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IVE Press, The Incarnate Word,
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THE WEAKNESSES OF CRITICAL REALISM: ON
LONERGAN'S COGNITIONAL THEORY

Fr. Andres Ayala, IVE, Ph.D.
Sacred Heart Catholic Church
Peterborough, ON

PREFACE

THIS PAPER IS MY BEST ATTEMPT to confute (Kantian) Modern Philosophy at its very core. This implies, of course, that in my view the principles of Critical Realism are Kantian.

The basic arguments supporting Critical Realism are powerful: I have tried to show clearly their power, but also to expose clearly their putrid root. Section III, on the principle of immanence, offers the most important contribution in this undertaking.

This paper began as a discussion on the Cognitional Theory of Bernard Lonergan,¹ but when I was revising it for publication, it became something much deeper and in my view much more helpful. The references to Lonergan are still there, but now as the springboard only for reflections on principles that go beyond Lonergan and deep into Modern Philosophy. As a result, this paper may also be of interest to those wrestling with other modern philosophers and trying to escape Kant's cage on their way to a true Realism, in which consciousness is grounded on being, and not the other way around.

My research is necessarily limited, especially regarding Lonergan, but I hope it will be found neither inaccurate nor superficial.

I say that my research is limited because I am not a Lonergan scholar per se. I studied Lonergan's writings, to the best of my ability, while at the University of Toronto. I approached him with great interest when I first heard about him, because Lonergan was presented as a great Thomist who was working out conscientiously the dialogue between faith and reason. Many

¹ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, SJ (1904 - 1984) was a Canadian Jesuit priest best known for his original contributions to philosophy and theological method. His intellectual program embraced philosophy, theology, macroeconomics, and the problems of method in the human sciences and historical scholarship. The *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* project 25 volumes. Cf. <http://www.lonerganresearch.org/>

students around me, young and old, were excited about him and I was excited too: my hope was to find in his works an appealing way to offer Aquinas' doctrine today. However, when I began to read Lonergan's writings and to hear more about his doctrine I realized that he perhaps was not what I was looking for. My goal became then to identify Lonergan's principles and to consider their true value. In any case, I have tried to substantiate my claims regarding Lonergan and I hope those who know him better than I do will correct or nuance my affirmations as they see fit.

This research comes mainly from my readings and studies during the academic year 2013-2014, a period in which I wrote two papers for Professors John Dadosky and Michael Vertin.² It has been a while since then, but I did not want to leave those efforts unpublished, even if they could be completed with more recent publications. The first of those two papers, with some modifications, was published as "Reflections on the Possibility of Perceptualism."³ The present article is based on the second of those papers but greatly revised and augmented, particularly in the doctrinal discussion of the issues.

I hope the reader will find here a clear confutation of basic principles of Modern Philosophy and, consequently, important elements for the foundation of a true Thomistic Realism. The issue is very complex indeed, but these reflections may, at the very least, indicate a path out of the Kantian world.

INTRODUCTION

Bernard Lonergan states that intellectual conversion is the "elimination of the false assumption that knowing involves

² I want to thank professors Michael Vertin and John Dadosky, for allowing me to "pursue my own set of questions" from such a different perspective as it is perceptualism, in an atmosphere of confidence, openness and academic freedom. Much of what follows has been inspired in their observations, clarifications, questions and proposed readings.

³ Cf. Andres Ayala, "Reflections on the Possibility of Perceptualism," *The Incarnate Word* 6, no. 1 (May 2019): 33-48 (henceforth as "Reflections").

‘taking a good look.’”⁴ He means to say that knowing is not the perception of objects “already out there now real,” but a process of experiencing, understanding and judging. Why? What are the reasons for denying that knowledge is perceptive? What are the reasons to postulate knowing as a process of “construction” of the object of consciousness? There are reasons: that which follows will expose the apparent power and the real weaknesses of these reasons.

As will be seen, the arguments discussed here are only those that appear to be, in my view, the basic assumptions and the starting point of Cognitional Theory. Therefore, the reader should not expect an assessment of Lonergan’s doctrine as a whole. At the same time, the principles at work in Lonergan’s Cognitional Theory and discussed here are present also in other expressions of Critical Realism and Modern Philosophy: therefore, this paper can be helpful to assess some of those accounts, as well.

The first thing that struck me in my Lonerganian readings was that I could hardly find the reasons to deny that knowing is ‘taking a good look.’ This is denied many times, but the reasons are presumed, most of the time.⁵ Therefore, I will try to make

4 John D. Dadosky, *The Structure of Religious Knowing: Encountering the Sacred in Eliade and Lonergan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 55 (henceforth as *Structure*), where Dadosky refers to Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238. For citation, I will give the complete bibliographical reference the first time only and then use abbreviated references. When *The Lonergan Reader* is referred, I will indicate first only the title of Lonergan’s original work and then add “in *Lonergan Reader*” and the page corresponding to *The Lonergan Reader* itself.

5 Naïve realism is rejected sometimes with irony Bernard Lonergan, “Insight,” in *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 180-181, or pejorative words (Mark D. Morelli, “The Realist Response to Idealism in England and Lonergan’s Critical Realism,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 21 (2003): 12, 19 [henceforth as “The Realist Response”]). The terminology “naïve” for perceptualism and intellectual “conversion” for the assumption of cognitional theory may be well grounded, but does not help by itself to see the strength

more explicit what these arguments are, because a cognitional theory cannot be sustained by words alone, especially when the difficulties of rejecting common sense are so clear.⁶

This paper is divided in five sections, as follows. In my view, the main reason to reject that knowing is ‘taking a good look’ is a notion of data of experience as “raw materials,” and this is the subject matter of section I.⁷ This notion in turn leads to a theory

of the arguments. On perceptualism and intellectual conversion cf. also Bernard Lonergan, “Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth,” in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 239-240, 247; Bernard Lonergan, “Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge,” in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 134; Morelli, “The Realist Response,” 12; Vernon Gregson, ed., *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 10 (henceforth as *The Desires of the Human Heart*).

6 Cf. Lonergan, “Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth,” 248; Lonergan, “Insight,” 221; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Giovanni B. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge*, ed. Robert M. Doran, trans. Joseph Sporerl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 30 (henceforth as *Lonergan and Kant*); strengths of naïve realism in Morelli, “The Realist Response,” 6, 19.

7 In this paper, however, I will focus on sense experience. As said in Ayala, “Reflections,” 37: “I set aside consciously the data of consciousness, belonging also in Lonergan’s view to the first level of experience (cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 2013 reprint, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 362 [henceforth as *Insight*]; Bernard Lonergan, “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 78; Darren Dias, “The Contributions of Bernard J.F. Lonergan to a Systematic Understanding of Religious Diversity” (PhD diss. University of St. Michael’s College, 2008), 120 [henceforth as “The Contributions of Bernard J.F. Lonergan”]; etc.). In my view, they are necessarily secondary and product of reflection. We cannot speak about consciousness without reflecting and without supposing other acts of direct knowledge. More should be said, but cf. Bernard Lonergan, “First Lecture: Religious Experience,” in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 117; Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 7, 10; Lonergan, “Insight,” 186; Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: An Introduction and Companion to Insight*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark Morelli (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980), 17-18 (henceforth as *Un-*

of knowledge in which the “formal” elements of knowing (such as intelligible unity or existence) are necessarily a function of the subject. Question and inquiry are for Lonergan helpful notions to explain these a priori functions in human understanding, and these notions are discussed in section II. Another main reason to deny Perceptualism, but connected with the notion of experience, is the principle of immanence, or the reduction of (intelligible) being to being of consciousness: this is treated in section III. This section is in my view the most important, because the other sections always refer in one way or another to this one. Section IV will focus on Critical Realism’s use of the notion of relation, especially with regards to understanding. Finally, Lonergan’s doctrine on judgment as the position of the real will be briefly discussed in section V.

In each section, by reporting some references and texts, I have tried to show, firstly, that each principle under discussion is actually maintained by Lonergan. Secondly, I have tried to understand and show why those principles are maintained, their plausibility, their allure and their power. They do (at least apparently) “make sense,” and the only way to discuss these principles in a useful way is to “see the point.” Otherwise one’s discussion would seem biased and unduly “dogmatic.” Thirdly, I have also tried to show clearly the falsity of those basic assumptions and principles. These issues are fundamental: a proper demonstration (or syllogistic confutation) is not always possible, because sometimes there is nothing more fundamental that can be used as a principle of demonstration. However, it can neither be said that the confutation of these principles depends on a decision, nor that their falsity is simply evident and no confutation is needed. In my view, the falsity of these principles must be clearly *exposed*, or better said, left naked be-

derstanding and Being. I use always this edition unless otherwise indicated); Cornelio Fabro, *Percezione e pensiero* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1962), 380 (henceforth as *Percezione*).

fore the judging eye of the intellect, sometimes by a reduction to the absurd, other times by deepening on the notions used for argumentation until the erroneous root of the arguments can be seen. I did what I could at each step on the way, and I hope the reader will find something useful in what follows.

I. THE NOTION OF EXPERIENCE

The first weakness I see in Lonergan's cognitional theory is related to his notion of experience as providing simply the "raw material" for human understanding. This implies, first, that the data from experience are without form and without unity; second, that the data from experience have no intelligibility of their own. The first is against experience itself, as I have discussed in *Reflections*. The second is against the Thomistic distinction between intelligibility as content (i.e., the natures of corporeal things, which certainly belong to the particular) and intelligibility as the abstracted mode of being of that content (which is only in the subject and depends on the subject's agent intellect), a crucial distinction which will not be the focus of this paper.⁸ In this section, divided in five points, I will try to assess what Lonergan says about experience and why, in order to show the weakness of his notion of experience.

1. Overview: The Problem

Lonergan's fact (or point of departure) in the explanation of human understanding is the emergence of intellectual con-

⁸ For this important distinction, cf. Andres Ayala, *The Radical Difference between Aquinas and Kant: Human Understanding and the Agent Intellect in Aquinas* (Chillum, MD: IVE Press, Forthcoming), 113ff (henceforth as *The Radical Difference*). This monograph is based on my dissertation, Andres Ayala, "The Agent Intellect in Aquinas: A Metaphysical Condition of Possibility of Human Understanding as Receptive of Objective Content" (PhD diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2018). Online <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/93391>. See especially Chapter 2.

tent over the content of sensible experience.⁹ This emergence of the intelligible content, however, is considered by Lonergan as an absolute heterogeneity, in such a way that the intellectual contents can never come from the sensible ones: they are different, irreducible. The content of sensible experience is indefinite, multiple and disorganized; whereas the intellectual content possesses unity, meaning, etc.¹⁰

Now, the intellectual content refers somehow to that of sensible experience. But it does not come from experience. Therefore, the intellectual content is subjectively added to the data of experience. This is one of the key features of a Kantian aprioristic system: if there is intelligibility in the object of knowledge, and this intelligibility does not come from the data, it must necessarily be a function of the subject.

The heterogeneity of contents of consciousness is a real problem. However, because here intelligible and sensible contents are arbitrarily dissociated, Lonergan's solution is questionable. One of the problems, as I have tried to show in *Reflections*, is Cognitional Theory's analysis of experience: experience is portrayed as disorganized and devoid of unity, simply a "raw material" for the subject to inform... a portrayal of experience which has basis neither in experience nor in science.

2. Lonergan's Doctrine of Experience

For Lonergan, the data of experience are the "material" for understanding, in the sense of elements without organization, determination, unity or structure. Speaking on the cognitive level of experience, Lonergan says that "it is presupposed and

9 Cf. Lonergan, "Christology Today: Methodological Reflections," 78: "The world of immediacy is a world of data, of what is given to sense and given to consciousness. It is a world as yet without names or concepts The world mediated by meaning goes beyond experience through inquiry."

10 Cf. Bernard Lonergan, "Cognitional Structure," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 4, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 218: "By our sense we are given, not appearance, not reality, but data."

complemented by the level of intelligence, that it supplies, as it were, the raw materials on which intelligence operates, that in a word, it is empirical, given indeed but merely given, open to understanding and formulation but by itself not understood and in itself ineffable.”¹¹ He further clarifies that: “[S]ince data, percepts and images are prior to inquiry, insight and formulation, and since all definition is subsequent to inquiry and insight, it was necessary to define data, percepts, and images as the materials presupposed and complemented by inquiry and insight.”¹² The only possible determination of the data is from intelligence: “The given is residual and, of itself, diffuse... it can be selected and *indicated only* through intellectual activities, of itself it is diffuse; the field of the given contains differences,¹³ but insofar as they simply lie in the field, the differences are unassigned.”¹⁴

We read sometimes also “insight into the data” and “immanent intelligibility of data,”¹⁵ which may suggest some intelligible content in the data of experience themselves. However, these phrases are interpreted by Patrick Byrne in this way:

¹¹ Lonergan, “Insight,” 165.

¹² *ibid.*, 194.

¹³ Regarding this interesting phrase, “the field of the given contains differences,” cf. *ibid.*, 288.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 218f (my emphasis). Similar expressions are found throughout Lonergan’s works. Cf. Lonergan, “First Lecture: Religious Experience,” 116f (no superstructure in the data; notion of experience as potential and material); Lonergan, *Insight*, 97: “raw materials of one’s sensations”; *ibid.*, 364: “as insight draws the definite object of thought from the hazy object of experience”; Lonergan, “Insight,” 219: “inquiry and understanding presuppose materials for inquiry and something to be understood”; Lonergan, *Insight*, 367: “Inquiry and insight, then, are related internally to materials about which one inquires and into which one gains insight.” He seems to interpret St. Thomas in this sense, cf. Bernard Lonergan, “Christ’s Knowledge: Thesis 12 of *De Verbo Incarnato*,” trans. Charles Hefling (unpublished), 18 [original Latin published as Bernard Lonergan, *De verbo incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964)], quoting ST I, q. 84, a.6, a text often misused in Transcendental Thomism (cf. Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 248ff).

¹⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 93.

This is what is meant by “insight *into* phantasm”—**not** that the intelligibility (proper object) **is somehow hidden within or behind the image**, but rather that the **insight adds** intelligent consciousness of the intelligibility proper to the image out of which it emerges ... The emergent insight bestows its own proper object of intelligibility upon the image, since, strictly speaking, the image as merely imagined has no intelligible content of its own.¹⁶

The data are devoid of any intelligible content: “As data, such acts are experienced; but as experienced, they are not described, distinguished, compared, related, defined, for all such activities are the work of inquiry, insight and formulation.”¹⁷ “The given is unquestionable and indubitable... in the sense that it lies outside the cognitional levels constituted by questioning and answering.”¹⁸ “Without this second level [of understanding] there is indeed a given but there is no possibility of saying what is given.”¹⁹

Lonergan’s consideration of understanding as a unifying activity supposes also a theory of data as elements without unity. He claims that: “Our answers unify and relate, classify and construct, serialize and generalize. From the narrow strip

¹⁶ Patrick Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan’s Foundations for Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 141-142 (henceforth as *Ethics of Discernment*). Mine bold, Byrne’s italics.

¹⁷ Lonergan, “Insight,” 166. Cf. *ibid.*, 188: “That P is 2 when the needle on a dial stands at a certain place is a judgment ... All that is seen is the needle in a position on the dial ... Nor is it this description that is seen, but only what is so described ... In the formulations there always are elements derived from inquiry, insight, conceiving. But in virtue of the checking one can say that the formulation is not pure theory, that it is not merely supposed or merely postulated or merely inferred, that it’s sensible component is given.”

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 218.

¹⁹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 336.

of space-time accessible to immediate experience we move towards the construction of a world-view.”²⁰ In a lecture on “Religious Knowledge,” Lonergan explains:

A grasp of unity presupposes the presentation of what needs unification, as a grasp of intelligible relationship presupposes the presentation of what can be related. Again, such insight or grasp presupposes inquiry that search, hunt, chase for the way to piece together the merely given into an intelligible unity or innerly related whole.²¹

Two features of this last text are interesting for our following reflections: 1) the “wholeness” of the object of knowledge is not related to experience but to understanding; and 2) understanding adds but without having anything ready-made to add.²²

3. Possible Reasons to Assume this Theory of Experience

Because this notion of experience is similar to Kant’s, it could be helpful to explore why Kant himself assumed this notion.

²⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 104 (henceforth as *Method in Theology*). Cf. Lonergan, “First Lecture: Religious Experience,” 126.

²¹ Lonergan, “Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge,” 142. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, “Insight Revisited,” in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 272: “The first seven chapters of *Insight* deal with human intelligence insofar as it unifies data by setting up intelligible correlations.”

²² For other texts that consider understanding or judgment as an addition or completion of the content, cf. Lonergan, “Insight,” 167; Lonergan, *Insight*, 30; Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 5, 12, 24; Byrne, *Ethics of Discernment*, 139ff; Dias, “The Contributions of Bernard J.F. Lonergan,” 120; Joseph Maréchal, *A Maréchal Reader*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 241 (henceforth as *Maréchal Reader*).

Lonergan's notion of experience is not different from that of Kant.²³ Kant also maintains the heterogeneity of sensible content and thought: "Kant assumed the heterogeneity of sense and thought, a generic difference between sensibility and understanding—one receptive, the other spontaneous"²⁴; "One such premise, contained in the principle that universality and necessity cannot be derived from experience, is the inability of understanding to penetrate the sensible."²⁵ For Kant, the data of experience are also material to be organized: "Empirical elements of experience, arising from mechanical affection by a real agent, are crude materials to be worked up into the form of knowledge, with the outcome being a *tertium quid* between the cognizing mind and the things themselves."²⁶ Quoting first Kant, Sala states that the a priori for Kant "will in any case be an addition made by the cognitional faculty to the raw material of the sense impressions"²⁷; sensation gives the matter of the appearance, "but that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations, I term the form of appearance. [It] cannot itself be sensation; and therefore, while the matter of all appearance is given to us a posteriori only, its form must *lie ready* for the sensations a priori in the mind, and so must allow of *being considered apart from all sensation*."²⁸

23 Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 1-6 (the numbers correspond to the original German edition, in this case, the second edition, noted "B"); Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 349ff.

24 Morelli, "The Realist Response," 12.

25 Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 22.

26 Morelli, "The Realist Response," 12.

27 Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 20.

28 *ibid.*, 14. This similarity between Lonergan and Kant regarding the notion of experience does not prevent us from finding differences between their respective doctrines. There is a difference between Lonergan and Kant regarding what they consider "knowing," which is still intuitive for Kant, and so actually impossible with regards to the *noumeno* (cf. Bernard Lonergan, "Metaphysics as Horizon," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 4,

Why Kant assumes this notion of experience seems unclear. Giovanni Sala wonders: “Why is it that the formal component of sensible knowledge cannot originate in the *Erfahrung* [experience]? The KRV does not give the slightest response to this question Admittedly Kant attributes an a priori origin to the synthetic, intelligible element of our knowledge.”²⁹ Therefore, he continues, for the same reason, he would have applied the same principle to every form of knowledge.

For Dawes Hicks, instead (as Morelli tells us) at least the historical origin of Kant’s notion of experience is clear. The problem of Kant, for Hicks, is the assumption of Hume’s theory of experience:

The inadequate starting point that Dawes Hicks identifies is ... Kant’s appropriation of Hume’s conception of sense-experience as constituted by a mere aggregate of discrete impressions. Given this assumed theory of perceptions, says Dawes Hicks, a synthesis or combination of the manifold becomes necessary. This synthesis becomes the very act of knowing, and its product the intervening and object veiling *tertium quid*.³⁰

In my view, Kant’s notion of experience as random elements without unity derives certainly from his historical-philosophical context, but Kant’s reason to assume it is related

Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 194; Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 5, 12; and there is a difference also regarding their respective notion of a priori: according to Sala, for Lonergan the a priori is only heuristic, without content, and instead for Kant “it has an objective content of its own” (ibid., 5; cf. Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 194ff). Cf. Morelli, “The Realist Response,” 20.

²⁹ Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 14.

³⁰ Morelli, “The Realist Response,” 21. It is the same position of Cornelio Fabro (cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 7, 12-13), that is, that Kant assumes Hume’s notion of experience.

to his solution to the problem of the universals. Kant's universal cannot be grounded in experience, which is particular through and through. Experience is the multiple which can only find unity in and from the subject. The universal, therefore, must be grounded on the subject. The *intelligible* unity of the object is now a function of the subject: why would the object's *sensible* unity be a "given"? Can this sensible unity be perceived outside our consciousness? Is not the sensible object one in our consciousness *only*? And if the sensible object were one in itself, could this objective unity be subjectively perceived? All we can perceive is what appears to us, what enters the realm of consciousness: for Kant, whatever is absolutely objective (*noumeno*) remains outside the field of human knowledge.

Or better said: the reason to deny an a posteriori origin of the intelligible is that the object *appearing in consciousness* (i.e., the universal and necessary object) is absolutely dissimilar to the particular sensible reality. Kant is departing from an object of knowledge which is *immanent* and subjective, because for him knowledge is possession, not encounter. Knowledge is for him physical possession, not intentional possession. It is enclosedness, not openness. For the same reason, that is, for the impossibility of verifying subjectively that which is outside the subject, for the impossibility of knowing outside of ourselves, Kant cannot justify the experiential origin of any other formal content, including sensible, and this is why he attributes to the subject also a priori forms of sensibility. As can be seen, Kant's reason to assume this notion of experience is related to the principle of immanence, which will be the subject of section III of this paper.

A physical interaction between two bodies is easier to admit, and that is probably why Kant, and in general all modern philosophers, admits that there is a material element coming from experience and producing "impressions" on the subject's sensibility. These "impressions" coming from outside allow

Modern Philosophy to explain the fact that we do not simply and arbitrarily “come up” with the object of knowledge, that we are not “creators” of the known world but, rather, simply “administrators” of what is given, according to the “Transcendental Rules” of our subjectivity.

I suggest that a similar approach is present in Lonergan, that is to say, he has made a possibly unquestioned assumption of Kant’s (and so Hume’s) theory of experience. Perhaps Lonergan thought it was an evident fact: “The problem tackled in the book [*Insight*] was complex indeed. At its root was a question of psychological fact. Human intellect does not intuit essences. It grasps in simplifying images intelligible possibilities.”³¹ But what were Lonergan’s reasons to assume this theory? Kant’s reasons seem to me more clear. Lonergan’s reasons may be similar, insofar as he also embraces the principle of immanence, as we will see in section III.

4. Weakness of this Theory of Experience

What is important at this point, however, is to draw attention to the weakness of this theory of experience, insofar as there is no reason to assume it, and many reasons to reject it.

As I have suggested,³² the psychological research of the *Gestalttheorie* has made clear that the data of experience are never a raw material without unity or form but “wholes.”³³

³¹ Lonergan, “*Insight Revisited*,” 268. Or perhaps Lonergan was trying to answer this question when he wrote: “Why is the given to be defined extrinsically? Because all objectivity rests upon the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know” (Lonergan, “*Insight*,” 220).

³² Cf. Ayala, “*Reflections*,” 37ff.

³³ It is the thesis of Cornelio Fabro in his monograph *Cornelio Fabro, La Fenomenologia della Percezione*, Opere Complete 5 (Segni, Italy: EDIVI, 2006). Cf. also Fabro, *Percezione*, 7-17 and for a very similar account on behalf of Dawes Hicks, cf. Morelli, “*The Realist Response*,” 21. For Lonergan’s awareness of the problem and related issues, cf. Bernard Lonergan, “*Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959*,” in *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997),

Hume's theory of experience does not have any experience to support it. The object of perception of everyday experience presents itself as a synthetic unity of contents ("objectual levels" of Fabro), in which the heterogeneity of contents does not prevent their interdependence. Modern Philosophy appears to separate mistakenly what is united in the data of conscious experience (i.e., sensible and intelligible content, matter and form of human knowledge, etc.).

It is also difficult to defend Hume's notion of experience by rational analysis, precisely because it implies that experience is intellectually perceived and not "irrational"!³⁴ Someone may suggest that it is not that we perceive experience intellectually, but that we "deduce" what experience must be like, given the facts. Fair enough, but what "facts"? Certainly not conscious experience. The immanence of the object of knowledge, then? I will address this in section III of this paper.

The assumption of Kant's notion of experience leads to an Epistemology in which knowledge is considered an informing activity and the subject a source of content. But if Kant's notion of experience is not safe ground to tread upon, then this theory of knowledge should be revised. This is the first weakness I see in critical realism.

II. THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE: QUESTION AND INQUIRY

Another important element of Cognitional Theory is the notion of question. The notion of question is employed in order to explain the aprioristic character of human knowledge. For example, it is argued that we understand something insofar as we find the clue we were looking for, insofar as we bring

364; Lonergan, *Method in Theology* Bernard Lonergan, "Method in Theology," in *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 448, 495f; Lonergan, "Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge," 142 (explicitly quoted above, see footnote 22).

34 Cf. Ayala, "Reflections," 39-40.

questions to the issue.³⁵ To understand is to unify otherwise disparate clues, to subjectively organize the data which we had but were insufficient to make understanding arise. Actually, the amount of data, helpful as it may be, never guarantees understanding.³⁶

These partially fair statements are used in Cognitional Theory to suggest that the *absolute* origin of every intellectual content is the activity of the subject (yearning, *intentio entis*, unrestricted desire to know, inquiry, etc.),³⁷ and not the data; this is because, as we have seen before, the data are devoid of any formal unity or intellectual content. The difficulty I see here is that the above-mentioned particular facts are not enough to establish their conclusion. In other words, the fact that *sometimes* our questioning helps understanding arise, is not enough to conclude or to suggest that all understanding arises from a certain “questioning.”

It is evident that a question presupposes an object about which we inquire. Lonergan does not disagree with this.³⁸ But

35 Cf. Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 86. He puts the example of bringing questions to a text. Sala uses an example of a judge to show how the questions are prior to knowledge (cf. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 6-7).

36 Cf. Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 84: “No sequence of rules can guarantee understanding. Understanding is a creative act of intelligence, deriving from the desire to know and one’s native gifts, which finally allows one to make sense of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a section, and finally the whole work”; John D. Dadosky, “Observations to Andrés Ayala’s Paper ‘An Inverse Insight’” (Course, Thought of Lonergan, University of Toronto, 2013).

37 Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 34; *ibid.*: “As human knowing begins from natural spontaneity, so its initial developments are inarticulate. As it asks what and why without being given the reason for its inquiry”; cf. also Michael Vertin, “Affirming a Limit and Transcending It,” in *Limina: Thresholds and Borders – A St. Michael’s College Symposium*, ed. Joseph Goering, Francesco Guardiani, and Giulio Silano (Ottawa: Legas, 2005), 117, 123 (henceforth as “Affirming a limit”): “primordial... yearning that is a constitutive feature of my concrete subjectivity.”

38 Lonergan, “Insight,” 167: “Questions for intelligence presuppose something to be understood, and that something is supplied by the initial level”; *ibid.*, 219: “inquiry and understanding presuppose materials for inquiry and

the problem is that, for him, that which is presupposed is not in the realm of intelligence. Instead, in my view, though it is true enough that we do not know what we question, in the sense of the “goal,” we do know the object we question about, we know the “this” of the “what is this?” If “this” can be questioned about, “this” is known. If “this” is known, “this” is determined, indicated, unified and one. If “this” is known in this way, “this” is in the realm of intelligence before the question itself, as a *datum* about which we question. “This” is not diffuse, as Lonergan’s data, but determined and unified. Now, what is the determination of “this,” what is the content of “this”? Its content is “something that is,” *ens*, the *primum cognitum* of Aquinas. In other words, when we question “what is this?” we neither question whether there “is” something, nor that this is “something”, but “what” this something is. So, the first weakness I see in Lonergan’s notion of question is that, for him, the subject matter of the question is not intellectual, and this seems not to be the case. The subject matter of the question is “something that is,” *ens*, which is intelligible and the first intelligible in human understanding.³⁹

Another weakness, connected with the previous one, is that the nature of that questioning is not clear, and is sometimes described in obscure terms. In fact, the words “questioning” and “desire” can be understood as certain conscious acts we know

something to be understood”; Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 164: “We cannot wonder or inquire without having something about which to wonder or inquire; and it is the flow of sensations, perceptions, and images that provides the materials about which one wonders or inquires”; cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 367.

39 As I have suggested in Ayala, “Reflections,” 40-41, what sets in motion the process of inquiry seems to be the participated unity of the object of knowledge, that is, its unity not of simplicity but of multiplicity. This kind of unity moves us to look for its grounds. Something similar could be said about the knowledge of a relation: we see something in the object that moves us to think in something else. Relation will be the subject of the fourth section of this article.

very well, but Lonergan is pointing to something much more primordial than that. What is the experience we have of that, or what is the consciousness we have of that “yearning”? Our desire to know, the one we can experience, allegedly implies a previous knowledge of something. If this “primordial” desire is not like the desire we can experience, why do we call it desire? If it is like the desire we can experience, can we say that it is more primordial than knowledge itself? And why, if not because of the assumption that intellectual content cannot be given?

Sometimes examples are proposed to illuminate the primordially of affectivity over knowledge, especially feelings that apparently do not have knowledge or reason as a cause, like falling in love, unsubstantiated or unreasonable fears, angst, etc.. I suggest that the fact that, at a certain point, we are conscious of an (affective) feeling but not of its cause, does not mean that we did not (cognitively) feel anything that produced this affection. It is also important to make a distinction between what we think is the cause of the feeling and what is actually the cause.

The obscurity of the term is sometimes greater because of the characterization of the *a priori* questioning as purely “heuristic,”⁴⁰ but at the same time adding content.⁴¹ There is a tension between affirming that intelligence does not have any “implicit” knowledge but at the same time adds intelligible content. Things are not clearer when we read: “Inquiry itself,

40 Cf. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 23. Michael Vertin, “The Finality of Human Spirit: From Maréchal to Lonergan,” *Lonergan Workshop 19* (2006): 270, 277 (henceforth as “Finality”): “*mere notion, bare idea, simple intention*, of being,” “bare anticipation”; *ibid.*, 279: “because he maintains that what is naturally given is my mere intending (rather than primordial knowledge) of being, Lonergan holds that the fundamental basis of a transcendental criteriology is my anticipating of knowledge (rather than actual knowledge).”

41 Cf. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 20; *ibid.*, 24: “Because of an intelligent *a priori* in the quest of the intelligible, there is an intelligible content, expressed in the concept, which is added to the sensible content of presentation.”

then, is something between ignorance and knowledge.”⁴² The difficulty is this: where does the content come from? It does not come from experience, because the given is unintelligible and diffuse. It does not come from inquiry either, because the a priori is only heuristic and it does not know anything yet.

I suggest that, if the things we know have a formal content (a certain perfection), and this perfection was not previously there (in our consciousness), we need to answer where this perfection is from. It is not enough to say that the answer is in the subject: considering that the subject itself does not have that perfection (from nothing, nothing comes out, and you cannot give what you do not have). Perhaps it would be argued that the intelligible content is just the organization of the data, as a certain unity of order, a certain relation among the (unintelligible) data. The question then becomes: is that process of organization blind or does it follow rules? If it follows rules, the rules for the process of organization of the data would be the functions of understanding (Kantian categories), and so understanding would not be purely heuristic. If the process is blind, how can it give an account of intelligibility? How can something unintentional and unintelligible give an account of intentionality, consciousness and intelligibility? Cognitive Theory’s plausible answer is: “It is necessary. If the intelligible content of consciousness does not come from experience, it must come from the subject, and even if the content does not seem to be ready-made in the subject, we need to postulate that it is there in some way. Now, if we do not want to postulate definite a priori rules of understanding, in a Kantian fashion, it seems that the only way left is to postulate that the content is in the subject implicitly.” The problem is at the beginning: why must we deny that the intelligible content comes from experience? Their necessary end, of course, cannot be more absurd: the only rational explanation of knowing is grounding the rational on the irra-

⁴² Lonergan, “Method in Theology,” 452.

tional, the definite on the indefinite, act on potency, being on nothing, intelligence on will, etc.⁴³ It does not make any sense to postulate something like this: that there is something definite because there was something indefinite before, that the definition of the present comes from the absolute indefinition of the previous. It would be more sincere to say that there is no explanation for the fact of knowing.

Another difficulty in using the word “question” is the very nature of questioning. By itself, a question implies previous knowledge: we need to know something in order to question about it. But, does the notion of knowledge, by itself, imply questioning? It does not seem so. Some knowledges imply previous questions, but knowing something does not necessarily imply to have questioned about it. Now, knowing something does imply the capacity of knowing, but that capacity needs not to be considered actively, as the word “questioning” seems to suggest. Therefore, the notion of question, because it implies knowledge, does not seem to be helpful in the ultimate explanation of knowledge. And because not every knowledge implies questioning, again, the notion of questioning does not seem helpful to explain every knowledge.⁴⁴

43 An observation regarding the origin of the content may be in place, and I thank Prof. Dadosky for his suggestion in this regard. In cognitional theory, the intelligible content is necessarily a function of the subject (Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 365: “Inquiry is generative of all understanding, and understanding is generative of all concepts and systems”), and it is only in this sense that the subject can be said the “creator” of its objects. Not, however, as a creator *ex nihilo*, but rather, I would say, as a platonic demiurge, who gives form to the matter. For Lonergan, the sensible component of the object is given, but the “form” is added by the subject’s activity (Cf. Lonergan, “Insight,” 188, text in footnote 17 of this paper).

44 The term “questioning” seems unhelpful for other reasons as well. 1) If the intelligible content (here, the “answer” to the primordial “questioning”) comes from the a priori activity of the knower, question and answer come in a certain sense from the same source, which is odd. 2) If question is a way of dialogue, it implies an “other” and a certain equality with this other, and so a) the one questioned is the data and therefore there is no equality or b) the

Admittedly this is not a matter of words, but of notions and principles: I hope, however, that this discussion on “questioning” has raised issues more important than words.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF IMMANENCE

In Cognitional Theory, the objects of our knowing are complete only in our knowing, insofar as our subjective operations inform (i.e., give form to) the raw material from experience. The object as we know it is only in our conscious operations. The world we know is the world *as* known. The world is thus immanent to consciousness. A world outside consciousness would not be known. Nobody can know outside his or her own knowledge. This is how I understand the “principle of immanence”: the object of knowing is necessarily “inside” consciousness as an act of it.

When I argued against Cognitional Theory at the University of Toronto I received these kinds of responses: “Are you not arguing from within yourself? Are you not using your very operations to contradict Cognitional Theory?” Such responses enabled me to realize that Cognitional Theory maintains the immanence of the object of knowledge, and one cannot get out of that immanence even as one argues against it. One always argues through one’s own operations; everything one knows is mediated by that person’s conscious acts: therefore, the object of knowledge “remains within” human consciousness, is subjective, insofar as the object’s formal determinations come from the subject’s conscious operations.

In the words of Lonergan: “The world mediated by meaning is not just reality but reality as known.”⁴⁵ Giovanni

one questioned is the knower itself and therefore there is no otherness. 3) We may find difference between the parties of a dialogue, insofar as they may be unequal in knowledge: but if the one who questions knows more than the other, why is s/he questioning?

⁴⁵ Lonergan, “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” 92. Perhaps in the same line is the text of Lonergan, “Insight,” 258: “the universe

Sala says, "Reality here obviously means the reality as understood."⁴⁶ He further explains:

When the mental content, the representation qua representation, has acquired the character of the absolute, we have a representation which by its very nature brings about that transcendence that belongs to knowledge; arriving at it as a mental representation is the means of reaching the thing directly. The difficulty of recognizing this reflexively, even though it is spontaneous in our performance whenever we make a rational judgment, is the difficulty of intellectual conversion.⁴⁷

As we have seen, it is common to speak in terms of that which is "within" when referring to the content of conscious acts or to the objects of consciousness. For example, Sala says: "Obviously, the representation as representation is in me, it is mine. But by reason of the unconditioned, its content is not relative to me."⁴⁸ Dadosky says something similar: "A judgment within the human subject... refers to reality as independent of the subject."⁴⁹

of being is whatever is intelligently grasped and reasonably affirmed All development is development inasmuch as it goes beyond the initial subject, but in man this 'going beyond' is anticipated immanently by the detachment and disinterestedness of the pure desire." An interesting description of the principle of immanence, though in interrogative terms, is in Lonergan, *Insight*, 363: "A thing is a concrete unity-identity-whole grasped in data as individual. Describe it, and it is a thing-for-us. Explain it, and it is a thing-itself. Is it real? Is it objective? Is it anything more than the immanent determination of the cognitional act?"

⁴⁶ Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 17.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁹ Dadosky, *Structure*, 48. For the principle of immanence in Maréchal, cf. Vertin, "Finality," 269; Maréchal, *Maréchal Reader*, 18. Other indications regarding the principle of immanence in general in Paul Templeman, "Clear-

1. Weakness of the principle of immanence

In order to appreciate the weakness of the principle of immanence, let us examine the following argument: “*we learn reality* through operations, and so *not what is outside*, but what is in the operations.” It could be answered that the fact that we learn reality through operations does not mean that reality is in the operations, as if reality were a subjective event, but that operations are about reality. To say that we do not know that which is “outside” our operations is either to say that we do not know that which is outside reality, which is obvious; or to say that reality is nothing other than the *known* reality, which does not follow. The fact that I reach reality through my operations does not imply that reality depends on my knowing it. The original fact in human knowledge is that I know *reality*, and that I *know* it: this is a dual fact, and nobody has ever been able to deny this duality.

Again, the fact that I cannot assert a reality which is outside the reach of my cognitive operations does not mean that the reality within the reach of my operations depends on those very operations. What is meant is simply that my operations are about being. The fact that knowing is about being, and that being is known, does not necessarily imply that being depends on one’s knowing it, or that being is because one knows it. This fact, of course, presupposes a certain adequacy between knowing and being, but not being’s dependence on knowing, and even less the reduction of being to knowing. If knowing is about being, to reduce being to knowing is to take away knowing itself.

ing the Ground. How to Think about Realism and Antirealism,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 19 (2001): 251 (henceforth as “Clearing the Ground”); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 67; Fabro, *Percezione*, 464-465, 474.

2. Being and Knowing: Comparing the Notions

Is being simply being known, as Modern Philosophy suggests? As I have just argued, there is no compelling reason to affirm this. Should we not rather say that knowing is nothing other than knowing being? A simple examination of the notions shows that the notion of being does not imply the notion of knowledge, and, instead, the notion of knowledge implies the notion of being.

Being, as the simplest and most original concept in human understanding, does not presuppose anything else. Knowing, instead, begs the question, “knowing what?” To know is to know something, knowledge implies an object of knowledge in order to be thought of. In order to think about knowledge, knowledge must be there and we must experience it, and the first knowledge we can experience is the knowledge of something else, not the knowledge of knowledge itself: because, again, knowledge cannot be known if it does not happen first. In other words, knowledge is a subjective act on something, and this something, at the beginning, cannot be this subjective act itself, precisely because this subjective act is not there to be known, unless something else is known first. Therefore, the first thing the subject can subjectively encounter in its act is that which is different from itself, that is, that which is thrown before itself (= object as *ob - jactum*). Only then, once the subject has known something, is the act of knowledge there, and able to be known as subjective act. The fact that the act of knowledge is “conscious” does not mean that it is conscious of itself, but that it is conscious of its object, whatever this object might be (i.e., being at first, and then also the act of knowledge itself).

Therefore, there is no compelling reason to affirm that being depends on knowledge, but we have seen that there is no way to think about knowledge without thinking being. Therefore knowledge depends on being. Knowledge does not happen

without being. Knowledge is actually about being. Being enters the definition of knowledge, but not the other way around.

Now, it is true that there is no *compelling* reason to affirm that being depends on knowledge, but can we not entertain that this is actually the case? To think that being is only being known and that being is simply an event of consciousness involves no contradiction. Could we not, therefore, pose arguments to support this theory? In the end, if this theory is thinkable, there are no arguments to show that is simply false. Cognitive Theory might be opposed to the appearances, but the appearances are not enough to contradict it as a theory.

First, there are compelling reasons to affirm that knowledge depends on being (as I have just shown), and therefore the opposite is simply false, even if it is thinkable. Second, you can certainly *try* to prove something which is thinkable, even if it is false and against the appearances, but this is an act of will, not a reasonable exercise of science. Third, the reasons to *try* to prove that being depends on and is coessential with knowledge are usually connected with skeptical arguments (the fact of error in human knowledge, the lack of agreement among philosophers, the relativity of the object to the subject, etc.), arguments which are inconsistent and have already been confuted. Skeptical arguments, however, keep enticing our scruples to “make sure” that our doctrine is completely certain, completely under our control... Other reasons to *try* to prove the principle of immanence are in the affectivity: when we do not want something outside of us to determine what we consider true or false, and reality seems to prove us wrong, the principle of immanence gives us a good excuse to determine our own truth because, in the end, “being depends on our knowing it.”

3. Human Knowledge: Communion, not Identity

In my view, it is very helpful to consider St. Thomas’ reflections on the nature of knowledge in *De Veritate*, q.2, a.2, in order to respond more completely to the principle of immanence. In

short, he says that there are two kinds of perfection in reality. One is the perfection that each thing has in itself, which is the specific perfection of every substance; with regards to this kind of perfection, each thing can have only one perfection, which is its own specific perfection. But there is in reality another kind of perfection: that is, the perfection of one thing present in another thing, and this is the perfection of the knower. In this way, that is, according to this second kind of perfection, one thing (the knower) can potentially possess the perfection of the universe (the other things).

This is an important point of departure. We human beings experience not one, but two things: we experience the world around us, and we experience knowledge itself. We know both, and we know that these two things are different from each other, even if they are connected with each other. It might very well be that one depends on the other, but that one is not the other *as such* is out of the question. One thing is the world, or each particular thing in itself, and a different thing is what happens to me when I know. When I know, this particular thing is in me, somehow. I know that this thing is something in itself, I know *it*, but now I consider this thing as related to me, as bringing itself to me, as being possessed by me. This thing appears different from me, but is *with me*, and is with me precisely *in its otherness*. How is this possible?

The consideration of human knowledge is the consideration of the communion between subject and object. Such consideration of human knowledge comes after this communion itself, that is, after we have considered not our communion with the object, but the object in itself. When we consider human knowledge we move from considering the characteristics of the object to considering the conditions of possibility of our communion with the object. This “togetherness” invites our consideration precisely because it presupposes a fundamental “alterity”: two things are somehow one. Again, how is this possible?

At this point, the temptation arises to transform this unity of communion into a unity of identity, this oneness of two into the oneness of one and the same. "It's true, Modern Philosophy says, they do not seem to be one, but they must be one, if they are together." Clearly, what they say is already a denial of the original factual duality. However, what is most important is their reason for this denial, which is, in my view, *Modern Philosophy's inability to understand being unless it is considered in a physical way*, perhaps related to a certain inability to transcend imagination. And this is why knowledge is understood by Modern Philosophy in terms of matter and form: the unity between subject and object must be like the unity of matter and form, because there is no other unity outside the unity of identity, the unity of one thing with itself.

This is the methodological mistake of Modern Philosophy: standing before the mystery of being and knowing, Modern Philosophy absorbed being into knowing. This was done in order to create a unified system, but at the price of amputating half of the mystery of reality. And so, in order to give primacy to knowing, Modern Philosophy actually destroyed knowing, rendering knowing no longer communion with the other but the oneness of a physical being, the information of matter, the imposition of the subject on the non-subject. Strangely, knowing, which was originally a "togetherness" with the in-itself of reality, is understood now in terms of the physical "in-itself." Being has been robbed of its matter-form structure by knowing, and then killed. Knowing is no longer itself, because it looks like being, and being is no longer there, because knowing has killed it.

St. Thomas avoids this problem, for example in *De Veritate* q. 2, a. 2, by starting from the consideration of two different kinds of being, one physical and one intentional. One kind of being is the unity of each thing with itself, the possession of itself and its own perfection; the other kind of being is the unity of one thing with another one, the possession

of the other. These two kinds of being are facts: but Modern Philosophy is reducing the second to the first. And this is also why Aquinas explains the second kind of being as something related precisely to immateriality, to a way of being which is independent from matter. In other words, while Modern Philosophy had to transform knowing into physical being, because it could understand unity only as identity, as the unity of matter and form, St. Thomas departs precisely from the necessity that knowledge be explained as something related to immateriality. Immateriality is thus the condition of possibility of this “togetherness” which knowing appears to be.

Modern Philosophy has transformed this “encounter with the other” (which knowledge seems to be) into a “finding myself in the other,” a “finding my own perfection in the material other.” For no reason, the “other” in knowledge has been robbed of its own perfection, and now the subject attributes to itself that which belongs to the object. For no reason, I say, because there was no reason to deny the duality that knowing implies both factually and essentially; also, because it was not necessary to explain every event in reality (including knowledge) with the parameters of one aspect of this reality (here, physical being). Knowledge is a primordial event, like being, and it may very well be that it has its own mystery and rules, irreducible to the mystery and rules of other things.

4. Immanence or Alterity?

If we are truly attentive to the data of consciousness, we realize that the object appears to the subject with a sheer character of alterity.⁵⁰ The object appears “in” consciousness as *other*; insofar as it appears “in” consciousness precisely as a guest, as “non consciousness.” I am not saying that the object’s alterity is already present as part of our initial consciousness of the object: our initial consciousness is busy with the “in-itself,” is

⁵⁰ Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 380.

“outside” of the self, so to speak. But once we become conscious of having known the in-itself, conscious of knowledge, and therefore conscious of our own selves also,⁵¹ the object’s alterity is obvious: the object appeared “to” us, is not us; the object came in from outside as a guest. The only way to pass from consciousness of the “in-itself” to consciousness of the object being present “in” us or “to” us, is by distinguishing the object from us: *the object’s presence “in” ourselves presupposes its distinction from ourselves, not its identity with ourselves.* Consciousness could be conceived as a certain “space,” but certainly not as a closed space: consciousness has doors and windows, is open to the world.

Things “happen” in consciousness, people and things “come and go”: we can only welcome them. We could try to reject them too, but only after they knock on our windows or doors, only after we realize that we don’t want them in. We can try to defend our space, but we should not destroy doors and windows: they are our salvation, and if we destroyed them, we would just be making bigger holes in the walls.

In short, what I mean is that the object appears as other in our consciousness of knowledge, not initially in our consciousness of the object in itself. Alterity is in this sense not a primordial datum of human knowledge, because it presupposes something, namely the knowledge of the “in-itself.” But alterity is certainly more primordial than immanence, since we cannot perceive the object “in” consciousness unless we have perceived the object as different from consciousness.

5. The Nature of the Cognitive Species

Epistemologies based on the principle of immanence have another problem, which is the consideration of the cognitive species as an objective mediation, that is to say, a species which becomes the very object of knowledge. Instead, the species I

⁵¹ Cf. ST I, q. 87, a. 1; *ibid.*

propose⁵² is a subjective-objective mediation, that is to say, a subject's quality referring him or her to the object. The species has thus a double aspect: a subjective aspect, as a real modification of the subject, and an objective aspect, the one which is the reason for the intentional presence of the object. The example of a picture *may* be helpful: in a picture we have a sheet of paper and we have the image of a person. Both things are present, but the mode of being of each is different. The paper and materials of the picture are real; the person, however, is not there physically. Yes, the person is somehow present in the picture but, physically, there is nothing in the picture except materials. However, when we look at the picture, we know the face of the person, of *that* person *him or herself*, and we do not care about the (*real*) materials out of which the picture is made. The species is something like this: something real connecting us with something different from itself. What we know in (through) the concept as subjective modification is the thing itself, not the concept.⁵³

I do not think it is necessary in this paper to defend thoroughly this proposed notion of species. But two things should be clear: 1) Modern Philosophy's notion of species as objective mediation is grounded on the issues already discussed. The cognitive species, as subjective modification, becomes in Modern Philosophy the only possible object of knowing, since reality is reached solely through our operations and therefore the reality we can know is only that which is "within consciousness": all we have "in ourselves", and therefore all we can know

52 Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 463-476, especially 472-473 with quotations of St. Thomas; Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 168ff.

53 Most important in this respects is the distinction between formal concept (the subjective modification by which we understand) and objective concept (what is understood). Prof. Tavuzzi emphasized this distinction in Michael Tavuzzi, "The Distinction of the Divine Attributes from St. Thomas to Gaetan" (Course, Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas: Rome, 2003) (henceforth as "Distinction").

is our cognitive species, understood as active information of the matter from experience. 2) The species I propose is also grounded on the issues already discussed with regards to the Thomistic notion of knowledge. The species' double aspect is related to the fact that our operations (subjective aspect of the species) are about reality (objective aspect of the species).

6. Intentional Attribution

A last observation is in order. The principle of immanence tells us that what we know is not outside but "within" us. But as Giovanni Sala noted, it is difficult to recognize this reflexively.⁵⁴ Lonergan himself recognized this difficulty.⁵⁵ We are not conscious of knowing something within us, but something "outside," distinct from us, independent in being.

It may be helpful here to recall the problem of the universals and the different instances of its solution. When I say, "John is a man," "man" does not stand for a name, because John is not a name, he is not the word "man." "Man" does not stand either for a concept, because John is not the concept of man, he is a man, not a concept, and even less a concept of mine. When we say, "John is a man," we do not mean to say that John is a name or a concept, but that John is an instance of *what we intend* (mean) by "man." "Man" stands for the nature, the nature of John. The universal, therefore, what we predicate of the many, is the nature of the concrete.⁵⁶

When in judgment we attribute a certain nature or the very existence to something, we do not attribute it in the sense of giving to or putting into the data something that was not there. We do not mean that, and so this is not what *we* do, this is not what we are conscious of. We attribute in the sense of recognizing that something belongs to the object of perception. It is

54 Cf. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 30. See footnote 47.

55 Cf. Lonergan, "Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth," 248; Lonergan, "Method in Theology," 470; Lonergan, "Insight," 221.

56 Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 611; Tavuzzi, "Distinction."

a cognitional or intentional attribution, not a physical attribution.

A notion of judgment or cognitive attribution as providing the data with an intelligibility they do not have in themselves would be an idea of attribution which is foreign to our experience, which is never conscious and which seems to confound the intentional with the physical. This “physical” attribution, that is, this giving intelligibility to the particular in the sense of adding something to the raw material of experience, presupposes the notion of experience which I have already criticized. However, if there is no reason to suppose that the object of experience is a disorganized material, and instead this object appears as a determined and meaningful whole, then judgment’s intentional attribution should be considered as a reflexive acknowledgement of what belongs to the object in itself, and not as adding to the object something that was not there before judgment.

The principle of immanence is not necessarily the childish transformation of everything into a solipsistic dream. It is rather the establishment of the subject as the criterion of objectivity, reality and truth.⁵⁷ Human being becomes the cen-

57 Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. Mark Morelli and Elizabeth A. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 22 (from the *Introduction*): “The criteria of knowledge, objectivity, truth, reality, and value are immanent in the operators; they are contained in the questions we raise.”; Lonergan, “Insight,” 217: “Upon the normative exigencies of the pure desire rests the validity of all logics and all methods”; *ibid.*, 198; Lonergan, “Method in Theology,” 456; Lonergan, “Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge,” 144: objective truth is the fruit of “being ruled by the inner norms satisfying these norms is the highroad to the objectivity to be attained in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values There is the objectivity of the world of immediacy But there also is the objectivity of the world mediated by meaning; and that objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity”; Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 2013 reprint, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Elizabeth A. Morelli, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 168: “Now insofar as there is a requirement, a criterion of the virtually unconditioned, there is opera-

ter of the universe, because there is nothing else outside his or her consciousness that could function as a rule or limit. Human being becomes the sovereign of a universe which is as great as his or her nothingness can be. Man remains alone, because he did not want to open his consciousness to the object-given-other, and so he blocked the way to discover the infinite Other. Thus, man is left without salvation, except from himself... and so becomes a being-towards-death. I suggest that the existential void into which humanity is being drawn comes from the principle of immanence, which has left man alone with his own nothingness and despair. It is not good for man to be alone. As Kant woke up from the dogmatic dream, we should now wake up from the immanentistic nightmare.

IV. THE NOTION OF RELATION

Cognitional Theory proposes a notion of understanding as an activity of unification of data, a unification through relation. The relation of the data among themselves is what gives them intelligibility. "A grasp of unity presupposes the presentation of what needs unification, as a grasp of intelligible relationship presupposes the presentation of what can be related."⁵⁸ "The first seven chapters of *Insight* deal with human intelligence insofar as it unifies data by setting up intelligible correlations."⁵⁹

tive something that we have from nature; but insofar as we grasp the virtually unconditioned, we are dependent"; *ibid.*, 169; Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105, 114, 115, 120; Vertin, "Finality," 278; Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 86: "Nor may one expect the discovery of some objective criterion or test or control. For that meaning of the 'objective is mere delusion. Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity"; *ibid.*, 93: "The criteria of our own consciousness... will lead us to true judgments both of fact and of value."

⁵⁸ Lonergan, "Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge," 142.

⁵⁹ Lonergan, "Insight Revisited," 272.

1. The Priority of Relation

In this way, Cognition Theory suggests the priority of relation over the things that are related (*relata*). Is this so? In order to respond, in my view, we need to consider the following. By principle, relation as “being towards” presupposes a plurality of things to be related: there is no notion of relation when there is only one thing.⁶⁰ Plurality, in turn, implies the unity of each member of the plurality: there is no plurality when we do not have distinct unities. Distinct unities imply understanding (because they can be indicated as “this” or “that,” and they can be distinguished).⁶¹ Therefore, an understanding of relation implies an understanding of the *relata*; not, however, *as relata*, that is, as members of a relationship, but rather in themselves, as beings.

Moreover, relation (as an accident) presupposes a subject or substance, and it is established with regards to another thing: these amounts to saying that a relation cannot even be thought of unless, on the one hand, we presuppose a subject of the relation, and, on the other hand, we presuppose something as an objective or aim of this “being towards.”

That is to say, a relation not only presupposes the *relata*, but these *relata* are presupposed *cognitionally* (they must be known before the relation itself is known) and are previously known on the same level of understanding (the *relata* must be *understood* before the relationship itself is understood). An intelligible relation implies intelligible things to be related, because otherwise the relation itself cannot be understood *as such*. In short, my contention is that an intelligible relation presupposes, and is not the absolute origin of, intelligible unity.

60 The terminology employed is intended to fit with the problem at hand, and does not intend to be fitting for Trinitarian Theology.

61 Cf. Lonergan, “Insight,” 218-219. An intelligible unity needs not to be a perfectly defined essence, but it can be perceived as just “something that is.” Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 631.

2. The Relation to the Subject

The use of the notion of relation in Cognitional Theory is problematic, not only as relation among the data themselves (as discussed in the previous point), but also as relation between the data and the knower. How is this latter relation understood? Giovanni Sala points out:

If we prescind of one of the two terms of the relation, we no longer have the connection, and so there is no longer any understanding and much less any resulting concept For if knowledge is a structure, then the ontological value of its object can be determined only by considering the whole structure.⁶²

It seems that, for Sala, knowledge is understood as a real relation on both sides, in which the intelligibility of each *relatum* as such depends always on the other term of the relation. Thus, for example, when we understand “father” as such we necessarily understand “child.” Something similar would occur between subject and object: “the ontological value of its object can be determined only by considering the whole structure.”⁶³

I would say, instead, that the object of knowledge would be affected by the whole structure if the being of the object were only a relative being, that is to say, if the object as such were dependent on the subject. However, as we have seen, the object of knowledge is not constituted by the activity of the subject, but given to it. Therefore, the object is not necessarily affected by knowing. Knowing instead, because it is by itself constituted

⁶² Sala, *Lonerger and Kant*, 16-17.

⁶³ This interpretation of knowledge as a physical relation is perhaps at work also when Lonergan writes about description as prior to explanation, thing-for-us as prior to things-in-themselves. Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 368: “But besides things-themselves and prior to them in our knowing, there are things-for-us, things as described”; Lonergan, “Insight,” 194; Lonergan, “Method in Theology,” 467; Lonergan, *Insight*, 36-37.

by a relation to an object, is certainly affected by the object. It is important to distinguish the two opposite relations in knowledge (that is, object to subject and subject to object): a relation is not necessarily real on both sides. There is certainly a real modification in the subject (*species* as subjective modification); however, that modification is not the object of knowledge, but rather the subjective ground of the relation to the object represented in the *species*.

It is true that knowing may “affect” the object, in the sense that whatever is apprehended depends on the attention, the experience, or even the faculty involved: different subjects, or different faculties, apprehend different things in front of “the same” real object. This fact, however, is not enough to affirm that what is perceived is not given, but a function of the subject.⁶⁴

The being known, if we considered it *as* known (and so *as relatum*), cannot be thought without the knower; but it can certainly be known without the consideration of the knower, and without the consideration of the relation, because *we know the object before knowing the relation*. Our intention (as “tension-towards”) of the object is prior to our knowledge of that intention. We first know being, and only later can we know being *as* known.

⁶⁴ Perhaps in this direction is the answer to Dadosky’s objection (in a private conversation) of the relativity of colours to the light and other circumstances: the fact that the same colour is seen differently is not enough to affirm that the object depends on the subject. What is at stake is the complexity of vision, the influence of the medium of perception and the distinction between the quality in the thing and in the organ. Cornelio Fabro speaks of a proportional objectivity of the secondary qualities. In any case, the real quality will always be decisive for the colour that is seen: in fact, the objection begins with the supposition that the colour (real quality) is the same. It is arguably possible to explain the difference in vision by means of physical causes. Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 79, 454, 480 and for a similar answer to the example of Dadosky, cf. also *ibid.*, 620-621.

3. Context and Interpretation

Finally, it may be argued that everything receives its proper meaning in its own context, and without context nothing can be properly understood.⁶⁵ However, and in response, nothing can be related to its context if it is not first understood in itself. The context can certainly add important features, increase intelligibility, but not give primordially that intelligibility. Again, the problem is the lack of consideration of the priority of the *relata* (though not as such) to the relation. And if there is a priority of the whole over the parts in perception, that priority cannot be extended to the universe, or to the context. The “whole” of everyday perception is given as such, in the form of a certain unity, but the context as a whole is not primordially given.

Cognitive Theory’s concept of interpretation is related to the foregoing considerations. This concept depends on the alleged priority of the relation over its *relata which we have previously discussed*. It is argued that data have no meaning if they are not unified, and intelligence works out this unity by relating the data. The context, then, as the complex of relationships, is always the key for the interpretation (understanding) of the data. Now, the argument continues, the context changes (development of history), and so the interpretation of the data changes as well. As can be seen, this argumentation may lead to relativism, not perhaps in the sense that the interpretation of a certain thing at a certain time is indefinite, but certainly in the sense that the intelligibility of anything depends on its relationship to a necessarily changing context (history).⁶⁶ Because this way of arguing is grounded on the principles pre-

65 Cf. Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 94.

66 Cf. *ibid.*, 74-78; Sala, *Lonerger and Kant*, 29; for an interesting critic of the philosophy of language as nominalism or conceptualism, cf. Templeman, “Clearing the Ground,” 241, 243. It is clear enough that Lonergan does not want to be a relativist (Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104ff; Lonergan, “Method in Theology,” 473), but I don’t think he really succeeds in supporting his claim.

viously discussed (the priority of the relation vs. the priority of the relata), the response to it could be the same as in point “a” of this section. That is, the relation among the data is not known before the data themselves. Therefore, the relation may indeed modify accidentally our understanding of the related data (because the relation to something else *happens [accidit]* to the already understood data) but the relation itself cannot modify substantially this understanding (since the relation happens precisely to *this* piece of data, that is, the relation presupposes the thing which is related). Both the *context* itself as a complex of relations and the *relation* between the datum and its proper context presuppose an understanding of the related things. The context is made up of things, and not things made up by their context. A context presupposes a plurality of things, a plurality presupposes unities and, therefore, those unities are previous to the context.

V. JUDGMENT AS THE POSITION OF THE REAL

In one way or another I have already referred to judgment several times. Let me now make some other observations that may be useful.

I agree with Lonergan regarding the fact that human knowledge is completed in the deepest sense in judgment.⁶⁷ It is in the act of judgment that we *consciously* (in the sense of “reflexively”) know reality, and so the perfection of knowledge is attained. I disagree with Lonergan’s notion of reality, insofar as for him being (*ens*) is posited by the affirmation, and so receives its objectivity and reality (*esse*) from the subject.⁶⁸ A “bright idea” becomes real when, according to the laws of sub-

67 Lonergan, “Insight Revisited,” 265: “Human knowledge as not intuitive but discursive with the decisive component in judgment.” Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 365; Lonergan, “Cognitional Structure,” 212-213.

68 Cf. Vertin, “Finality,” 271, 275; Vertin, “Affirming a Limit and Transcending It,” 122f.

jectivity and faithful to them, the subject affirms the content of consciousness as real.

I agree with Lonergan in the fact that affirmation is not left to pure subjectivism, but it must respect certain laws.⁶⁹ I also agree in that the subject affirms the reality of the intelligible idea when the latter is connected in some way with the data of sense experience. Lonergan speaks about verification.⁷⁰ But to verify is to ascertain the correspondence of a statement with reality.⁷¹ What correspondence can there be between diffuse data of sense experience and an intellectual proposition? It is difficult to see in what sense Lonergan speaks about verification, or on what grounds. No intelligible content can be verified in experience, because (for Lonergan) nothing intelligible is there.⁷²

As I have suggested, the affirmation of existence is not an attribution in the sense of an addition (physical attribution), but an attribution in the sense of predication (cognitional attribution). When we say “this tree is” we do not mean to say that we give being to the tree, but that being is something that belongs to the tree. My attribution is a recognition of the tree’s own being, not the position of it, as the position of something that was not there. When we attribute existence to something,

69 For him they are a priori laws; for me they are the first principles, and depend on the notion of *ens*, which is a posteriori.

70 Cf. Lonergan, “Insight,” 188.

71 Cf. Templeman, “Clearing the Ground,” 239, 241.

72 Instead, and together with St. Thomas, there is something intelligible in the concrete, insofar as what we understand (the nature of a dog) is in the thing itself (the particular dog) with a different mode of being (not abstracted from particular determinations, as in the mind, but imbedded in those particular determinations, even if distinguished from them). The term “intelligible” means not only the abstracted mode of being of things in our mind, but also that which we understand or can understand, and this is the nature or whatness of things. The nature of something is *part* of the concrete, as the concrete’s formal, specific or essential aspect. There is no reason to deny that one and the same perfection be in two different modes of being, as St Thomas argues in ST I, q. 84, a. 1, c. (cf. Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 115ff).

we mean to say that “this thing” is radically *given*, posited *to* us through sense experience. As is clear, this is related to what has been said before: the object of experience is unified, its intelligible content is given, and so its absolute position through the senses is also given.

Now, what are the conditions of possibility of the affirmation of existence? In my view, a correct account of judgment, and especially of the affirmation of existence, can be given only by departing from the perception of *ens* in the simple apprehension.⁷³ Intelligence not only perceives an intelligible unity, but also its absolute position before consciousness, its unquestionable “presence,” its being (*esse*) as existence, as a fact.⁷⁴ This perception of existence is dependent on sense experience (even though it is not a sensible content), and is not a separate formal intelligible content, but a *mode* of the content.⁷⁵ This amounts to saying that the real concrete being is perceived by intelligence as “something *that is*,” where the “is” depends originally on the actual perception of the senses.⁷⁶

This account better explains why the affirmation of existence is connected with sense experience.⁷⁷ This connection postulates that intelligence is able to “touch” the content of

73 Lonergan recognizes also the centrality of insight, though insight is not equivalent to simple apprehension.

74 And so not the *esse ut actus essendi*, that is, the *esse* as *principium quo*. Cf. Pablo Rossi, “La Fondazione Teorica Del Valore Della Conoscenza Nel Realismo Tomista Di Cornelio Fabro” (Rome, 2013), 2 (henceforth as “Presentazione”). Rossi obtained his doctoral degree with this thesis. What I quote here is his presentation for the public exam.

75 Cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 519.

76 Cf. *ibid.*, 515, 523-524; Rossi, “Presentazione,” 2.

77 And why we do not confuse *on a regular basis* things that are just imagined and real existent things. The old skeptical argument based on human error, used by Maréchal among others to raise doubts about the perception of existence, is absurd: an error implies that what is natural is not to make mistakes (otherwise, the error could not be perceived as such). Lonergan also confutes the theory of error. Cf. Maréchal, *Maréchal Reader*, 62-69; Vertin, “Affirming a Limit and Transcending It,” 117; Lonergan, *Insight*, 368-370.

sense experience, not alone though, but through the senses. This “postulate” should not be a surprise, because everyone who speaks about sense experience is presupposing that intelligence is not foreign to the realm of the sensible. The doctrine of the *conversio ad phantasmata* is grounded on the same presuppositions. The question of the interaction between sensibility and intelligence might appear as a difficult metaphysical problem but, again, the problem is not the fact, which seems evident: the problem is the explanation of the fact.⁷⁸

Perception, then, is the intelligible apprehension of the real and concrete thing as “something that is,” but not independently of sense experience: intelligence apprehends “in” the senses the reality (*esse* as existence) of what is. An elemental judgment will be grounded in this implicit synthesis (*something that is*), as an unfolding of it.⁷⁹

In judgment, human being participates consciously of the perfection of being (*ens*). When we judge, we know something “perfectly” because we not only know it, but we know that it “is.” Here knowledge is completed, in the sense that we consciously take possession of the *reality* of something and, for this reason, only in judgment is there truth (which is the proper perfection of the intellect). In this, I agree with Lonergan.

In my view, however, we are the ones who participate reality *passively* (participation as “taking part from”). In other words, in knowing, we are the ones perfected by the entity of another thing: we do not participate *actively* (participation as “communicating something to,” as “sharing my own with” someone else), that is, we do not participate actively our own perfection to the data, as Lonergan seems to suggest. Instead, judgment is the intentional appropriation of the perfection of being. Not a perfection we posit, but a perfection we have received, because it is a perfection we did not have (i.e., the per-

⁷⁸ For Fabro’s Thomistic explanation, cf. Fabro, *Percezione*, 227-234.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Percepción del Ente* (2013).

fection of the object).

Human knowledge is the remedy of our radical finitude and imperfection,⁸⁰ it is the means of “salvation.” Human beings’ perfection lies in their cognitive openness to the other.⁸¹ We do not need to save the “out there world” from unintelligibility. Instead, we need to be saved from loneliness by Reality, who is offering its friendship at the threshold of our souls.

CONCLUSION

Cognitional Theory is built upon two presuppositions: the theory of experience as a perceptual mosaic and the principle of immanence. Thus, Lonergan’s position of the critical problem could be expressed in this way: “What am I doing when I know, *if experience is considered as data without organization, meaning and existence?*”⁸² and “What am I doing when I know, *if the content of knowledge can never be more than a subjective modification, in the sense that nobody can know anything outside of him or herself?*” The difficulties I have shown in sustaining these presuppositions strongly suggest a revision, not perhaps of the whole theory, but certainly of its foundations. It is true enough that every revision will try to be more attentive to data, understand them better and judge, therefore, more responsibly about the matter at hand. But we do not need to presuppose that those

80 Cf. Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.2, a.2.

81 I am not saying that freedom is not important, or even more important than knowledge. It is out of the purpose of this paper to work out this relationship.

82 For the three basic questions, cf. Bernard Lonergan, “Theology and Understanding,” in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 4, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 132; Michael Vertin, “Rahner and Lonergan” (Course hand-outs, University of Toronto, 2013), Handout #16; Lonergan, “Method in Theology,” 468. The first question suggests in my view a subjectivistic starting point, because it asks about knowledge as an action without taking into account its object, as if we could think about knowing without first thinking in what we know, or as if knowing were not in itself a dual phenomenon.

data have no intelligible content of their own. Instead, more attentiveness to data should lead us to realize that they are unified, and a better understanding of cognitional process should lead us to recognize that knowing is not about completing the data, but about perfecting ourselves with what is truly given.

Only the truth will set us free, free to embrace again (or not!) the fulfillment of our desires in the Other. Our radical desire for perfection does not mean that we already possess perfection, but exactly the opposite. If we open ourselves to the other, some remedy to human being's radical poverty might be found: *some* remedy by natural knowledge, and complete remedy (*salus*) by grace. If instead we lock ourselves up in the "immanentistic castle," we may have a sense of peace and control for a while, but we risk starving to death for lack of supplies... Nowadays, human beings are increasingly consumed by the existential void, and some have no further strength for lowering the castle's drawbridge and letting hope enter again. The problem of knowledge is, in this sense, not simply an academic concern but the very key to understanding and renewing our modern culture.

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