind exhibits in Lonergan's opinion an infinite capacity to want to know all that is to be known, i.e. an unrestricted desire to know⁴². But no one knows infinitely, and so the subject is in perpetual tension between what she actually knows and what she desires to know. The objectivity of a knowing being consists in knowing that my understanding is limited and my questioning is unlimited, and that I do not interfere with my own detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know⁴³. The normativity of the notion of objectivity means here the obligation to be intellectually honest, to be detached, to ask further questions⁴⁴.

39 B. Lonergan, 1992, 372-373, 659-662; J. Flanagan 1991, 2.

40 B. Lonergan, 1992, 399-401; B. Cronin, 1999, 336-337.

41 B. Lonergan, 1992, 399.

42 B. Lonergan, 1992, 407.

43 B. Lonergan, 1992, 404-405; J. Flanagan, 1991, 2-3.

44 B. Cronin, 1999, 333-335.

Finally, there is an absolute notion (aspect) that manifests itself on the level of judgment. If a judgment is true, it is absolutely true, and it is in that sense objective⁴⁵.

10. The metaphysics of the knowing subject and the metaphysical question

Metaphysics tries to resolve the problem: What do I know when I am knowing? It is based on cognitional theory and epistemology, because the nature and structure of knowing, in Lonergan's opinion, determines the overall nature and structure of what is to be known. Lonergan's metaphysics is essentially the metaphysics of the knowing subject, and cognitional and epistemological notions define categories of his metaphysics.

a. *The notion of being (reality)*

The notion of being is closely related to the notion of objectivity and to the notion of knowing⁴⁶. Lonergan argues against the notion of being as something that is out-there and was out-there before one started to know it, against the notion of objectivity as extroversion, and against the notion of knowing as looking. He does not agree that what is unreal is what is inside one and merely imagined or felt to be real. For Lonergan reality is not the object of naive extroverted consciousness. The real is neither immediately out-there nor immediately in-here, but is what one comes to know through the mediation of the dynamic structure of knowing: inquiring, understanding, reflecting and judging⁴⁷. Reality is nothing other than what is to be known so far as we exercise our attentiveness, intelligence and reasonableness to the full.

b. *The infinite desire to know and being an authentic knower*

Basically, the answer to the question of what the knowing subject knows is that she knows that she does not know, that she has the capacity to know what she does not know, and that what she wants to know is the being (reality) of what she does not know⁴⁸. Lonergan's position is that every human is born a potential knower with an infinite, detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know but she can actualize its potentiality in different degrees⁴⁹. The human being has no choice about being born oriented to infinity but she can block the realization of the infinite desire to know⁵⁰. To be an authentic human knower means having to actualize one's infinite capacities in so far as one is able⁵¹. The basic problem with metaphysics, then, is to invite born knowers to discover that their being is a knowing being, that whenever they know, they want to know being, and that the only

45 B. Lonergan, 1992, 402-404; B. Cronin, 1999, 330-333.

46 B. Lonergan, 1992, 401.

47 B. Lonergan, 1992, 437-441; J. Flanagan, 1991, 3.

48 J. Flanagan, 1991, 3.

49 B. Lonergan, 1992, 372-373.

50 B. Lonergan, 1992, 375-376.

51 B. Lonergan, 1972, 104.

way to know correctly and objectively is to experience, understand and judge in an unbiased way (self-appropriation)⁵².

The human desire to know – if it is allowed to develop properly – means that the human mind cannot rest until the knower understands and judges in a completely transcendent and unlimited way. To be an authentic human knower, then, is to be under the continuous tension of having to overcome the present state of one's own acquired knowledge and belief, and to make oneself into that more perfect knower which one is not but potentially could be⁵³.

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52 B. Lonergan, 1992, 13, 498; J. Flanagan, 1991, 5.

53 B. Lonergan, 1992, 410-411; 497-498, 680; J. Flanagan, 1991, 9.