

INTRODUCTION

In his study of human understanding entitled *Insight* Bernard Lonergan argues for the coherence of the idea that the human soul can exist apart from the body.ⁱ Very substantially, Lonergan's argument concurs with that of St. Thomas Aquinas.ⁱⁱ However, what becomes explicit in Lonergan's argument is the role of cognitional theory, indeed, his intellectualist cognitional theory. Lonergan contrasts this with what he calls conceptualism, which he saw in the prevailing interpretations of the Thomist texts on *Word and Idea*.ⁱⁱⁱ Lonergan's presentation highlights the act known as insight, and the type of abstraction Lonergan calls 'apprehensive' which precedes the formation of concepts. He calls that abstraction 'formative.'^{iv} Intellectualism, in essence, is the position that we form concepts in virtue of, and because of, the prior act of understanding.

Lonergan presents his argument for the spirituality of the human soul in a short section of just six pages entitled *The Unity of Man*. The fundamental principle that does the work in the argument is the claim that the spiritual is 'not intrinsically conditioned by the empirical residue.'^v By 'the empirical residue' Lonergan is referring to the *intellectualist* understanding that he has of matter. What I want to do in this paper is to spell out how Lonergan's argument does indeed rely on *his* cognitional theory so that we can readily see how inadequate conceptualism is for his purposes. More generally I will suggest that insofar as one has a conceptualist reading of Aquinas, to that extent one is bound to have difficulties in accepting the traditional arguments for the subsistence of the human soul. This seems to be confirmed in Sir Anthony Kenny's critical reading of *Aquinas on Mind*.^{vi}

LONERGAN'S INTELLECTUALISM

In the introduction to *Insight* Lonergan announces that an understanding of the structure and dynamism of intelligence will yield an account of the 'intellectualist (though not the

conceptualist) meaning of the abstraction of form from material conditions.'^{vii} Later, having completed his argument for the spirituality of the human soul Lonergan notes the affinity of his own conclusions with that of St. Thomas. In both positions 'there are matter and spirit, with spirit independent in existence and in operation both of matter and of the empirical residue (the *conditiones materiae*).'^{viii} It's very clear that at the heart of the argument he has just given for the spirituality of the human soul is Lonergan's account of its spiritual operation. This emerges in the seventh paragraph. Lonergan is in the process of offering a definition of matter and spirit that goes beyond mere description and that grasps things as they are in themselves:

Further, our definition requires that the spiritual be not conditioned intrinsically by the empirical residue. Quite obviously, there is some conditioning. Our inquiry and insight demand something apart from themselves into which we inquire and attain insight; initially and commonly that other is sensible experience, and in it is found the empirical residue.

Lonergan has earlier glossed this 'empirical residue' by providing a list that includes the 'here and now of particular instances' but also, the continuum, and random variations.^{ix} He continues:

But if sensible experience and so the empirical residue condition inquiry and insight, it is no less plain that that conditioning is extrinsic. Seeing is seeing color, and color is spatial, so that seeing is conditioned intrinsically by the spatial continuum. But insight is an act of understanding, and so far from being conditioned intrinsically by the empirical residue, understanding abstracts from it.^x

This last sentence, referring to the 'act of understanding' and how it 'abstracts' from the 'empirical residue' and why such an act is not 'intrinsically conditioned' by matter is at the heart of Lonergan's argument. What I want to spell out is that the 'act of understanding' is

not intrinsically conditioned by matter *in any sense*, though it could be said that *in some sense* the inner word or concept or 'scientific definition' is intrinsically conditioned by matter.^{xi}

This is precisely why only an intellectualist cognitive theory can yield Lonergan's conclusions.

The dynamic structure of human understanding is presented in five steps. Here, in a lecture on the Trinity, Lonergan is concise:

With respect to the first operation of intellect, the object that moves, which is external, is the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter. *First*, corporeal and individual matter is made known through the senses. *Second*, from the agent intellect a wondering arises that asks, 'What is it?' or 'Why is it so?' *Third*, a phantasm is formed in which the intelligible that is to be grasped in sensible data becomes more clearly manifest in the sensible data themselves. *Fourth*, the possible intellect, directed to the phantasm, grasps in the phantasm an intelligible, a quiddity, or another cause. *Fifth*, the possible intellect, since it now actually understands the quiddity of a reality, or another cause, utters a simple inner word, which is the definition of the reality through its quiddity or through another cause.^{xii}

I will continue by explaining these steps in turn with a view to showing how Lonergan could claim that the act of insight (step four) was not intrinsically conditioned by matter. The first step is the operation of sense, and of course, we see or hear because an object acts as an efficient cause. It might be worth pointing out that with Aquinas Lonergan held that sense could, 'in a certain way' apprehend the universal – as when we see Callias as 'this man,' or as when a sheep sees in this wolf its natural enemy.^{xiii} Lonergan does not regard this as abstraction properly speaking.^{xiv}

The second step goes beyond sense. In virtue of inquiry the objects given by sense are constituted as *intentional* objects. We ask about them for the sake of understanding something about them. In asking 'What is a circle?' we do not simply seek the meaning of a word; we want to know why this shape is perfectly round. The act of understanding is intrinsically conditioned by such wonder – the light of our souls. Ultimately, according to Aquinas, this wonder is grounded in 'agent intellect.'

The third step touches on a highly complicated discussion in Aristotle regarding what he terms the 'parts of the matter and the parts of the form.'^{xv} The 'parts of the form' are equivalent to what Aquinas also calls 'common matter' and what Lonergan calls the 'schematic image.'^{xvi} Essentially, this is the set of aspects in the data that are significant as regards triggering the insight in question.^{xvii} For example, suppose one wants to know why it is that a cart-wheel is perfectly round. The roughness of the wooden circle, its temperature, its colour, and its position in space and time are irrelevant. In fact, a teacher attempting to communicate insight in an example will present a simplified figure (or schema) that contains the relevant aspects proportionate to the insight so as to make the idea 'more clearly manifest.' Certainly, and of course necessarily in this life, we need images in order to understand – insight is *into* phantasm.

However, it is the fourth step that Lonergan refers to as the act of understanding. This is the grasp of some unity, relation or necessity immanent in the datum. For example, we grasp the equality of radii as a necessary and sufficient condition for circularity, and precisely because we understand by the same token we ignore as irrelevant any incidental aspects that happen to be given in the image. This consideration of what is essential in the image is the grasp of something universal in the particular. This is precisely why teachers use examples and metaphors. When images are 'illuminated' they become, like objects of sense, causes. But they do so only in virtue of the fact that images first enter the horizon of inquiry. This is why

the act of understanding is only extrinsically related to the objects of imagination that are inquired into.

Now insight involves abstraction. Certainly, the 'here and now' (matter in its individuality) is not relevant to understanding as such. No one explains with the words 'it was there then' except when they are describing an accident. But Lonergan's point is that as situations vary, as the context for understanding differs, so what is relevant differs too. For example, in Newtonian mechanics a crucial insight is that uniform motion – a body travelling in a straight line with constant speed – is not something to be explained. Rather, we explain *changes* in motion – so that accelerations are explained by mechanical forces. Uniform motion is one example of the empirical residue for Lonergan. In each case, what is left over as unexplained depends on the insight in question. This is why Lonergan provides a list of various forms that the 'empirical residue' can take. This is why Lonergan insists on the intellectualist rather than the conceptualist understanding of abstraction.

If a banal metaphor is permitted, think what we mean by 'the change.' When we purchase a coffee with a ten pound note we get change as follows. If the coffee costs one, two, or three pounds we get back nine, eight, or seven pounds respectively as 'our change.' The change is intrinsically related to the cost of the coffee, and in fact, the money we used divides into two parts that complement each other. There is the part that was used to purchase our goods, and that which was left over as a remainder – how much, exactly, will depend on the price of the goods in each case. Just so with Lonergan's concept of the empirical residue. In the intellectualist perspective the idea of matter must be conceived as analogously – in each case it is that from which intelligence prescind. Complementary to the empirical residue are the aspects of the data that are proportionate to the insight. The schematic image is not the object of the insight though – rather, the insight grasps some relevant unity in the schematic image. When we hit upon the significant or relevant or essential we are inclined to shout, Eureka!

The fifth step is the uttering of an inner word – it is the formation of the *verbum*. The conceptualist is concerned with this product exclusively. The point upon which the intellectualist insists is that the concept, like a water molecule that is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, is a compound. Lonergan's lecture continues:

Now the intelligible that is grasped in sensible data is the same as the intelligible that is uttered in the definition. Nevertheless, the object when grasped is different from the object when defined. For when it is grasped, corporeal matter becomes known separately through the senses, but the quiddity or nature or cause becomes known separately through the intellect. However, when it is defined, what became known earlier through distinct acts are now brought together into one; for in the definition common corporeal matter is posited, but not individual corporeal matter; and the quiddity, nature, or cause are not themselves defined, but rather the reality is defined in accordance with its quiddity, nature, or cause.^{xviii}

This 'bringing together into one' of concept formation is the bringing together of the parts of the form – the common matter or schematic image; that is, those aspects of the data proportionate to the insight – along with the intelligible unity that is the object of insight. The abstract concept so formed prescind from the here and now of the empirical residue. So, although there is abstraction – when we speak of the circle we have no particular circle in mind – the product is nevertheless conditioned by 'common matter' (equal radii, say). It is a compound of what is material (that upon which the insight is extrinsically conditioned) and what is immaterial – the content of insight. Only because he isolates this latter, spiritual element in the compound can Lonergan entertain the possibility of a soul without a body. Incidentally, it seems to follow that although a separated soul after death could coherently think in some confused way (as Thomas teaches), it would not be able to form concepts.^{xix}

CONCLUSION

I have little time left to engage with the thought of Anthony Kenny but the foregoing seems to suggest a hypothesis. It is that insofar as insight is ignored the arguments of Aquinas on the spirituality of the soul are bound to be rejected. Now Kenny, though he praises Lonergan's *Verbum*, tends to air brush out the act of insight, and to this extent can be regarded as a conceptualist.^{xx} The suggestion is that Kenny's conclusions are quite understandable given his starting point, and that those interested in evaluating this debate may be rewarded by reconsidering Lonergan's insight.

For there is an alternative to conceptualism: Lonergan notes that the operation of understanding is abstractive. Abstraction selects 'this but not that.' Formative abstraction puts this but not that into the product (the abstract concept). But it does so because apprehensive abstraction has first considered this but not that as relevant to what one wanted to understand (in the concrete image). The 'this' in question is the common matter; the 'but not' in question is the abstraction; the 'that' in question is the residue.

Apprehensive abstraction is able to distinguish as it does because we actually understand. We grasp a unity, a relation, a necessity in some datum. Although this is extrinsically conditioned by the proportionate image, the insight is intrinsically conditioned only by the desire to understand, an activity that has as its ultimate principle 'agent intellect,' a 'created participation in uncreated light.'^{xxi} It is on these grounds only that that Lonergan can affirm the possibility that man's soul can be separated from matter 'without ceasing to ground an existing unity and identity.'

ⁱ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). Lonergan's argument comprises of just six pages in a chapter dedicated to *Metaphysics as Science* (538-43).

ⁱⁱ Note, not only does Lonergan argue for man's spiritual nature, but (with Aquinas) Lonergan argues that the unity of man is grounded in man's spiritual nature. For Thomist texts see the *Prima Pars*, question 75 inquires *Of Man Who is Composed of a Spiritual and a Corporeal Substance: and in the First Place, What Belongs to the Essence of the Soul* and question 76 *Of the Union of Body and Soul*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lonergan published his studies of the Thomist inner word as a series of articles for *Theological Studies*. They are available in Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

^{iv} Lonergan's fourth article, *Verbum and Abstraction*, is especially relevant as the background to *Insight's* 'article' on the unity of man (538-43). In the third and fourth sections (*Formative Abstraction, Apprehensive Abstraction*) Lonergan introduces distinct types of abstraction precisely to counter conceptualist objections (see *Verbum* 59). The second section, *The Immateriality of Knowing* corresponds to the claim that the spiritual is not constituted by matter as Lonergan also argues in his article on the unity of man. Lonergan's intellectualist understanding of matter is introduced in the first section, *The Analogy of Matter*.

^v This is introduced in Lonergan's fifth paragraph in which he gives a definition of matter and deployed in the eighth paragraph, and again in the twelfth. See *Insight* 540, 541, 543.

^{vi} Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (Routledge: London, 1993).

^{vii} *Insight* 16.

^{viii} *Insight* 545.

^{ix} More accurately: 'As was noted early in this study, inasmuch as we are understanding, we are grasping the universal apart from its instances, the limit apart from the continuum, the invariant apart from particular places and times, the ideal frequency apart from the nonsystematic divergence of actual frequencies.' *Insight* 540. Lonergan refers to the 'empirical residue' over a hundred times in *Insight*.

^x *Insight* 541.

^{xi} In his commentary on the central sections of *Metaphysics Zeta* Aquinas explains: 'Yet it must be noted that no kind of matter, be it common or individual, is related essentially to species insofar as species is taken in the sense of form, but insofar as it is taken in the sense of a universal; for example, when we say that man is a species, common matter then pertains essentially to the species, but not the individual matter, in which nature of the form is included.' Lonergan refers to this text (§1473) on four occasions (*Verbum* 29 n. 64, 36 n. 117, 133 n. 158, 187 n. 198), more than any other passage in these central sections. Presumably, Lonergan thought that clarification of variant understandings of species was crucial in combatting conceptualism. Lonergan will refer to the 'object of insight' (a phrase he never uses in *Insight*) as the *species quae*. See *Verbum* 175-9.

^{xii} Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 205.

^{xiii} See *Verbum* 44 n. 150 for references including *In II Post. Anal. Lect. 20*.

^{xiv} *Verbum* 53.

^{xv} Lonergan (*Verbum* 54 n. 194) notes the sources in *Metaphysics Zeta* that are commented on by Aquinas in lectures 9-11 (Paragraphs 1460-1536). Less unwieldy is Aquinas' work on methodology, *On Boethius on the Trinity* especially the text on the second of the three degrees of abstraction, q. 5 a. 3. Simpler still is *ST* 1.85 articles 1 and 2.

^{xvi} *Insight* 208; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 86.

^{xvii} *Insight* 55.

^{xviii} *The Triune God: Systematics* 205.

^{xix} Lonergan does not actually draw this conclusion. Nor does Aquinas address the question of whether the separated soul can form concepts in question 89 of the *Prima Pars*. He agrees, though, with the objector (*ST* 1.89.1 ob. 3) that the separated soul does not understand by abstraction (see also *ST* 1.89.7 c.).

^{xx} A frequent complaint is that Thomas confuses abstract and concrete (*Aquinas on Mind* 143), which seems understandable if the act of insight, which pivots between abstract and concrete is ignored. Kenny seems to equate form with what Lonergan would call the concept (the definition, *verbum*). Thus, in discussing *Summa Theologiae* 1.76.1 in which Thomas will consider the spirituality of the soul and the application of hylomorphism to soul and body, Kenny can make no sense of a concrete notion of form (*Aquinas on Mind* 149). Kenny rejects what he sees as the resulting notion of soul is one with 'concrete and abstract parts.' (*Aquinas on Mind* 136, 150). Kenny appears to read the idea of common matter abstractly as 'matter in general' so that, again in the context of subsistence, he is 'disconcerted' by Aquinas' 'disdain for distinctions between abstract and concrete.' *Aquinas on Mind* 138.

^{xxi} *ST* 1.84.5 c.