

## Lonergan and Hegel on Some Aspects of Knowing

Michael Baur

---

*Abstract.* Twentieth-century Canadian philosopher Bernard J. F. Lonergan and nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel regarded themselves as Aristotelian thinkers. As Aristotelians, both affirmed that human knowing is essentially a matter of knowing by identity: in the act of knowing, the knower and the known are formally identical. In spite of their common Aristotelian background and their common commitment to the idea that human knowing is knowing by identity, Lonergan and Hegel also differed on a number of crucial points. This essay discusses some key similarities and differences between Lonergan and Hegel on the issue knowing, in the hope that such a discussion might uncover a few possible avenues for further philosophical dialogue about these two important thinkers.

There is always some risk in trying to draw parallels, comparisons, and contrasts between two different thinkers who lived in different time periods and who were motivated by different philosophical and cultural concerns. In spite of the risk, I shall aim in this paper to discuss certain aspects of the thought of Bernard J. F. Lonergan and G. W. F. Hegel, focusing primarily on their accounts of knowing. My examination of Lonergan and Hegel on knowing does not aim at comprehensiveness; the aim rather is to highlight some salient similarities and differences between the two thinkers on the issue of knowing, in the hope of opening up some possible avenues for further dialogue regarding these two original and important thinkers.

### I.

*Lonergan and Hegel on the Identity of Knower and Known.* It might be well to begin with the observation that both Hegel and Lonergan consider themselves to be Aristotelian thinkers. While there may be debate about what Aristotle himself may have said or meant, and about the ways in which Hegel and Lonergan are—or are not—“good” Aristotelians, it is fairly clear that Hegel and Lonergan—as self-described Aristotelians—wish to affirm that “knowing”

is “knowing by identity.” As Aristotle himself observes regarding intellectual knowledge in particular, “what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical [*to auto esti to nooun kai to nooumenon, hê gar thêoretikê epistêmê kai to outôs epistêton to auto estin*].”<sup>1</sup> Following Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas affirms in various contexts that “*sensibile in actu est sensus in actu*” and “*intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu*.”<sup>2</sup> Regarding the basic identity of knower in act and known in act, both Hegel and Lonergan would be in full agreement with Aristotle and Aquinas.

But if knowing is by identity (and in particular, if the intelligible in act is the same as the intelligent in act), then how are we to think of the “objectivity” or “other-directedness” of our knowing? Stated somewhat differently: if knowing consists in a kind of identity (if “the actualities of the faculty and object are one actuality in one subject,” as Aquinas says<sup>3</sup>), then does it follow that nothing is colored or flavored if it is not seen or tasted, and that nothing is intelligible if it is not understood? A preliminary answer to these questions is provided by Aquinas, who explains that we need to distinguish between potentiality and actuality. Once we properly distinguish between the two ways in which both faculty and object can be understood (they can be understood as “in potency” and also as “in act”), we can begin to understand why the earlier (e.g., the materialistic, Empedoclean) philosophers were wrong to draw the conclusions that they did. According to Aquinas:

[these philosophers were] wrong in supposing that nothing was white or black except when it was seen; or had savor except when it was tasted; and so forth. And because they thought that nothing existed except what was sensible, and that the only knowing was sensation, they concluded that the whole being and truth of things was a mere appearance; and further, that contradictories could both be true at the same time, if and because they seemed true to different people.

Now this is partly true and partly false. Sense-faculty and sense-object can be taken in two ways, as in potency and as in act. From the point of view of act, what they said was correct: there is no sense-object without sensation. But it is not true from the point of view of potency.<sup>4</sup>

Developing upon Aquinas’s argument, Lonergan observes that it is true that knowing consists in a kind of identity between knower and known; but there is a kind of non-identity as well. For if there were no non-identity or difference between knower and known, then all knowing would be a kind of self-knowing.

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.4, 430a4; see also *De Anima*, III.2, 426a16.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Aquinas, *In De Anima*, III.2; and Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 85, a. 2, ad1.

<sup>3</sup>Aquinas, *In De Anima*, III.2.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

Just as Aquinas insisted on the importance of distinguishing between potency and act, Lonergan insists on the importance of distinguishing between the ways in which one and the same form can be received by different recipients:

The form of the knowing must be similar to the form of the known, but also it must be different; it must be similar essentially for the known to be known; but it must differ modally for the knower to know and not merely be the known. Modal difference of form results from difference of recipients: the form of color exists naturally in the wall but intentionally in the eye because wall and eye are different kinds of recipient. . . . There remains a still further step to be taken. Why have forms two different modes of existence, natural or intentional, according to difference in recipients? It is because the Thomist system conceives perfection as totality: if finite things which cannot be the totality are somehow to approximate towards perfection which is totality, they must somehow be capable not only of being themselves but also in some manner the others as others; but being themselves is natural existence and being the others as others is intentional existence.<sup>5</sup>

This passage suggests an interesting parallel between the Aristotelian, Thomistic thought of Lonergan and the Aristotelian, post-Kantian thought of Hegel. Like Lonergan and Aquinas, Hegel wishes to think of “perfection as totality.” In approximating towards the perfection which is totality, finite beings—on Hegel’s account—do not just seek to be themselves; they seek to be themselves precisely by overcoming, negating, or cancelling out the otherness of that which (at first) appears to them as wholly other. Now there are two ways in which finite beings can negate or cancel out this otherness of the other. First, they can do so by negating or destroying the other itself and thus by preventing the other from remaining the other that it is. This happens, for example, when an animal, through its own vegetative activities, consumes a plant or consumes another animal (thus turning the organic matter of the other into its own organic matter, and thereby preventing the other from being the other that it is—or was). But there is a second way in which finite beings can negate or cancel out the otherness of the other. They can do so by *becoming* the other cognitively or intentionally. By becoming the other in this way, a finite being is able to cancel out the otherness of the other, yet without cancelling out or destroying the other itself. In becoming the other cognitively or intentionally, the finite being is able to overcome or cancel out the otherness of the other—and thus is able to approximate to the perfection which is totality—precisely by allowing

---

<sup>5</sup>Bernard J. Lonergan, SJ, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David B. Burrell, CSC (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 151.

the other to be what it is. After all, the finite being's act of becoming the other cognitively or intentionally does not, in itself, change or destroy the other as other; rather, it allows the other to be the other that it is.

Along these lines, Hegel argues that mere animal desire (which seeks to overcome the otherness of the other by means of consuming and destroying the other) is an imperfect way for a finite being to approximate to the perfection which is totality. On one level, it might appear as if animal desire is the most perfect way for a finite being to approximate to perfection and totality; for animal desire—by virtue of consuming and destroying the other—completely does away with the other and seemingly asserts its own self-sufficiency and independence from anything outside of itself. But as Hegel argues, “we philosophical observers” are able to see that the apparent self-sufficiency and independence of animal desire is a fiction; rather than approximating more perfectly to self-sufficiency and totality, animal desire—by entirely negating or cancelling out the other—makes itself dependent on the appearance of a *new* other (that is, the finite being which exemplifies mere animal desire renders its own sustenance and ongoing existence dependent on the appearance of a *new* object to be consumed and thus destroyed).<sup>6</sup> In other words, finite beings which exemplify the logic of mere animal desire are always dependent for their own being on the sheer, extrinsic, givenness of objects whose very givenness can never appear to such finite beings as continuous with and connected to their own activity as the finite, desiring beings that they are. Unlike desire in the form of labor, for example, desire in the form of mere animal desire is systematically unable to apprehend a basic truth about itself; this is the truth that objects which are given as suitable for satisfying desire, are not simply given apart from the activity of the living, desiring finite being, but in fact are objects which are suitable for satisfying desire, precisely because of the desiring finite being's own determinate characteristics and activity.<sup>7</sup>

It is for this reason, argues Hegel, that finite beings which exemplify the logic of animal desire are fundamentally dependent beings which only very imperfectly approximate to the perfection which is totality.<sup>8</sup> Such animal-desiring beings must consume other beings, then consume again, and consume yet again, ever dependent on the seemingly fortuitous, externally-governed cycle of freshly appearing objects in their environment, objects whose being can never appear to the animal-desiring beings as continuous with or connected to their own acts of living and desiring. Hegel's overview of the main point (along with a few

---

<sup>6</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 109.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 115–6.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

explanatory glosses) is as follows: "Thus self-consciousness [in the form of animal desire] by its negative [merely destructive] relation to the object, is unable to supersede [overcome] it; it is really because of that [merely destructive] relation that it produces the object again, and thus the desire as well [it remains ever dependent on the appearance of a new object for it, without being in a position to realize that its own manner of desiring is what makes it thus dependent on the seemingly unrelated, fortuitously given object]."<sup>9</sup>

Hegel's language, and the central argument that he is making, can easily strike casual readers (especially casual modern readers) as hopelessly opaque. But his main point can be stated with relative clarity: finite beings seek to perfect themselves by approximating to totality. They do this by seeking to overcome, negate, or cancel out the otherness of that which appears to them as other. But they can do this in one of two ways: (a) by consuming the other (in accordance with animal desire), and thus by preventing the other from being the other that it is; or (b) by *becoming* the other cognitively or intentionally (that is, by knowing the other), and thus by allowing the other to be what it is. This latter way is the more perfect way of approximating to perfection as totality. It is through this latter way that the finite being can overcome the otherness of the other while at the same time allowing the other to be what it is. By letting the other be (i.e., by respecting the being of the other, even while overcoming the otherness of the other), this latter way of approximating to perfection as totality also avoids the endless cycle of consumption and dependence which characterizes mere animal desire.

For Hegel as well as for Lonergan, finite beings are able to perfect themselves in an especially excellent way, when they succeed not only at being themselves, but also at being (cognitively or intentionally) that which is other than themselves. That is, a finite being perfects itself in an especially excellent way by becoming identical (cognitively) with what it knows. In a set of seminar lectures now published under the title, *Understanding and Being*, Lonergan helpfully contrasts the two ways in which one might conceive of knowing: (a) knowing as the "ontological perfection" of the knower whereby the knower is identical (cognitively or intentionally) with the known; and (b) knowing as a matter of "confrontation" or "taking a look":

Knowing can be conceived as intrinsically or essentially a matter of confrontation, of taking a look, seeing what is there, intuition. Since knowing, on this account, is what comes from the look, anything that comes from the subject is not knowing at all; and if it comes from the subject, that just means it is not knowing. Knowing is what is given in

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 109.

the look, and what is known is what is out there to be looked at and seen when one looks . . . .

On the other hand, if knowing is conceived not as looking but as an ontological perfection of the subject, then you might say that the more knowing there is in the subject that comes from himself the better off he is. The premise that knowing is essentially a matter of looking is denied by this view. A fellow who knows something is better off than a fellow who is ignorant; an intelligent person is better off than a stupid one, and he is more likely to know something. Knowing is a perfection of the subject that knows. It may be that knowing, in some cases, includes knowing something else, but that is incidental.<sup>10</sup>

With these observations, Lonergan is drawing attention to a counter-intuitive and yet exceedingly important feature of the Aristotelian account of knowing (an account that both Lonergan and Hegel endorse). Because knowing is to be conceived primarily as a kind of ontological perfection through identity (the identity of knower and known), there is something backwards in trying first to think of knowing in terms of receptivity, and then secondarily to determine whether and how such receptivity enables the knower to achieve (cognitive) identity with the known. For Lonergan, the Aristotelian account entails that knowing involves first and foremost the act of being identical with the known; only secondarily or incidentally is it the case that this known may refer to something that is other than the knower, and thus something in relation to which the knower is said to be receptive or passive. The act of knowing, considered in itself, is always a matter of being identical with the known; the question of whether this identity of knower and known involves any receptivity (or requires any “input” from that which is outside of the knower) is a further and incidental question. Because knowing is essentially a matter of identity, and only incidentally a matter of receptivity, it is possible, says Lonergan, for there to be knowledge in God, even though there is no receptivity in God. As Lonergan argues (following Aquinas), God knows everything about everything, not because God has taken an exceedingly perspicuous look at all the existing things to be known, but rather because God’s knowing is identical to the known, which is God Himself. That is, God’s act of being is the same as His act of knowing, and what God knows in His act of knowing is nothing other than His own being. Now because God knows Himself, it follows that God also knows everything that is possible (everything that can be created by Him) and everything that is actual (everything that is created by Him). God knows everything about everything, but not because God’s act of knowing is the most open to or most receptive to what can be known. Rather,

---

<sup>10</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, Vol. 5 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 159.

God's act of knowing is not passive or receptive at all; and yet it is a knowing of everything about everything. God's knowing is genuinely a kind of knowing, not because of any receptivity, but rather because in such knowing there is an identity of knower and known.

For Lonergan, knowing first and foremost involves the identity of knower and known, and only incidentally or derivatively might it involve difference, and thus a relationship of dependence or receptivity between knower and known. We might refer to this as the "priority of identity over difference." In a passage from *Insight*, Lonergan further explains this priority of identity over difference:

Again, being is divided from within; apart from being there is nothing; it follows that there cannot be a subject that stands outside being and looks at it; the subject has to be before he can look; and, once he is, then he is not outside being but either the whole of it or some part. If he is the whole of it, then he is the sole object. If he is only a part, then he has to begin by knowing a multiplicity of parts (A is; B is; A is not B) and add that one part knows the others ('I' am A).<sup>11</sup>

A key point here is that knowing can be genuine knowing, for Lonergan, even if there is no distinction or difference between knower and known. It is possible for there to be knowing, even if the knower is fully identical with the whole of being and thus even if there is nothing outside of the knower and in relation to which the knower is receptive. The determination that the knower is receptive in relation to something outside of it, and thus that the knower is not the whole of being, is a determination that is incidental or secondary to the primary and essential determination about knowing, which is that in knowing there is an identity of knower and known.

Like Lonergan, Hegel affirms the priority of identity over difference. Hegel explains this priority (among other places) in remarks that he makes about his immediate post-Kantian precursors, Fichte and Schelling. In making his remarks, Hegel adopts the often opaque language of Fichte and Schelling themselves. But Hegel's main point can be expressed with relative clarity. In order to give an adequate account of knowing, says Hegel, one must recognize that all knowing involves two elements: those of "identity" and "difference." According to Hegel, Fichte and Schelling were right to recognize that knowing necessarily involves both identity (expressed by Fichte as "I = I") and difference (expressed by Fichte as "I ≠ not-I"). Fichte's failing, however, was to regard these two elements as equiprimordial elements in knowing. If identity and difference are both necessary, and yet if they are equiprimordial, then neither one can be

---

<sup>11</sup>Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 377.



made subordinate to the other. But if neither one can be made subordinate to the other, then they must be simply and unconditionally opposed to one another (for identity and difference are different, after all). According to Hegel, Schelling quite rightly identified Fichte's fundamental failing. If, as Fichte held, identity and difference are equiprimordial and simply opposed to one another, then knowing will itself become impossible; for knowing requires that identity and difference have at least something to do with one another (it requires that they not be simply and unconditionally opposed to another).<sup>12</sup> For Schelling, as well as for Hegel, knowing does not involve identity and difference as brutally given and equiprimordial, but rather identity and difference as unified under a principle which prioritizes one to the other. The principle of knowing must not be identity and difference as brutally given and equiprimordial, but rather identity and difference as unified together under the principle of identity (or, as Hegel puts it, the principle of knowing must be "the identity of identity and non-identity"<sup>13</sup>). If one recognizes the necessity of both identity and difference, but fails to acknowledge the priority of identity over difference, then knowing will become impossible and will be reduced—as in Fichte's philosophy—to an infinite and thus unsatisfied striving, or "ought."<sup>14</sup>

There is a further set of implications to the Lonerganian and Hegelian position that knowing is primarily a matter of identity between knower and known, and only incidentally or derivatively a matter of difference or distinction. Lonergan touches upon these implications when he observes:

the object of insight into phantasm is pre-conceptual, so that any expression of it is as conceived and not as such, just as any expression of the object of sight is of it as conceived and not as such.<sup>15</sup>

For Lonergan, the act of insight (the act through which, strictly speaking, the knower in act and the known in act are one and the same) is pre-conceptual. It follows from this that any conceptualization or expression of the act of insight is not the same as the act of insight itself. More to the point, any conceptualization or expression of the act of insight involves a kind of duality or distinction

---

<sup>12</sup>For Hegel's mature thought on identity and difference, see *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1976), 409–31. For an accessible, contemporary account of Hegel on the logic of identity and difference, see Stephen Houlgate, "Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 139–58.

<sup>13</sup>See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 156.

<sup>14</sup>Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, 132–3.

<sup>15</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 164. Or, as Lonergan observes elsewhere, "all insight lies behind the conceptual scene" (*Insight*, 20).



that is not already present in the act of insight itself. In the move from insight to conceptualization or expression, Lonergan observes, “understanding moves from identity with its pre-conceptual object to confrontation with its conceived object.”<sup>16</sup> If one attends to conceptualization and thus to the duality that emerges as a result of the act of insight—and fails to attend to the pre-conceptual act of insight itself—then, on Lonergan’s account, one is apt to overlook and—even more perniciously—to misconstrue the nature of human knowing. More specifically, one is apt to regard human knowing primarily as a matter of duality, confrontation, or “taking a look” at some externally-given (material or conceptual) object. But if one begins by regarding difference and duality (rather than identity) as primary in human knowing, then one will sooner or later be confronted by a seemingly unsolvable bridge-problem (this “bridge-problem” is often expressed in questions of the following sort: “how is truly objective knowledge possible, if objectivity requires that the knower cross a bridge connecting what is ‘inside’ his or her own subjectivity to what is ‘outside’ and thus truly objective?”). According to Lonergan, the misguided attention that philosophers have given to the mind’s products (e.g., concepts, definitions, formulations, etc.) along with their relative inattention to the dynamic activity of human intelligence which generates such products in the first place, have given rise to a pernicious “conceptualism” in the history of philosophy. The conceptualist knows the human intellect “only by what it does” and fails to know the human intellect “by what it is.”<sup>17</sup> According to the conceptualist, knowing does not consist essentially in the identity of knower and known, but is instead a matter of “confrontation” between subject and externally-given (conceptual) object. The conceptualist starting point, according to Lonergan, lies at the heart of Plato’s untenable theory of Forms and recollection,<sup>18</sup> Scotus’s untenable nominalism,<sup>19</sup> and Kant’s untenable transcendental idealism.<sup>20</sup>

Like Lonergan, Hegel frequently observes that one is apt to misconstrue the nature of human knowing, if one attends merely to the products that are generated by subjectivity’s (or spirit’s) activity, and fails to attend to the inner dynamism which lies at the heart of subjectivity and gives rise to such products in the first place. Throughout the history of philosophy, Hegel argues, subjectivity (or spirit) has fallen prey to the tendency to interpret itself or give an account of itself on the basis of (or on the model of) an ontology derived from subjectivity’s own products. Insofar as it knows itself “only by what it does” and thus insofar as it fails to know itself “by what it is,” subjectivity or spirit

---

<sup>16</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 193.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. 186–7; see also 142.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 187–8.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. 187; see also 25.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 25.

is led to overlook and sometimes even falsify its own nature. Thus Hegel quite famously argues, in the section of the *Phenomenology* dedicated to the Master-Slave dialectic, that subjectivity or consciousness in the form of labor ends up misconstruing and debasing itself when it overlooks its own activity in producing objects and ends up interpreting itself as if it were merely one object among others.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, though perhaps less famously, Hegel argues that all forms of object-oriented consciousness (or, as Lonergan might say, all forms of “confrontational” consciousness) misconstrue their own nature insofar as they fail to recognize that “objects” count as the particular objects that they are for consciousness, only because of the (hidden) activity of consciousness itself. Thus consciousness in the form of “sense-certainty” overlooks its own activity when it seeks merely to point at that which is a bare “Here” and “Now” (as if the distinction between one “here” and another “here,” or between one “now” and another “now,” were not a result of its own selectivity and meaning).<sup>22</sup> Perceptual consciousness (e.g., as instantiated in “sound common sense”) overlooks its own activity when it makes judgments about things which remain stable in spite of changes of properties (as if the ability to identify relative permanence in the midst of change were not a function of its own categorial, judging activity).<sup>23</sup> Finally, understanding consciousness (e.g., as instantiated in naïve scientific realism) overlooks its own activity when it builds theories about universal laws and unobservable forces (as if such theory-building were not a result of its own *desire* to perfect itself by attaining cognitive unity with the forces and entities about which it speculating).<sup>24</sup>

## II.

*Lonergan and Hegel on the Difference between Knower and Known.* As we have seen above, both Lonergan and Hegel hold that the identity of knower and known is essential to knowing; any difference between knower and known is secondary or subordinate to that identity. But if Lonergan and Hegel are right about this, then how can human knowing (which, unlike divine knowing, is supposed to involve an element of passivity or receptivity) be a knowing of the other as other (and not merely a kind of self-knowing)? We touched upon this question earlier, and now return to it for a fuller analysis (an analysis which will begin to reveal some important differences between Lonergan and Hegel). Lonergan begins to address this question by noting that the “critical problem” in human knowing (the problem of how we can know both subjects and objects

---

<sup>21</sup>Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 117.

<sup>22</sup>See *ibid.*, 65–6.

<sup>23</sup>See *ibid.*, 77–9.

<sup>24</sup>See *ibid.*, 101–3.

as distinct from one another) cannot be adequately addressed if one begins by thinking of human knowing on the model of “confrontation,” i.e., if one begins by assuming that the knower can reach the known only by stepping outside the confines of his or her own subjectivity). For Lonergan, the critical problem:

is not a problem of moving from within outwards, of moving from a subject to an object outside the subject. It is a problem of moving from above downwards, of moving from an infinite potentiality commensurate with the universe towards a rational apprehension that seizes the difference of subject and object in essentially the same way it seizes any other real distinction. Thus realism is immediate, not because it is naïve and unreasoned and blindly affirmed, but because we know the real before we know such a difference within the real as the difference between subject and object.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel makes a similar point when he criticizes the Kantian presumption that our faculty of knowing is a kind of medium or instrument which blocks our access to being (or “the Absolute”), and thereby limits us to knowing mere appearances only. The Kantian position is ultimately self-defeating, argues Hegel, since it makes claims (which it takes to be true) about our faculty of knowing; and yet it also makes the claim that we cannot know what is true but only what appears to be true. The Kantian position:

takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an *instrument* and as a *medium*, and assumes that there is a *difference between ourselves and this cognition*. Above all, it presupposes that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other, independent and separated from it, and yet is something real; or in other words, it presupposes that cognition which, since it is excluded from the Absolute, is surely outside the truth as well, is nevertheless true, an assumption whereby what calls itself fear of error reveals itself rather as fear of truth.<sup>26</sup>

So Lonergan and Hegel—each relying on his own particular kind of argumentation and language—affirm that knowing the other as other is not a matter of crossing a divide, or moving from “inside” the subject to an object on the “outside.” Instead, knowing the other as other involves making distinctions within what is known. But how precisely are such distinctions to be made? For Lonergan, as we have already seen, our knowledge of the other as other is bound up with our knowledge of a difference in recipients (or difference in potency). To be sure, knowing as such is primarily a matter of identity: the sensible form

---

<sup>25</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 88.

<sup>26</sup>Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 47.

that is in the object as sensed is identical with the sensible form that is in the sensory knower that is sensing; and the intelligible form that is in the object as understood is identical with the intelligible form that is in the intellectual knower who understands. It is through reflection, Lonergan argues, that one arrives at knowledge of the difference of potency in the knower and known:

But the problem of knowledge, once it is granted that knowledge is by identity, is knowledge of the other. As long as faculty and object are in potency to knowing and being known, there is as yet no knowledge. Inasmuch as faculty and object are in act identically, there is knowledge indeed as perfection but not yet knowledge of the other. Reflection is required, first, to combine sensible data with intellectual insight in the expression of a *quod quid est*, of an essence that prescind from its being known, and then, on a deeper level, to affirm the existence of that essence. Only by reflection on the identity of act can one arrive at the difference of potency.<sup>27</sup>

Because of one's affirmation of this difference in potency, Lonergan holds, it becomes possible to make true judgments about objects which have the reality that they do, even apart from the subject's own knowing of such reality. As long as the knowing and the known are identical in act, the knowing does not yet involve a knowing of the otherness or independence of the other that is known. It is only through reflection that one can arrive at a set of correct judgments which affirm, in effect, that: "I am; it is; it is not me; and it would be the reality that it is even if I did not happen to arrive at knowledge of it." According to Lonergan, then, the attainment of objectivity in knowing does not involve crossing any divide between subject and object (or objects), but consists rather in the making of true judgments which affirm the reality of the subject, the reality of an object or objects, and—finally—a real distinction between the subject and its object or objects. Lonergan explains:

We have been describing knowledge as something going on within the subject. How does the subject know anything besides himself, if what we have been describing is simply a process going on within the subject? . . . If your judgments fall into the pattern we have described, then insofar as those judgments are acts of knowing, you are knowing objects and subjects according to the fulfilment of conditions. In other words, there is no problem of a bridge [from the subject to the object]. If you can reach the judgment, you are there. An object means no more than that A is. If I am A, and A is, and B is, and A is not B, then we have a subject: I am a knower . . . ; and we have an object: something that A knows, that I know,

---

<sup>27</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 72.

that is not myself, that is not the subject. Through true propositions, you can arrive at an objective world. That is the principal notion of objectivity.<sup>28</sup>

For Lonergan, acts of reflective understanding enable the knower to grasp what is called “the virtually unconditioned” and thereby to make true judgments about the way things are in reality:

By the mere fact that a question for reflection has been put, the prospective judgment is a conditioned; it stands in need of evidence sufficient for reasonable pronouncement. The function of reflective understanding is to meet the question for reflection by transforming the prospective judgment from the status of a conditioned to the status of a virtually unconditioned; the reflective understanding effects this transformation by grasping the conditions of the conditioned and their fulfilment.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, Lonergan argues that when one reaches the virtually unconditioned and makes a true judgment about the way things are in reality, one enters into an “absolute realm” of objects; that is to say, one obtains knowledge of the way things really are in themselves, independent of and unconditioned by one’s own knowledge or judgments about such things. Thus:

The principal notion of objectivity is concerned with a multiplicity of objects, some of which are subjects. It involves a multiplicity of true judgments falling within a certain pattern. But absolute objectivity is found in each judgment by itself. The virtually unconditioned is an unconditioned, and an unconditioned is an absolute. An unconditioned is not dependent, qua unconditioned, on anything. Not depending on anything, it is not dependent on the subject.<sup>30</sup>

Lonergan makes the same point, but using slightly different language, in his essay on “Cognitional Structure.” In this essay, Lonergan observes:

Because human knowing reaches such an unconditioned, it transcends itself. For the unconditioned qua unconditioned cannot be restricted, qualified, limited; and so we all distinguish sharply between what is and, on the other hand, what appears, what seems to be, what is imagined or thought or might possibly or probably be affirmed; in the latter cases, the object is still tied down by the relativity to the subject; in the former the self-transcendence of human knowing has come to its term; when

---

<sup>28</sup>Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 172.

<sup>29</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 280.

<sup>30</sup>Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 172.

we say that something is, we mean that its reality does not depend upon our cognitional activity.<sup>31</sup>

In response to Lonergan's account of objectivity, Hegel would be likely to ask: is it really possible (as Lonergan says it is) for the human knower, in knowing an object which it distinguishes from itself, to know not only the reality of the object known, but also that this reality is independent of and unconditioned by the knower's own cognitional activity in knowing it? Is it really possible for the human knower ultimately to arrive at a set of true judgments which affirm, in effect, that "I am; it is; it is not me; and it would be the reality that it is even if a knower such as myself never arrived at knowledge of it"? Hegel is certainly no Berkeleyian idealist, but he would have doubts about the way that Lonergan apparently argues in favor of an affirmative answer to these questions.

For Hegel, a determinate knowing subject can have a determinate knowable object present to it as given, only because the knowing subject is reciprocally determinate in relation to the object and thus reciprocally "fit" for knowing the object in its own particular determinacy. In the case of any determinate subjectivity which finds a knowable object as given to it, the knowable object has the particular determinacy that it has *for* the knowing subject only because the knowing subject has the (reciprocally suited) sort of determinacy that it has. If the knowing subject and the given, knowable object were not determinately suited for one another in this way (if they were not internally related in this way), then they would have nothing to do with one another qua subject and object—in which case it would not be possible for the knowing subject to know the known object, or even to recognize the object as knowable in principle.

Now crucially, Hegel argues, the determinate knowing subject systematically overlooks the role that its own determinacy plays in making possible the knowability of the object as given. And so the determinacy in the determinate subject which makes possible the determinacy and knowability of the determinate object is a determinacy that is systematically overlooked by the determinate subject that is engaged in such determinate knowing.<sup>32</sup> It is a determinacy that can be thematized and thus become *an object only for another subject*. It is for this reason, Hegel argues, that the journey of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (a

---

<sup>31</sup>Bernard Lonergan, "Cognitional Structure," in *Collection*, Vol. 4 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 213.

<sup>32</sup>F. W. J. Schelling, who exercised an early and lasting influence on Hegel, made the same basic point when he observed, in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, that the human knower cannot directly intuit an object other than itself and *at the same time* directly intuit itself as intuiting the object. See F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 54.

journey which uncovers the ultimate conditions of the possibility of determinate knowing subjects and determinate known objects) must take place on the basis of a methodological distinction between “observing” and “observed” consciousness. For Hegel, “we philosophical observers” look on in order to see how “ordinary” (“observed”) consciousness encounters various objects as given within its experience and how this ordinary consciousness tries (ultimately unsuccessfully) to give an account of its knowledge of such objects. The journey of the *Phenomenology* is completed when “we philosophical observers” (a) realize that all such (failed) attempts by “ordinary consciousness” have been exhausted, and at the same time (b) realize that the “ordinary consciousness” which we have been observing all along (the ordinary consciousness which counts as the “object” of *our* observations) is actually not alien or external to us (it is actually not “given” to us) but is in fact the (not yet self-transparent) history of our own selves as philosophical observers.

The upshot of Hegel’s argument in the *Phenomenology* is that the relation between knowing subjects and known objects (regardless of whether the knowing subject is “observing” or “observed” consciousness) is not to be conceived on the model of externally related intraworldly entities. Knowing subject and known object must be understood as being internally related to one another; or—as Lonergan might express the matter—what is meant by “knowing subject” in any particular instance of observed knowing is implicitly defined by what is meant by “known object,” and vice versa. And so contrary to what Lonergan says, Hegel would hold that it is not possible to say with respect to any determinate known object that “I am; it is; it is not me; and it would be the reality that it is even if a knower such as myself never arrived at knowledge of it.”

Hegel’s doubts about the Lonerganian approach might be further expressed by reference to Aristotelian metaphysical considerations. Recall that, for Lonergan, it is possible for us to know that our knowledge is not just self-knowledge but knowledge of a genuine other, since it is possible for us to know that the potency (or kind of recipient) at work in the knower qua knowing subject is different from the potency (or kind of recipient) at work in the known qua object. For Lonergan, intellectual knowing as such is primarily a matter of identity: the intelligible form that is in the object as understood is identical with the intelligible form that is in the intellectual knower who understands. But in spite of this formal identity, there can be a difference between knower and known; there is a difference of knower and known, if there is a difference of potency or a difference in kind of recipient. One and the same intelligible form can exist in different ways in two different potencies or in two different recipients; that is, two different recipients can stand as potency to (intelligible) form in two different ways. The one and same intelligible form can exist naturally (and thus as individualized and only potentially universal) in the object to be known,



while it can exist intentionally (and thus as actually universal) in the knower. Knower and known are formally identical, but it is possible to judge truly that they are also different (and possibly even independent of one another), if one is able to judge truly that knower and known are different in potency and thus that they are different in the way they receive the same, identical form.<sup>33</sup> Now Hegel could raise the following, Aristotle-inspired metaphysical question: how is it possible for the knower to know definitively that the potency (or receptivity to form) which is at work in the known object is different from the potency (or receptivity to form) which is at work in his own role as knower? After all, the knower can have no intelligent apprehension or acquaintance with the potency that is at work in the object except insofar as this potency is already informed by the intelligible form which makes the object the determinate—and thus knowable—object that it is in the first place. But this means that the knower can have no intelligent apprehension or acquaintance with the potency that is at work in the object qua potency; and if the knower has no intelligent apprehension of this potency qua potency, then—it seems to follow—the knower is not in a position to make an intellectually-grounded judgment to the effect that the potency (or kind of receptivity) at work in the known object is different from the potency (or kind of receptivity) at work in the knowing subject. And if the knower is not in a position to make this sort of judgment, then the knower is also not in a position to know that knower and known—which are formally identical—are nevertheless different (and thus possibly independent of one another).<sup>34</sup> And so, once again, it is not possible for the knower ultimately to arrive at a set of true judgments which definitively affirm that “I am; it is; it is not me; and it would be the reality that it is even if I did not arrive at knowledge of it.”

Now Lonergan might respond by saying that Hegel’s doubts might be justified, if a definitive explanatory account of the universe is one in which all relations between things (including relations between subjects and objects) were internal relations, and thus if there were no real external relations between things in a definitive explanatory account of the universe. But Lonergan directly argues that a definitive explanatory account of the universe would not be one

---

<sup>33</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 151.

<sup>34</sup>In other words: it always remains possible that the potency which the knower attributes to the object (and thus which forms the basis for the knower’s judgment that the object is different from and perhaps even independent of himself as knower) could turn out to be a (not-yet-discovered) potency that lies hidden within himself as knower. It is this very possibility which haunted early supporters of Kant’s critical philosophy and led them to begin thinking differently about Kant’s thing-in-itself. For the early supporters of Kant’s critical philosophy were compelled to address the following question from the skeptics and the idealists: “is it not possible that the thing-in-itself which the Kantian knower regards as being outside of or independent of himself could turn out to be a (not-yet-discovered) feature or capacity that lies hidden within the knower himself?”

in which there were only internal relations. In order to understand Lonergan's argument on the matter, we must consider his explanation of the distinction between internal and external relations. According to Lonergan, "Relations are said to be internal when the concept of the relation is intrinsic to the concept of its base,"<sup>35</sup> such that—for example—the base of the relation, "father," would be Abraham and the term of the relation would be Isaac.<sup>36</sup> So the concept of the relation, "father," is intrinsic to the concept of Abraham qua father; one cannot understand Abraham's being a father apart from Abraham's relation to something other than Abraham (which, in this case, is the term of the relation: Isaac qua child). By contrast, relations are said to be external "when the base remains essentially the same whether or not the relation accrues to it."<sup>37</sup> Lonergan illustrates the distinction between internal and external relations by reference to the two different ways in which the concept of "mass" might be understood:

if "mass" is conceived as a quantity of matter and matter is conceived as whatever satisfies the Kantian scheme of providing a filling for the empty form of time, then the law of inverse squares is external to the notion of mass. On the other hand, if masses are conceived as implicitly defined by their relations to one another and the law of inverse squares is the most fundamental of those relations, then the law is an internal relation, for the denial of the law would involve a change in the concept of mass.<sup>38</sup>

Now a crucial question that Lonergan raises is the following: would a definitive explanatory account of the universe be an account in which all external relations were "explained away" and thus replaced by internal relations? Or stated differently, would a definitive explanatory account of the universe be an account in which only internal relations survived and thus in which only internal relations were known? On the face of it, Lonergan acknowledges,

it would seem that on a definitive explanatory account of the universe, all relations would have to be internal. For an explanatory account proceeds by insight; it consists basically of terms and relations with the terms fixing the relations and the relations fixing the terms; and clearly such relations are internal to the terms.<sup>39</sup>

For Lonergan, however, it is a mistake to think that a definitive explanatory account of the universe would include only internal relations. For in addition

---

<sup>35</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 493.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 490.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 493.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

to acts of insight which arrive at implicit definitions (where the relations fix the terms and the terms fix the relations, and thus where there are not external relations but only internal relations), there must also be acts of a different kind of insight: a kind of insight by means of which implicit definitions and abstractive formulations are applied to concrete situations. The necessity of this different kind of insight signals the incompleteness of classical method (which grasps internal relations through abstract system and implicit definition); and it correspondingly signals the need for another kind of method—statistical method—which involves applying the abstract systems of classical method to the manifold, particular cases of the actual, concrete universe. As Lonergan explains:

There does not exist a single ordered sequence that embraces the totality of particular cases through which abstract system might be applied to the concrete universe. In other words, though all events are linked to one another by law, still the laws reveal only the abstract component in concrete relations; the further concrete component, though mastered by insight into particular cases, is involved in the empirical residue from which systematizing intelligence abstracts; it does not admit general treatment along classical lines; it is a residue, left over after classical method has been applied, and it calls for the implementation of statistical method.<sup>40</sup>

For Lonergan, then, it is not possible to arrive at a definitive explanatory account of the actual universe by relying only on acts of insight which grasp the internal relations to be found in the abstract laws and implicit definitions of classical method. There must also be acts of insight which involve *applying* such abstract laws and implicit definitions to actual, concrete cases; and because this different kind of insight is necessary, there will always be an ineliminable “empirical residue” left over from the abstract systems and implicit definitions of classical method. Accordingly, Lonergan argues, there will be—even in a definitive explanatory account of the universe—relations which are real and external, and thus not ultimately eliminable in favor of purely internal relations.

For Lonergan, then, a key mistake consists in thinking that what he calls classical method is the only method by means of which human beings can apprehend the intelligibility of the universe of being. It is true, Lonergan says, that systems to be reached by classical method are systems in which there are only internal relations. But this is

not the whole truth. Because classical systems are abstract, because they can be applied to the concrete only by appealing to a non-systematic manifold of further determinations, there also are statistical method and statistical laws . . . .

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 87.

Accordingly, while we must grant that the shift from description to explanation involves a shift from external to internal relations, still, we also contend that the internal relations constitute no more than the component of primary relativity and, since in concrete relations there is also a component of contingent secondary determinations, external relations survive in a definitive explanatory account of our universe.<sup>41</sup>

Now Hegel would not deny that acts of understanding which give rise to implicit definitions and classical laws in science are necessarily abstractive; nor would he deny that statistical laws are needed if one is to develop a complete and definitive explanatory account of empirically-given reality. Nevertheless, Hegel would still have doubts about Lonergan's argument to the effect that in a definite explanatory account of the universe there would be not only real internal relations but also real external relations. Indeed, Hegel would regard Lonergan's argument as essentially question-begging.

Consider the basic argument that Lonergan wants to make: Lonergan wants to hold that a definitive explanatory account of the universe is not an account in which there are only internal relations. In a definitive explanatory account of the universe, he says, there will be real external relations as well as real internal relations. But why is this so? Lonergan's answer is that, in a definitive explanatory account of the universe, there will remain external relations, since classical methods of understanding (by which intelligence grasps implicit definitions and internal relations) are necessarily abstractive and so necessarily require a further kind of understanding, a kind of understanding in which what is known in the implicit definitions and internal relations is *applied* to an empirically given manifold of concrete instances, a manifold of concrete instances that includes an empirical residue not captured by the implicit definitions and internal relations. But precisely why do acts of understanding which grasp only implicit definitions and internal relations fail to capture the intelligibility which might exist in this empirically-given manifold of concrete instances? Such acts of understanding fail to capture the intelligibility which might exist in the empirically-given manifold since—as abstractive acts of understanding—they *are externally related* to this empirically-given manifold. Indeed, to say that such acts of understanding are abstractive, even though the empirically-given manifold is itself concrete and particularized, is just another way of making the point that acts of understanding which grasp only internal relations are themselves *externally related* to the empirically-given manifold. But to argue that external relations would survive in a definitive explanatory account of the universe, and to support such an argument by relying on the premise that a certain kind of external relation exists in such a

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 493–4.

universe (namely, the external relation between abstractive acts of understanding and the empirically-given manifold to which such acts of understanding can be applied), is to beg the question.

This is why, from Hegel's point of view, Lonergan's argument for the persistence of real external relations in a definitive explanatory account of the universe is a question-begging argument. Instead of *explaining why* external relations would survive in a definitive explanatory account of the universe, the claim that classical method is necessarily abstractive and thus needs supplementation by acts of understanding which *apply* such abstractive acts of understanding to concrete, empirically-given instances, is simply a way of *restating* the view that external relations would survive in a definitive explanatory account of the universe. But the idea that external relations would survive in a definitive explanatory account of the universe is something that Hegel would contest. Rather than answering Hegelian doubts about real external relations (and in particular, about real external relations between knowers and knowns), Lonergan's appeal to the abstractive character of classical method merely begs the question.

This is not the place to illustrate how Hegel would aim to present a non-question-begging account of the difference between knower and known (in spite of their formal identity). Such an illustration would be far beyond the proper scope of the present essay. But some concluding and perhaps helpfully suggestive observations might be in order. From Hegel's point of view, a non-question-begging account of the identity-and-difference of knower and known must not begin by assigning (whether implicitly or explicitly) a normatively fundamental role to acts of understanding that are necessarily abstractive. For as we have seen, beginning in this way commits one to the underlying premise (whether this premise is explicitly articulated or not) that there are real external relations (e.g., real external relations between knower and known) in a definitive explanatory account of the universe. For Hegel, an account that does not beg any of the central questions at issue must begin by assigning a normatively fundamental role to what—in various contexts—has been called “intellectual intuition,” “self-positing,” or “reason” (where the term “reason” is meant to signal its difference from mere “understanding”).<sup>42</sup>

For Hegel, the form of thinking that is operative in “intellectual intuition,” “self-positing,” or “reason” is necessarily non-abstractive and non-representational; in such thinking, there is no distinction between subject and object, concept and intuition, the *apriori* and *aposteriori*, or theory and practice. For Hegel, it is only such thinking which is fully true to the view that Kant had

---

<sup>42</sup>The idea of “reason,” according to Hegel's account in the *Phenomenology*, is the idea that consciousness is not externally related to reality but is, in a certain sense, “all reality.” See Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 138.

only imperfectly articulated in the “transcendental deduction” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely that there is “no subject without an object and no object without a subject”; or “no self without a world and no world without a self.”<sup>43</sup> On Hegel’s view, only such thinking is able to recognize that there is no being-for-the-self which is not made possible by the self’s own being-for-itself. Once one enters into this form of thinking, the key challenge becomes the challenge of giving an adequate account of how it is true that there is “no self without a world and no world without a self,” even though the world that exists for the self is at the same time a genuinely objective world, i.e., a knowable world that presents itself to the knowing self (even “imposes” itself on the self) with an integrity and necessity and recalcitrance that is in no way reducible to the contingent wants or arbitrary desires of the self. It is the task of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* to lead the not-yet-converted reader to recognize this fundamental and ineliminable difference of knower and known, in spite of their even more fundamental and more primordial identity.

In an early fragment (from 1796) which has come to be known as the “Earliest System Programme of German Idealism,” Hegel explains that the primordial “intellectual intuition” or “self-positing” from which philosophy must take its orientation involves a kind “creation out of nothing.” To begin with the primordial act of “intellectual intuition” or “self-positing” is to begin, in a way, with a kind of “creation out of nothing.” For to begin with “intellectual intuition” or “self-positing” is to begin with the realization that there is no world for the self if there is no act of the self’s being for itself, and no act of the self’s being for itself if there is no world for the self:

The first Idea is, of course, the presentation of *my* self as an absolutely free essence [or the presentation of my being-for-myself in a fully non-determinate, non-representable—and thus free—way]. Along with the free, self-conscious essence there stands forth—out of nothing—an entire *world*.<sup>44</sup>

The key point here is that, for Hegel, the terms “self” and “world” (or “knower” and “known”) are not to be understood as referring to two separate or separable entities that can be understood as bearing some kind of external relation to one another. Instead, for Hegel, “self” and “world” (or “knower” and “known”)—understood most primordially—are coextensive with one another; they are

---

<sup>43</sup>One of Kant’s more famous articulations of this view is to be found in the following passage: “The *apriori* conditions of a possible experience are at the same time conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience.” See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A111.

<sup>44</sup>This translation of the “Earliest System Programme Fragment” is taken from H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight (1770–1801)* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), 510.

two different aspects under which one and the same non-determinate, non-representational activity (the activity of “intellectual intuition” or “self-positing”) might be thought. In such “intellectual intuition” or “self-positing,” there is no world that is not always already *for* a self; and there is no self that is not always already mirroring the *entire* world.<sup>45</sup>

On Hegel’s account, the self mirrors or reflects the entire world “all at once,” so to speak; the self is essentially coextensive with the entire world. It follows from this that the relation between self and world (or “subject” and “object,” or “knower” and “known”) cannot—on Hegel’s account—be truly understood on the model of any relation between one intrawordly entity and another. Furthermore, for Hegel, if one wishes to give a non-question-begging account of the difference (in spite of the identity) between knower and known, one must grasp the full implications of the idea that the relation between knower and known is altogether different from any relation between one intrawordly entity and another. That is, one must realize (contrary to what Lonergan says) that judgments about the difference between knowers and knowns are not to be arrived at in “essentially the same way” that one arrives at “any other real distinction.”<sup>46</sup> From Hegel’s point of view, Lonergan is ultimately guilty of interpreting the subjectivity of the subject on the basis of a model derived from (objective) intrawordly beings. To be sure, Lonergan regularly insists that the presence of the subject to itself is altogether different from the presence of objects to one another, and altogether different from the presence of any object to the subject.<sup>47</sup> But while Lonergan may be correct to insist on this particular truth about subjectivity, it remains possible that he may have nevertheless overlooked another truth. This is the truth that—as Hegel would insist—a philosophically sound and non-question-begging account of the identity-and-difference of knower and known (subjectivity and objectivity) cannot begin by assigning the sort of normative significance that Lonergan assigns to intelligence as abstractive and thus as externally related to the known. For Hegel, a philosophically sound and non-question-begging account must begin rather with the non-abstractive, non-representational act of intellectual intuition or self-positing, according to which knower and known are coextensive with one another and thus not

---

<sup>45</sup>An important precursor to Hegel’s idea here is, of course, the idea of the Leibnizian monad. The Leibnizian monad mirrors or reflects or perceives the entire world “all at once,” even if such mirroring or perception is not fully conscious. Because the self, on Hegel’s account, mirrors or reflects the entire world “all at once,” it is coextensive with the entire world. It follows from this that the relation between self and world (or “subject” and “object,” or “knower” and “known”) is not—on Hegel’s account—anything like an intrawordly relation between one determinate, representable entity and some other determinate, representable entity outside of it.

<sup>46</sup>Lonergan, *Verbum*, 88.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 15.



related to each other externally in the way that two intraworldly entities might conceivably be related.

Perhaps a final question is in order: might one defend Lonergan against Hegelian criticisms by relying on what Lonergan says about statistical investigations? If so, then a possible Lonerganian defense might be expressed as follows: if, as Lonergan says, statistical investigations yield true judgments about reality, then reality itself includes non-systematic as well as systematic processes. But if reality itself includes non-systematic processes, then there is no question-begging at work in the Lonerganian claim that reality includes external as well as internal relations. Instead of being a question-begging assumption, the assertion that reality includes external relations would be a justified conclusion drawn from the fact that statistical investigations yield true judgments about non-systematic processes that exist in reality itself.

It is beyond the scope of the present essay to provide a full and adequate response to this possible Lonerganian defense. But a preliminary, two-part response might be suggested. First, the question of whether or not statistical investigations actually do yield true judgments about reality is not a question that can be settled empirically. It is an empirical fact, of course, that many scientists who engage in statistical investigations also happen to believe that such investigations yield true judgments about non-systematic processes that exist in reality itself. But the claim that statistical investigations yield *true* judgments about reality is a philosophical claim which is bound up with (which implies and is implied by) a host of other claims in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind.<sup>48</sup>

Secondly, it is possible to hold that non-systematic processes exist in reality itself, while at the same time denying that “knower” and “known” are related externally in the way that Lonergan says they are. So even if Lonergan is right to hold that non-systematic processes exist in reality, he may not be right to hold that it is possible for a human knower to arrive at the following set of correct judgments regarding some given subject matter: “I am; it is; it is not me; and it would be the reality that it is even if a knower such as myself never arrived at knowledge of it.” One philosopher who would surely disagree with Lonergan in this connection is the American pragmatist philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce vigorously defended the idea that there are chance events (and thus non-

---

<sup>48</sup>Even Lonergan himself apparently raised doubts about whether statistical investigations can yield *true* judgments about reality. In order to come up with a satisfactory theory of probability, Lonergan suggests, one would need to address “the difficulty involved in introducing the notion of infinity. The empirical scientist never reaches an infinity of cases; and if infinity is involved in the very notion of probability, then one may at least raise the question whether it is ever possible either to establish or to refute any given probability.” See Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 74.

systematic processes) in reality itself,<sup>49</sup> but he just as vigorously rejected the idea that the relation between knower and known can be construed as an external relation.<sup>50</sup> Not surprisingly, Peirce regarded himself as something of a latter-day “objective idealist”<sup>51</sup> in the spirit of Hegel.<sup>52</sup>

*Fordham University*  
*New York, NY*

---

<sup>49</sup>See Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 298–311.

<sup>50</sup>For example, Peirce writes: “if in pitch darkness a tremendous flash of lightning suddenly comes, you are ready to admit having received a shock and being acted upon, but that you reacted you may be inclined to deny. You certainly did so, however, and are conscious of having done so. The sense of shock is as much a sense of resisting as of being acted upon. So it is when anything strikes the senses. The outward excitation succeeds in producing its effect on you, while you in turn produce no discernible effect on it; and therefore you call it the agent, and overlook your own part in the reaction. . . . The main distinction between the Inner and the Outer Worlds is that inner objects promptly take any modifications we wish, while outer objects are hard facts that no man can make to be other than they are. Yet tremendous as this distinction is, it is after all only relative. Inner objects do offer a certain degree of resistance and outer objects are susceptible of being modified in some measure by sufficient exertion intelligently directed.” See Charles Sanders Peirce, “On Phenomenology,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, ed. The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>51</sup>Thus Peirce writes that “The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws.” See Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Architecture of Theories,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 293. Elsewhere Peirce observes that “My philosophy resuscitates Hegel, though in a strange costume.” See Charles Sanders Peirce, “Principles of Philosophy,” in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1960), 18. According to what has become the standard practice for citing from Peirce’s *Collected Papers*, the reference for this particular citation would be: *CP* 1.42.

<sup>52</sup>My work on revising this essay has benefitted greatly from the input of two anonymous reviewers for the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*. It goes without saying—though I will say it nevertheless—that all unaddressed shortcomings or oversights in this essay remain solely my responsibility.