

## THE COGNITIVE PROCESS ACCORDING TO BERNARD LONERGAN AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL COUNSELLING

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The thought of the philosopher, methodologist, theologian, and economics scholar Bernard J. F. Lonergan (1904-1984) is dealing with both theoretical aspects and applications to several knowledge fields, while it has relations also to practical problems which are of present interest. The more important philosophical work of this thinker, *Insight*, of nearly 800 pages, which has been just newly translated into Italian, consists of "a study of human understanding" as the subtitle itself of the book declares.

This work is divided into two parts: the first ten chapters treat insight as activity, while the last ten chapters treat insight as knowledge. However, all the material is not organized as a treatise, but as a moving viewpoint, as a step by step invitation to the reader to realize a "self-appropriation", that is a deep understanding of what understanding is and an affirmation of oneself as a knower. Knowledge implies not only sensible experience of data, and grasp of the intelligibility of those data, but also responsible affirmation of the reality of the grasped content. Then, upon this basis the Author goes further in the second part of the book to analyse the several developments of understanding.

He declares that the pure desire to know is like an engine of all human intellectual developments, from the earlier questions continuously asked in childhood, to the achievements of practical intelligence of commonsense persons, to the realizations of scientific and philosophical thought. However, he is aware that "[j]ust as insight can be desired, so too it can be unwanted. Besides the love of light, there can be a love of darkness" (chapter 6, § 2.7), and he applies himself to the analysis of the flight from understanding. He studies in depth the scotoma (aberration of understanding), the repression (the aberration of censorship), the inhibition (the effect of repression upon neural demand functions), the dreams (in which ignored claims of neural demand functions are met), a common problem (posed by the "nice distinction between the sensitive mechanism that enforces a taboo and the rational judgment that imposes a moral obligation"), and the evidence provided by specialists of psychotherapy (in particular, by those who assume that the analysand is the subject of a scotoma and that the analysand's flight from knowledge, manifested in both resistance and transference, "is to be cured by knowledge").

Later, after treating the tension of community and the dialectic of community, he analyses the individual bias (egoism as incomplete development of intelligence and, thus, exclusion of correct understanding), group bias (both supported by intersubjective feelings and generating commonsense views), and general bias (lag of intellectual development, which manifests itself in rationalization, disregard of larger issues, and indifference to long-term results) (chapter 7, §§ 6-8).

One has to note that the stress of Lonergan on intellectual and rational aspects of the cognitive process, and on the importance of self-appropriation in the sense above outlined, does not imply his indifference to intersubjective relationships, which we consider as the base of the very essence of psychotherapeutic processes (Stern, 2005). On the contrary, all intersubjective phenomena are notably studied and their importance is highlighted by him throughout all his works.

Rather, his considerations on flight from understanding and, thus, from knowledge, that is to be cured by knowledge, are of a great significance for philosophical counselling, from both the theoretical viewpoint and the application-oriented one. In fact, the core and the foundation of philosophical counselling consists of the maieutic going along with the consultant, in aiding s/he, by an active method, to reach the insight that illuminates the very essence and the suitable solution of the problematic, troubling situation for which the philosophical counselling has been requested.