

# Lonergan on Person as Psychological Subject

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The turn to the subject, heralded by Kant as the transcendental turn has influenced subsequent modes of philosophizing. For Hegel, this turn has meant a shift from substance to subject. A shift from talk about substance or soul to talk about subject has brought about a new perspective in the approach to thinking about person. So instead of speaking about a soul, its acts and its objects, we speak about a subject and its conscious acts.

It is in the light of this turn that Lonergan's view on Person as psychological subject is to be understood. By psychological subject here is meant the approach to subject as subject and not as object. A person is a psychological subject because of his performance of conscious operations (I). These conscious operations thrust him into a world (II), and relate him to other persons with whom he shares a community (III). Self-knowledge makes a person's living to be authentic (IV). Through authentic living persons develop (V). And personal development involves an ongoing self-transcendence (VI) and conversion (VII). By living in a community persons exercise authority and are subject to authority whose legitimacy is based on authenticity (VIII). The exercise of his conscious acts makes a person to stand within a synthetic view of history in terms of progress, decline and redemption (IX). Lastly, there is an interdisciplinary value to the conception of person as a psychological subject since this conception sheds new light on basic issues in systematic theology such as Trinity and Christology (X).

1 A psychological subject is a subject of consciousness. By consciousness is meant not some sort of "inward look", but an "awareness immanent in cognitional acts" (Lonergan, 1997, 344). To be conscious is to be present to oneself. And by his conscious acts a person operates on different levels: there is consciousness on the level of empirical awareness. On this level we sense and perceive, imagine and feel, speak and move. There is also consciousness on the level of intelligence, where we inquire and understand, express the content of our understanding, and work out their presuppositions and implications. There is consciousness on the level of reasonability, where we reflect, marshal evidence and pass judgment on a statement as its truth or falsity, certainty or probability. And there is consciousness on the level of decision, where we deliberate about the courses of action to take, evaluate, decide on them and carry the decisions (Lonergan, 1999, 9). These levels of consciousness constitute a whole. This whole is a structure that is dynamic, self-constituting and reaches out to an object.

These structured levels of consciousness form imperatives that are all-pervasive. These imperatives are *Be attentive*, *Be intelligent*, *Be reasonable*, *Be responsible*. But to deny being attentive is pretend to be absent minded or a somnambulist, to deny being intelligent is to pretend to live on the level of a brute, to deny to have acted reasonably would mean to subject oneself to be unreasonable; and to deny to have ever been responsible would mean accepting to have always acted irresponsibly.

2 The conscious operations of a person take place not only in the world of immediate experience, but also thrust him further into another world. Apart from the world of immediacy and there is a world mediated by meaning and motivated by values.

A person's world is constituted by a realm of meaning. We may differentiate four realms of meaning: the realm of common sense, the realm of theory, the realm of interiority, and the realm of transcendence. When a person is operating in the realm of common sense, his meanings are expressed in everyday or ordinary language. If he is operating in the realm of theory, then his linguistic expression is technical. If he is operating in the realm of interiority, then his linguistic expression would be in terms of basic cognitional operations such as experience, understanding, judgment and decision, the relation between these operations and their verification in the consciously self-affirming operator. When a person operates in the realm of transcendence, his linguistic expression would be in terms of the ultimate concern that takes over his whole being (Lonergan, 1999, 257).

3 The conscious operations of a person relate him to other persons. In this relation among persons there results an intersubjectivity. Through intersubjective relations persons could live as a community when persons become subjects sharing a common field of experience; when they share a common or at least complementary way of understanding; when they have common judgments and common aims. But where there is lacking common field of experience among persons, people get out of touch. Where they lack a common way of understanding, persons misunderstand one another, suspect each other, become distrustful, and even get hostile and take to violence. Where they lack common judgments, persons are likely to live in different worlds. And where they lack common aims, persons could be working at cross-purposes (Lonergan, 1985, 5).

4 Self-knowledge makes a person's living authentic. By self-knowledge is meant that persons reduplicate the constitutive structure of their conscious intentionality. It means that they experience their operations of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonability, and responsibility. It means that they understand the dynamic structure of their attentiveness, intelligence, reasonability and responsibility. It demands that they make a self-affirmation of the operative structure of their attentiveness, intelligence, reasonability and responsibility. It demands that persons make an existential decision to implement the transcendental precepts, to make decisions based on the cumulative elements of their attention, intelligent inquiry, reasonable judgments and responsible actions. It is the fidelity to this known operative structure of our human intentionality that makes our living authentic. An unauthentic personal living would be constituted by lack of fidelity to the transcendental precepts. It would be a commitment to inattentiveness, unintelligence, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility.

**5** Through authentic living persons develop. Persons develop authentically through an advance from below upwards and from above downwards. The upward development is a finality that begins with human experience and advances through inquiry to the level of understanding; and from the level of understanding facts and problems through reflection to the making of sound judgments; and from the sound judgments made to the level of existential decisions for responsible courses of action. This upward process brings about a creative process in history. For fidelity to the norms of human attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility lead to cumulatively new insights that, when committed to action, could reshape our world and bring about a progressive development.

But there is also a development from above downwards. This form of development starts with our acceptance of the invitation to fall in a love that transforms our whole being. The transforming power of love would direct persons in their deliberations and decisions, it would reinforce their making cogent judgments, it would intensify their concern for inquiry, and redirect their attention to the things that matter in life. The development from above downward brings about a healing process, a transformation of evil into good.

**6** Personal development involves an ongoing self-transcendence. This ongoing self-transcendence is the constant fidelity to the transcendental precepts, to sustained attentiveness, sustained effort to be intelligent, to a constant effort to be reasonable, and to an effort to persevere in making responsible decisions. It is a sustained effort to advance from the level of attentiveness to the level of intelligence; from the level of intelligence to the level of reasonability; and from the level of reasonability to the level of informed decisions that make a person's courses of action to be responsible. The ongoing self-transcendence also involves a constant effort to withdraw from any slip into inattentiveness, unintelligence, unreasonableness, irresponsibility and the refusal to fall in love. This constant effort to resist violating the dynamic orientations of the transcendental precepts could make us experience what is meant by saying: "the price of liberty is perpetual vigilance".

**7** An ongoing self-transcendence demands conversions. The conversions could be intellectual, moral and religious. A conversion on the intellectual order makes persons to distinguish between the real and the imaginary, and to know that the real is not the imaginary. The effect of this form of conversion is evident in St. Augustine when he said that it took him time to realise that the real is not simply identical with the bodily (Loneragan, 1997, 15). It is this form of conversion that makes a person to distinguish between history and legend, astronomy and astrology, chemistry and alchemy. For Lonergan the breakthrough to this conversion lies in the ability to grapple with these basic questions: "What I am doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it?" (Loneragan, 1996, 241).

The moral conversion gives us orientation to the good and valuable. When this conversion is operative, then a person's decisions would be based on the criterion of values and not on personal satisfactions, interests and tastes. A moral conversion makes a person to opt for the truly good, even in the face of conflict of choice between values and satisfaction. This conversion demands a constant scrutiny of one's intentional responses to values (Loneragan, 1999, 240).

The religious conversion is always preceded by a religious experience. It transfers a person into the world of worship. This conversion shows that a person has the capacity for a total surrender, with grounds of the heart that reason does not know.

Loneragan distinguishes Christian religious conversion from religious conversion in general. An identity of the Christian religious conversion is its inter-subjective character. It is God's love to the human person as manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian religious experience gives a person a conversion that makes him to realize that the New Testament is not just a religious document that calls for religious living, but also a personal invitation that demands an appropriate response of a personal commitment to the person of Jesus Christ as God (Loneragan, 1985, 84).

**8** Persons living in community may be subject to authority or exercise authority. Authority means legitimate power. Authority belongs to the community that has a common field of experience, common and complementary ways of understanding, common judgments and common aims. Every member of a community is subject to the rule of law constituted by human attentiveness, intelligence, rationality and deliberation. But in the name of the community some persons exercise authority. Where there is authenticity in the exercise of authority, power is legitimate. But where there is unauthenticity in the exercise of authority, power lacks its legitimacy. An authentic exercise of authority has a hold on the consciences of the governed. But an unauthentic exercise of authority could invite the consciences of the governed to repudiate the claims of the rulers to rule. Persons who are subjects to authority may act authentically or unauthentically. They act authentically when they accept the claims of legitimate authority, and resist the claims of illegitimate authority. But the governed may act unauthentically if they resist legitimate claims to authority and support illegitimate claims to authority (Loneragan, 1985, 7-8).

**9** The exercise of his conscious acts makes a person to stand within a synthetic view of history in terms of progress, decline, and redemption. The historical progress is conceived in terms of faithfulness of persons to the dynamics of the transcendental precepts. Persons contribute to the historical process by meeting up the exigencies of Being attentive, Being intelligent, Being reasonable, and Being responsible, in formulating and implementing policies that cumulatively improve human life.

But persons could also be agents of historical decline. The decline in human history is effected by persons when their choice of inattentiveness, obtuseness, irrationality and irresponsibility contribute to the breakdown of law and order, and promote instability.

But beyond the historical progress and decline there stands the need for redemption. The historical progress wells up into the need for redemption when human attentiveness, intelligence, reasonability and responsibility call forth a self-sacrificing love. A self-sacrificing love "can wipe out the grievances and correct the objective absurdities" (Loneragan, 1985, 10) brought about by the cumulative consequences of infidelity to the dynamic orientations of the transcendental precepts. Religion has a redemptive function in an era of crisis when it thinks less "of issuing commands and decrees and more of fostering the self-sacrificing love that alone is capable of providing the solution to the evils of decline and of

reinstating the beneficent progress that is entailed by sustained authenticity" (Lonergan, 1985, 10f.).

10 Lastly, the conception of person as psychological subject has an interdisciplinary value since it sheds light on basic issues in systematic theology such as Trinitarian and Christological understanding.

The relevance to Trinitarian understanding lies in the ability still to speak of God in terms of person, and to transpose the classical Doctrine of three persons in one God into "three subjects of a single, dynamic, existential consciousness" (Lonergan, 1996, 25). When we speak of God as person we mean that he is "somebody, someone, not something..." (Lonergan, 1996a, 125). The Christian doctrine of three persons in one God refers to three cases of somebody, who is attentive to prayers and answers them, who understands human needs, judges human actions with fairness, and intervenes in human history. Christians know that they relate to God as somebody whose presence fills them with awe, whose will they want to know, whose Word they affirm to be true, and whose command of love they want to carry out.

The conception of person as a psychological subject sheds light on the understanding of the consciousness of Christ. This makes it possible to transpose the traditional doctrine that conceives Jesus Christ as one person in two natures, as a Divine person with human and divine natures into one subject, a Divine Subject, with human and Divine Consciousness (Lonergan, 1996, 25). The transposition of the classical Trinitarian and Christological doctrines in the light of Lonergan's conception of person as a psychological subject makes it possible for us to understand, re-express and re-affirm what the Church fathers said, meant and professed in the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon to be coherent with biblical data.

To conclude, Lonergan's view on person as psychological subject is relevant for authentic living and religious understanding in a world mediated by meaning and motivated by values.

## References

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