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Method in Philosophy

1. Introduction

Even when he was a young student, Lonergan was deeply interested in philosophy and investigated the nature and methods of knowledge in many fields of learning. That early concern, improved by personal studies and readings, instead of cooling as a consequence of his engagement in the Society of Jesus as a professional theologian, he always kept alive and this became the basis for his original formulation of what he called Transcendental Method (see *Method in Theology*, 1972) or Generalized Empirical Method (see *Insight*, 1957).¹

Lonergan associated his methodological and philosophical concern for the renewal of thinking in the Catholic world with attention to the cultural change that characterizes the present time: that is, an unrestrained scientific development—although ambiguous on the technological side—an ever deeper attention to the historical and hermeneutical dimension of human studies, a widespread cultural pluralism that refuses to consider classical culture as unique and normative, the ever-growing specialization of knowledge into so many branches, the inadequacy of the ideals fixed by logic,² the importance of method, that is, the activity present in every kind of knowledge.³

On the basis of his lucid and detailed analyses, Lonergan felt it necessary to make a radical transposition from classic Thomism (especially in its neo-scholastic formulation) to a new form of philosophical and theological thought adequate for our day. Consequently, Lonergan proposed five famous “transpositions” from classical to contemporary culture. These manifested his research program and his eagerness to dialogue with the complexity of contemporary culture.⁴ It was the realization of these transpositions that led the Canadian philosopher to work out his transcendental method.

I will try here to write about my subject in rather informal language, since these pages are not addressed to specialists, but to people who are teachers or work in the field of education.

2. *The Transcendental Method and Philosophy*

Obviously there is a very close relation between the transcendental method worked out by Lonergan through philosophy and its methodical procedure. I shall try to explain that relation not only with reference to the two main works by Lonergan (*Insight* and *Method*) but also to a very large number of minor writings now collected into several volumes of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* by the University of Toronto Press. Among these works I shall mention only one, which seems to me particularly important for our theme: Lonergan’s answer to a *Questionnaire on Philosophy* for a symposium on philosophy held near Rome in September, 1977.⁵

First of all, transcendental method is basically a personal way of proceeding that involves an analysis of one’s own process of learning (the Greek word “method” includes the meaning “the way”) in order to arrive at the self-appropriation of him/herself as a knower. The goal is the knowledge of one’s own intentional cognitive and moral dynamism as a starting point for the further “flourishing” of the human subject, not only from the intellectual but also from the existential point of view.

This project is rooted in two strong motivations: 1) on the one hand,

the inquiry into the nature of human knowledge is still today a basic question on which philosophers and epistemologists have yet to reach agreement; 2) on the other hand, every abstract theory of knowledge based on some *a priori* assumption comes with an “existential joker” since it presupposes what one is seeking to know.

Thus, the proposal of self-appropriation consists in a phenomenological analysis of the conscious operations we perform when we are getting to know something. By beginning with the question in the first person, “What am I doing when I am knowing?” I am invited to “descend” into my interiority (consciousness) in order to pay attention to the operations I perform with the aim of identifying all of them, trying to understand them, relating them to one another and finally verifying if I have properly understood them and their relationships. Self-appropriation means that I have attained the first philosophical judgment, “I am a knower.” By this a human subject becomes acquainted with his/her own nature as a knower: namely with several operations constituting the whole intentional process of human knowing, as well as the unity of one’s own consciousness.

The formulation of all of this Lonergan calls *transcendental method*. It is a *method* because our consciousness is structured on different operational levels (experience, understanding, judgment, decision) and this structure is a set of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. This method is *transcendental*, both because our operational capacity is the *a priori* condition that makes our knowing possible (*transcendental* in the Kantian sense) and because it is the source of several particular methods (*transcendental* in the classic sense). So, the source of knowing is the knowing subject him/herself in his/her operative resources of sensibility, intelligence, reason, as well as affectivity, freedom and responsibility.

The awareness of such resources—self-appropriation—opens new horizons for teachers, pupils and all interested in education.⁶

Lonergan thinks of philosophy as “*the basic and total science, the Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft,*” playing a mediating role between theology and the other sciences as well as human cultures and societies. To fulfill this

task, considering the cultural transpositions from the classical world into the modern world and, particularly, the present conception of science with its own developments, philosophy is conceived by Lonergan as a compound consisting of four basic sections:

- 1) cognitional theory or gnoseology -
What am I doing when I am knowing?"
- 2) epistemology -"Why doing that is knowing"
- 3) the metaphysics of the proportionate being -
"What do I know when I do so?"
- 4) existential ethics.

Cognitional theory tells just what one is doing when one is coming to know. It includes the whole genesis of common sense, of the sciences, of exegetical and historical studies, of the philosophies. It will be radical enough to leave room for future scientific, scholarly, and philosophic developments. It ensures our basic and total science against objections from the sciences of the past and leaves it open to the discoveries of the future.⁷

So, the first dimension of philosophy essentially coincides with transcendental method. As we noted, it supplies us with the normative and immanent pattern of our operative consciousness; this is the "rock" on which every further development is based. Standing upon this rock, it is possible for us to answer the classical questions about the value and the objectivity of our knowing —epistemology— and to go beyond the mistaken views that are still so prevalent today: phenomenism, relativism, skepticism. Moreover, transcendental method allows us to understand what we come to know when we perform our cognitional operations, that is, it allows us to work out a correct notion of proportionate being (the world of our experience), namely a correct notion of reality—metaphysics. Finally, we have to formulate human living according to an existential ethics that traces the shift from unauthenticity, "when one just drifts through life," to authenticity, that is, the discovery

that “one finds out for oneself that one has to decide for oneself what one is to do with one’s life.”⁸ This is the question of personal authenticity.

The basic and total science, philosophy, then, is no longer ancient metaphysics but rather a compound of four parts:

[It] results from understanding both in their similarities and in their differences the several methods of the particular sciences and, as well, the procedures of common sense... In the medieval context logic was the norm and measure of science and by that standard metaphysics was the basic and total science. But in the contemporary context method is the norm and the measure of science, and so it is from an understanding of methods in their similarities and their differences that one attains the basic and total science.⁹

Everything is based on the objectification of our cognitional structure, which has become the touchstone permitting further philosophical developments. And this is possible because our structured consciousness is intentional, namely spontaneously oriented to reality, a shining transparency allowing us to perceive the universe of being, that is to say the notion of being itself.

3. The Originality of Lonergan’s Formulation: Philosophy and Interiority

As classic philosophy started from the ontological analysis of reality – metaphysics - to come to views on knowledge and truth, so Lonergan (influenced by modern thought and especially by Kant) goes on the same path in the opposite direction: from the theory of knowledge through the clarification of the objectivity of human knowledge to the explanation of the notion of being and reality, thus arriving at a possible ontological position. He goes along that path convinced that we

must first deal with the cognitional problem if we want to get rid of so many of the misunderstandings and confusions present in the history of philosophy precisely because one has not yet clearly answered the first important question, that is, the problem of our own knowing: “What am I doing when I am knowing?”

There is no doubt that the human person has a natural desire to know, a conscious, intelligent, rational, deliberate and methodical desire; it is the Aristotelian “wonder.” In every person such a desire becomes an implicit or explicit cognitional ideal; it underwent a profound evolution with the achievement of scientific thought. The philosopher, too, pursues a cognitional ideal that has changed with times. For example, in the modern age there has been the deductive ideal of pure reason that, founding itself on the mathematic model, starts from self-evident principles (necessary and universal) and from clear and distinct concepts deduces some philosophical conclusions that claim to reach absolute certainty (Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Wolff). Then Kant came along and undermined that ideal of pure reason with his thesis that any philosophical knowledge about unconditioned objects is impossible. Then there was Hegel’s attempt to return to an all-inclusive philosophical system through a dialectical process that has its pivot in the *Aufhebung*.

Lonergan’s problem is to know what the right ideal of knowledge is - if any exists. What sort of knowledge is possible and what does it consist in? As we have said, we can get the answer to these questions only if we are personally involved in the concrete and explicit process by which the human cognitional ideal defines itself through cognitional examples drawn from the several fields of knowledge. It is a test that any person claiming to be a philosopher has to take by him/herself, starting from his/her own experience of the cognitive operations he/she has applied to some particular field or example. For knowledge is always the knowledge of something.

The crucial point is that the cognitional ideal for philosophy is the human subject himself, as he is intelligent, as he asks questions and requires intelligible and reasonable answers. Thus, *self-appropriation* is central. Posing as a philosopher, in fact, implies that the subject takes

possession of that ideal of knowledge that *is already given* in the very practice of cognitional intentionality: it is nothing but one's own empirical, intellectual, rational and moral consciousness. According to Lonergan, a person is a philosopher not because he knows the whole history of philosophy, but because he takes a position upon the basic issues concerning knowing, objectivity and reality. Each philosopher has to speak on his own about these issues. According to Lonergan's method, that conception of philosophy, based upon the interiority of the concrete subject with his/her personal experience, is the novelty and at the same time the obstacle one has to overcome in order to call himself or herself a philosopher.

The *novelty* is really the proposal of a quest in the first person starting from the assertion that some types of knowledge are working (that is, the sciences) and that, through the analysis of the operations performed to obtain that certainty, everyone is theoretically able to affirm him/herself as a knower: that is to say, a conscious unity and identity able to perceive, understand and judge. And that is made possible by the complete verifiability of all the elements involved through their immediate presence in one's own consciousness. It is an intentional analysis completely performed upon an empirical basis, even if the data I have to verify are to be found within myself and not outside. The result of such a method is a knowledge characterized by a formally dynamic structure of experience, understanding and judgment, obtained with an epistemological comparison among the various trends of modern and contemporary philosophies.

But for many thinkers that proposal is also an obstacle. First of all, the "masters of suspicion" have thrown an unfavorable light upon consciousness which is considered unreliable since it is the product of a strange mechanism or hidden forces. Then there is Karl Popper's criticism of "psychologism" and his decision to draw up an epistemology with no cognitional subject. Then there is Wittgenstein's decision to prohibit the consideration of mental acts, and analytical philosophy's subsequent analysis of language. Last but not least there are the restrictive claims of some neuroscientists.

The way towards self-appropriation, therefore, can seem to produce very weak and impractical results. As a matter of fact, one is relying on a certain reality that is immediately given to each of us, but at the same time it is so impalpable and elusive that these various philosophical currents have excluded the possibility of taking it into serious consideration. The obstacle is our intentional consciousness, that is to say our subjectivity, so much celebrated even by some contemporary philosophical trends (for example, existentialism) to the extent of vigorously promoting it against an objectivity which they consider cold and impersonal.

What is surprising is that it seems to be the fact that the ultimate basis of this theory of knowledge is a *contingent* event, an event that can occur - and that does in fact occur - and that not even a skeptic can reasonably deny.¹⁰ Everyone has to answer the first philosophical question, Am I a knower? on one's own on the basis of a personal concrete judgment of fact. This is, indeed, the critical foundation of philosophical knowledge. Self-knowing qualifies me and allows me to talk about knowing in the first person, then eventually as a philosopher. Properly speaking, philosophical intelligence is an intensification of one's own critical self-consciousness taking place within the complex context of culture. Everything is based on the factual and contingent aspect of self-affirmation. That fact is real and implies experience. That fact is not indistinct and indeterminate, but is something precisely defined and, therefore, involves some insights and conceptions. Finally, that fact has in itself an element of absoluteness; it is a virtually unconditioned fact, since its conditions for existence are fulfilled. The problem is to establish with absolute certainty that the cognitional structure operating within oneself is the same structure that operates in every other human subject. But, that is proved by the fact that, while we are discussing this theme, each of us knows by common sense that, when someone else is questioning and weighing the answers, he or she is experiencing, understanding and judging just as I am myself. We know all that by judgments of common sense and, certainly, we need not enter into the interiority of anyone else.

Therefore, Lonergan is telling us that it is time that we consider our-

selves seriously as cognitional subjects, as the very source of the enormous knowledge that the human family has accumulated during the millennia. But he is also warning us that this attention on ourselves cannot be separated from the necessity of objectivity. On the contrary, objective knowledge is a goal that can be attained only by a really authentic subject, that is, a subject capable of fully realizing the inner dynamism of his/her consciousness: a self-appropriated subject respecting, as Lonergan puts it in *Method*, the four transcendental precepts: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible. It is important that one get personally involved in the cognitive and cultural enterprise, for no one will be able to reach such a cognitional ideal unless he or she first attains self-appropriation. This task, of course, cannot take place aside from one's own intellectual and existential history.

The centrality of the self-appropriation of one's own conscious activity is "a peak above the clouds"—as Lonergan defines it in the original preface of *Insight*—and it involves a profound *intellectual conversion*: that is:

- (1) eliminate the myth of knowing as simply taking a look at things but realize that it is, on the contrary, a dynamic structure on three levels: experiencing, understanding, judging;
- (2) discover that the criteria of objectivity are a three-fold structure, the same as our cognitional structure;
- (3) modify and enrich the notion of reality, which is not the "already out there now real" - biological extroversion - but rather is attained by correct judgments, after being experienced and understood.

These three theses, according to Lonergan, are the *fundamental position* of *critical realism*. They allow us to pass from a world of immediacy (the world of the infant that lives only on sensations) to a broader world mediated by meanings and values: the world of being, in which one has to acknowledge and distinguish several spheres of being: real being, merely logical being, mathematical being, merely hypothetical being, transcendent being.

That philosophical formulation, while revealing the inadequacy of empiricism and naïve realism, is founded neither on the rationalist claim of the necessity and universality of our judgments, nor on the idealist assumption of the complete coherence of thinking expressed in an ultimate system; it is rather founded on the actuality and contingency of our existence and of our real knowing, capable of overcoming the obstacles of phenomenalism and relativism. We do not know everything, but what we progressively know is reliable and is the fruit of rational judgments, be they certain or probable.

I think that such a conception of knowledge explains Lonergan's radical criticism of Husserl's way of conceiving philosophy.¹¹ Husserl wants to make philosophy a rigorous science, based on necessity and capable of attaining absolute certainties. The search for absolute necessity and absolute certainty is a task beyond man's possibilities; therefore it is bound to fail. On the contrary, our knowledge is founded on the knowledge of the world as contingent and on the assumption that our knowing, too, is a contingent occurrence. Demanding the absolute and being satisfied with nothing but the absolute, results ultimately in skepticism.

That formulation, without doubt original, assumes that philosophy is the knowledge of human interiority (self-appropriation is central) and has the peculiar role of tracing back all other forms of knowledge (no competition is allowed) to their ultimate basis, to the rock where the knower is existentially situated. Lonergan starts from the idea of building metaphysics as a heuristic discourse on the totality of the real, and from that idea, first of all, he takes up a position against all reductive epistemologies, such as empiricism, rationalism, criticism, relativism, naïve realism and idealism.

4. Philosophy and the Dialectical Method

Metaphysics is latent in every intelligent and reasonable individual in his or her existential condition. That spontaneous metaphysics becomes a problematic metaphysics in the theoretical subject (the researcher

or the scholar) who is aware of the necessity of a systematic effort at connecting the specializations in order to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge. At the same time, one can advance from a problematic metaphysics to an explicit metaphysics to the extent that the subject turns into a critical subject, that is to say, into a self-appropriated subject, an intellectually converted person. That subject, the philosopher, is able “to transform and to unify” other knowledge, not because he possesses the best first principles (as the Aristotelian and the scholastics might do), but because the knower knows himself or herself as the ultimate source of meaning and rationality—and their absence as well. I have here synthesized the basic task of philosophy as the knowledge of human interiority, but such a task involves a long and complex search that can be carried out only through a dialectical method that Lonergan outlines in detail.

The dialectical method has taken several different meanings in the course of the history of philosophy. According to Lonergan, the dialectical method specifically applies to the human world and it is not an “undifferentiated tool fit for everything” as Hegel would hold. This “tool” pertains to the field of the data on human development, which is affected by tensions and manifold individual and collective biases and reveals a radical opposition between two operators of human development: the *intellectual operator*, that is, emerging intelligence as a perennial source of superior systems of knowledge and cultures; and the *intersubjective psyche*, that is, the perception common to all animals (man included) and which is tied to the biological world enriched with intersubjectivity—that is, the primeval belonging of man to a prior “we.” So the basic dialectic originates from an in-born confusion between an elementary empirical knowing-perception that is structured upon the motor and perceptive operations of the infant, and a fully intelligent and reasonable knowing that has been successively developed through the abstract operations of our intelligence and the critical ability of our judgment.

At the root of the human dialectic between the intersubjective psyche and the intellectual operator, between an elementary form of knowing and a fully human knowing, between biases and freedom, be-

tween decline and progress, there is the acknowledgment, on the one hand, of the essential incompleteness of the human person and, on the other, of the intrinsically dialectical character of human history.

One should observe that the fruitful use of the dialectical method, as Lonergan intends it, cannot overlook the absolute necessity for one's own intellectual conversion, which leads the self-appropriated subject to the *fundamental position* of critical realism and, at the same time, takes into consideration the protean character of Being

... which as protean now is identified with matter and now with idea, now with phenomena and now with essence, now with a transcendent unknowable and now with the things that exist.¹²

In such a way, we are able to distinguish both the statements in the different sciences and philosophies that are coherent with such a fundamental position and contrasting statements, or *counterpositions*. Some examples can clarify the practice of such a dialectic.

Hume elaborated a brilliant theory of knowing basically conceived as a set of empirical sensations and perceptions confronted and ordered by the human intellect through practice and belief. But in doing so Hume performs a peculiar exercise of his own intelligence that his theory of knowledge does not acknowledge. Therefore in the Scottish philosopher there is a sharp contrast between his brilliant actual operating procedures and his empiricist theory of knowledge. This is an example of Hume's counter-position.

Even Kant is involved in such a dialectic. On the one hand, he affirms that our knowing is limited to the phenomenal world (things-for-us), for his starting point is to consider every quality of our perception as subjective. The empirical datum is already wrapped in our subjectivity. Yet, on the other hand, Kant claims that our knowledge really and truly extends only to phenomena. In doing so he claims to employ a rational judgment about reality transcending his own phenomenalism. His very statement that we know only phenomena belongs to the noumenal world and highlights his counter-position.

In the same manner, neo-positivist philosophers think that every metaphysical, ethical and religious statement has no meaning since it is not verifiable by means of empirical protocols. But, that neo-positivist statement itself (that they claim to be true and rational) cannot be subjected to the principle of verification. Here again is a counter-position: these philosophers deny the possibility of metaphysics by using a metaphysical statement themselves.

Nevertheless Lonergan's attitude is not that of Hegel in judging previous philosophers and the whole history of philosophy. In fact, he does not mean to prove that everything is directed towards his own system and that his system is to be held as the definite one. Lonergan is conscious that the character of philosophy is always temporary and progressive. He is aware of the infinite variety of perspectives and proceedings that are offered to philosophers. He holds that the contributions of each of the philosophers of the past have enabled us to reach a more differentiated individual and socio-cultural consciousness. They have enabled us to give more complete answers to crucial philosophic problems.

The development of mathematics, the maturity of some branches of empirical science, the investigations of depth psychology, the interest in historical theory, the epistemological problems raised by Descartes, by Hume, and by Kant, the concentration of modern philosophy upon cognitional analysis, all serve to facilitate and to illumine an investigation of the mind of man... On the one hand, the philosophers have been men of exceptional acumen and profundity. On the other hand, the many, contradictory, disparate philosophies can all be contributions to the clarification of some basic but polymorphic fact.¹³

That basic polymorphic fact is the intrinsic dialectic of our own intentional consciousness. Lonergan's aim is to show that any theory of knowledge has a great influence on the various possible metaphysical and ethical theories and also on theological research. He formulates his theory upon that very principle: "Positions invite development and

counterpositions invite reversal.”¹⁴ This means that what is coherent with the dynamism of our consciousness leads us to develop our research beyond all that we have attained in our cognitive development. On the contrary, the lack of coherence—especially towards intelligent activities aiming at understanding and judgment – leads the intelligent and reasonable researcher to introduce such coherence into the counter-positions. A clarifying example of what I have just said is the Cartesian dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. While the former is a fundamental position opening on one’s own self, on thinking and on being, the latter is a counter-position, as far as it identifies corporal being with extension— a dimension of the “already-now-there-out-real”— and invites reversal, that is, the correction of the misunderstanding involved in the counter-position.

5. *The Theory of Philosophical Differences*

According to the degree of personal self-appropriation of the three fundamental levels of cognitive operations—today made more complete and precise by the development of human sciences and psychology and by a greater differentiation of socio-cultural consciousness—we are now able to order the numerous and different philosophies and to point out their differences. So, Lonergan traces a theory of the philosophic differences,¹⁵ dividing the different philosophies into three main groups, each of them being organized on one of the three levels of the human knowledge.

In order not to misunderstand such a subdivision, it is necessary to remember that the three levels are always spontaneously operative in all fields of knowledge—common sense, human and cultural studies, the sciences, philosophy, theology—but they are given a different emphasis according to the type and purpose of each particular field of knowledge. In the field of the arts and literature the level of experience is the most relevant. In the field of mathematics and the sciences it is the intellectual level that plays the most important role for it enables us to

reach an insight from any possible amount of sensory data or of images. In the philosophical domain the most relevant is—or ought to be—the reflective–rational level, that is, the skill of judging reality in the midst of a number of insights and conceptual assumptions. It is the third level, in fact, that controls the other two: many experiences (a flow of experiences) are needed to obtain one insight; and many insights are necessary to come to a true judgment. Therefore, it is the rational level of judgment that emerges in philosophy as the key level, especially if we assume that philosophy and metaphysics in particular has to do with the notion of the real. Nevertheless, and here emerges the sense of “the theory of the philosophical differences,” each philosopher, or scientist, or man of letters, or even each person of common sense can organize his or her life mainly on one or other of those three levels. It means that the three different cognitive levels will characterize three different groups of philosophies.

In the first group, philosophy is organized according to the degree of self-appropriation on the empirical level of one’s own self as an experiencing subject. These philosophies emphasize experience, sensory data, all that is empirically verifiable and measurable and the practical comparison of theories. In this group, we can recognize the following: ancient atomism; all materialistic and sensory philosophies, both ancient and modern; empiricism; positivism; neo-positivism; pragmatism; and modernism.

In the second group, philosophy is organized according to a degree of self-appropriation on the intellectual level, of intelligence combined with experience, of the self-appropriation of one’s own self as of one who understands. All these philosophies are characterized by a more articulated theory of knowledge, a theory that acknowledges a more important role to the intellectual side of knowing. Here we can recognize all sorts of Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian, idealistic, relativistic and essentialist philosophies.

In the third group, philosophy is organized according to a self-appropriation at the rational level, that is, at the level of one’s own ability to judge according to the ability of the subject and the possibilities of a given

age and culture. Here are grouped together all realist philosophies, namely all those philosophies assuming *reality* as “what is known” when one truly states “This is,” that is, when one arrives at a true rational judgment.

Inside the previous groupings there are further nuances. In particular, such philosophical differences may extend to the whole of life through the three levels of the good: the particular good, the good of order and value. These correspond to the three levels of value established by Kierkegaard: aesthetic value, ethical value and religious value; here we can specify three spheres of individual subjectivity, and three different types of horizons. Moreover, the distinction among philosophies can affect the social-cultural sphere, so that we can now identify three different cultural stages. The first stage is the stage of *sensate culture*, where attention is centered on particular goods that are related to the experimental level. The second stage is the sphere of an *idealistic* culture centered on the level of the good of order, a stage which therefore implies the centrality of intelligent understanding. The third stage is an *ideational* culture that is based on the centrality of values and, therefore, requires the recognition of the critical ability of to make judgments upon reality.¹⁶

To conclude, as we can attain the metaphysical analysis of a particular being and its components starting from self-appropriation, so it is possible to find all the *categories* to characterize different philosophies according to their level and historic period and also different cultures according to different levels in the development of their self-appropriation.

The above mentioned categories supply a sort of “upper blade” for the study of history, of philosophy, of cultures and literatures, and also for hermeneutics and the theory of interpretation. There is also “the lower blade” constituted by the factual effort to understand what the philosopher assumed and also the meaning of the words he used in the time and place where he lived and spoke. Against a purely positivist approach emphasizing the merely factual, Lonergan in chapter 17 of *Insight* traces the categories of a scientific hermeneutics, and brings that work to fruition in *Method in Theology*. First of all, he remarks that the basis of such hermeneutics is that all documents and monuments of the

past are only sensible signs of a particular order. Any intelligibility we can attribute to these signs lies within the interpreter and depends on his or her capacity to interpret. What is “out-there” only supplies a criterion for the publication of documents or photographs of inscriptions on old monuments and sarcophagi. It is not, then, through the minimum possible effort to understand that we succeed in understanding the ancient philosophers and protagonists correctly; we can reach such a goal only if we try to understand as seriously as possible. Furthermore, we must not be afraid of our “prejudices.” Whoever has emerged from childhood has some development of understanding and the only way to eliminate ideas would be to return to one’s own childhood. Rather, the proper way to understand the task of interpretation is to develop our own intelligence as much as possible:

Interpretation of the past is the recovery of the viewpoint of the past; and that recovery, as opposed to mere subjective projections, can be reached only by grasping exactly what a viewpoint is, how viewpoints develop, what dialectical laws govern their historical unfolding.¹⁷

If we increase the dialectical comprehension that lies within ourselves and come to know ourselves more deeply, we shall have a better chance of understanding the other and we shall be able to move from the present into the past and so succeed in understanding ancient cultures and philosophies.

The theory of philosophical differences is important because it explains that just as there are differences between naïve realists, empiricists, positivists, idealists, phenomenologists and critical realists, so such epistemological differences also influence those who make use of hermeneutics and historical criticism, the interpretative techniques most in fashion today. While explaining the role of the human sciences and their relation to philosophy, Lonergan refers to the theses he had already expounded in *Method in Theology* and says:

There exist scientific techniques to be followed in works of interpretation and in the writing of history; but these techniques do not preclude differences arising from the philosophic, ethical, and religious views of those that employ them; hence interpretation and history have to be regarded as functional specialties to be completed by such further specialties as dialectic and foundations in which radical differences can be dealt with, not indeed automatically but at least openly and clearheadedly.¹⁸

Even if the passage refers to the application of transcendental method to theological research, the meaning of the quotation is clear enough. Lonergan accepts hermeneutics and the historical critical method but only after a prior serious analysis of the presuppositions and epistemology of the interpreters and historians.

Such a project allows Lonergan to escape from the charges of relativism and historicism.¹⁹ In fact, historic relativism (for instance, that of Troeltsch) is the fruit of an epistemological inadequacy. On the contrary,

...truths that are not eternal are relative, not to a place and time, but to the context of a place and time; but such contexts are related to one another; history includes the study of such relations; in the light of history it becomes possible to transpose from one context to another; by such transpositions one reaches a truth that extends over places and times.²⁰

So, through the important notion of “transposition,” Lonergan overcomes the charges of being a relativist and, at the same time, he does not deny the positive achievements of the historical method itself.

6. *Conclusions*

Of course there are many more aspects to deal with in regard to the transcendental method and its relation to the specific method of philosophy, but the limits of the present report compel us to reach a conclusion.

With transcendental method Lonergan appeals to our inner personal experience to analyze the structures of our conscious intentional cognitive operations. In doing so, he leads us to conceive philosophy as the knowledge of that particular field of meaning which is human interiority. At the same time, however, he assumes that such a philosophy (a compound of theory of knowledge, epistemology and metaphysics) is not sufficient, but needs to be supplemented with a “philosophy of action,” able to integrate both the affective and moral dimension when man deliberates, evaluates, makes decisions, and finally acts.

It is on this level that people move from unauthenticity to authenticity; it is on this level that they decide to believe; it is at the root of this level that God’s love floods their hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rm. 5:5).²¹

So philosophy is conceived as “an exercise of wisdom” and a way of living, in which knowledge is not an abstract practice made of concepts and ideas, but is an effective desire to know what things really are and what is worth doing.

To cope with the development of knowledge due to an ever-growing differentiation of the individual and the collective (socio-cultural) consciousness, the task of philosophy based on the transcendental method consists in trying to integrate all these various areas.²² The integration we are dealing with here implies an effort to organize the different fields of meaning of human knowing into a comprehensive unified vision. This is neither the task of common sense, nor the task of either the natural sciences or the human sciences. In fact, all of them, before being integrated, must be sufficiently differentiated as to their specific methods and classifications. Integration, therefore, is an operation that can be performed only by an individual who has attained a remarkable critical ability. That is to say, integration will be the task of a self-appropriated subject who has become aware of his conscious operations and who knows him or herself as a “knower.” Such a person is the philosopher who has learned – thanks to the results of epistemology and of the

theory of knowledge – how to attain metaphysics as a possible discourse on the whole of human knowledge. Here the effort toward integration is *an effort of collaboration* carried out together with many other specialists. So philosophy will again find its own proper role after having seen that role usurped by the human sciences or reduced to the purely rhetorical or to “an analysis of the language.” It is no longer philosophy as “the first science” (*scientia prima*) but rather a “generalist philosophy,” able to respect the autonomy of all other sciences and, at the same time, to integrate all their most up-to-date contributions about the world and the human person.

I think it is significant that, for Lonergan, a fully complete “science of man” means the integration of most of the sciences: from the phenomenological analysis of human person’s living experience with its different kinds of activities and patterns of experience, to psychology and psychoanalysis with the discovery of the unconscious and the classification of sensitive and affective aspects; to the historical sciences and cultural studies, hermeneutics, the biological sciences, neuroscience, cognitive sciences informing us about human dimensions which are constitutive but only assumed by philosophers; to the physical-cosmological sciences that allow us to put the human person within an interesting cosmological story (the anthropological hypothesis); to religious studies and the history of religions.

Finally, Lonergan’s methodological proposal is also useful for a balanced view of the various areas of knowledge, where each area has its own place and legitimacy, its value and limits, and at the same time, is given the possibility of becoming connected and integrated with all other areas. As a theologian, Lonergan pointed to two other contributions offered as philosophical knowledge: the necessity of a *philosophy of religion* to support and integrate the different branches of religious studies (history of religions, phenomenology of religions, psychology and sociology of religion) and the importance of the *history of philosophy* in order to understand the preliminary remarks of the Fathers of the Church and other theologians, and also to underline the philosophical sources of some of the misunderstandings or inadequacies which

have caused theological failures. In fact, through dialectics you can also elaborate a theory of the theological differences and a dialectical history of theology. As a matter of fact, if transcendental method draws our attention to the structure of human authenticity, that is, a structure based on the four fundamental precepts independent of cultural differences (Be attentive! Be intelligent! Be reasonable! Be responsible!), the realization of such a structure in a “knowing subject” (a philosopher, a theologian, a scientist, etc.) depends on certain social conditions and his or her cultural tradition. It is therefore necessary to add a fifth transcendental precept to the previous four and that is: “Acknowledge your historicity!”²³ After all, Lonergan’s whole intellectual undertaking has been an effort to introduce into theology the historical dimension of the human person, a dimension that the modern human sciences have clearly highlighted.

Notes

- 1 The editions of the two main works of Lonergan are: *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1992); *Method in Theology* (London-New York: Darton Longman & Todd- Herder & Herder, 1972).
- 2 The clarity of concepts conflicts with their static nature as products of thinking in a precise historical cultural context. The coherence in the systematic formulation of thought crumbles in front of new data and discoveries; further relevant questions appear and challenge even more well-established philosophical or theological systems. The rigor of reasoning based on the search for necessity on the basis of evident premises has failed also in those fields of knowledge that are traditionally held as most rigorous; today not only the natural sciences but even mathematics find themselves based upon postulates that are not evident axioms, that is, they rest on hypothetical and weaker bases.
- 3 About these subjects see: “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” “The Future of Thomism,” “Theology in its New Context,” “The Subject,” “Philosophy and Theology,” *A Second Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan S.J.*, ed. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (London: Darton Longman & Todd 1974): “Method: Trend and Variation,” “Aquinas Today: Tradition and Innovation,” “Healing and Creating in History,” “The Ongoing Genesis of Methods,” “Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,” *A Third Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, S.J. (London-New York: Geoffrey Chapman-Paulist Press, 1985).
- 4 The five transpositions involve five shifts: (1) from an emphasis upon logic with its abstractions

- to the attention to the concrete and operative method with which the human mind attains its own cognitive development; (2) from the ancient view of science (certain knowledge of causal necessity from evident first principles) with its excessive search for necessity and certitude, to the modern conception of science: verifiable possibilities, probable statements, falsifying theories, a hypothetical-deductive system; (3) from an anthropology based on the metaphysical notion of soul (faculty psychology), to reflection and appropriation of man as an existential subject, conscious and intentionally open to the universe of being; (4) from a conception of human nature in which the essential is already known through the philosophical contribution of the Ancients to the attention to human history characterized by both a personal and collective development in which meanings and contexts can change and horizons can become larger or smaller; (5) from certainty of first self-evident principles to the transcendental method that deals with the concrete ability of the subject as an attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible person urgently invited to self-appropriation in view of authentic and collaborative living.
- 5 Lonergeran was not present at that symposium but he sent his paper to the symposium. It was later published in *METHOD: Journal of Lonergeran Studies*, 2 (1984) 1-35; now also in B. Lonergeran, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergeran, vol. 17, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London 2004), 352-383.
- 6 Transcendental method allows one to reach a normative and invariant structure, a transcendental *a priori*. That does not mean that the linguistic-conceptual formulations of such a structure cannot further be perfected by a more profound self-appropriation and also by a higher differentiation of consciousness that some cultures may have reached. "A distinction must be drawn between the normative pattern immanent in our conscious and intentional operations and, on the other hand, the objectifications of that pattern in concepts, propositions, words." *Method in Theology*, 18-19. The revision will affect only the objectifications of that pattern, but not the dynamic structure of human consciousness; otherwise one would have to be reaching a new type of consciousness.
- 7 Lonergeran, *Philosophical and Theological Papers, CWL 17*: "Questionnaire on Philosophy" 357.
- 8 "Questionnaire on Philosophy," 358.
- 9 "Questionnaire on Philosophy," 359.
- 10 This paragraph refers to my book: V. DANNA, *Percorsi dell'intelligenza. Un viaggio nella filosofia con Bernard Lonergeran*, (Turin: Effatà, Cantalupa, 2003) 464.
- 11 Lonergeran focused on Husserl's phenomenology together with existentialism in general in a seminar held at Boston College in the summer of 1957. The study is now published: see Bernard Lonergeran, *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergeran 18* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
- 12 B. Lonergeran, *Insight, CWL 3*, 545.
- 13 See *Insight*, p. 411-412.
- 14 See *Insight*, p. 412.
- 15 See B. Lonergeran, *Topics in Education, CWL 10* (Toronto 1993).
- 16 Lonergeran refers here to the P. Sorokin's analysis of western culture: see *Understanding and Being, CWL 5* (Toronto, 1990); and *Topics in Education, CWL 10*, 74s, 260.
- 17 *Insight*, 564.
- 18 "Questionnaire on Philosophy" *CWL 17* (Toronto: 2004) 371-372. The functional specialty *dialectic* tries to understand the contrast among the several interpretations of the data, and the

different historical views. It studies the different horizons that define – for researchers, interpreters and historians – the source of the differences among the data we are looking for, among the meanings we assume, among the history we write. In the dialectic the study of the horizons directly leads to our horizon. The *foundation* uses the threefold conversion (religious, moral and intellectual) and involves the theologian and his/her existential horizon as the determining element in doing serious scientific work. As the historian can assume different positions and the dialectic will show possible epistemological counterpositions, so there is the very possibility of building a theological language that involves the theologian himself.

- 19 See *Philosophy and Theology*, in B. Lonergan, *A Second Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan S.J.*, (London: 1974) 193-208.
- 20 B. Lonergan, *Philosophy and Theology*, 207-208.
- 21 B. Lonergan, *Philosophy and Theology*, 204. Of course, in this context the theologian Lonergan is speaking.
- 22 “At the present day we don’t have only to speak Latin, write Greek, and read Hebrew. We have all the modern languages with their modern literatures; the modern nations and the different worlds; instantaneous communications, perpetually available entertainment; terrific development in industry, in finance and all this sort of thing. No mathematician knows all mathematics, no physicist knows all physics, no chemist all chemistry; and, least of all, no theologian knows all theology. With this transformation that has taken place, the world is a world of specialization.” P. McShane (ed) “An interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.” in B. Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (London: 1974) 210. If specialization as the development of the internal articulation of a science is a helpful opportunity for the development of knowledge, fragmentation is rather the loss of the relationships among the various sciences with the consequent disappearance of the unity of knowledge.
- 23 See “Questionnaire on Philosophy,” 378.