

Bernard Lonergan's Notion of Truth From Augustine through Thomas Aquinas

In this paper, I hope to introduce Bernard Lonergan's understanding of truth as this exists in the nature and structure of human judgment. However, since Lonergan's understanding of truth does not exist in a vacuum, because it partially derives from earlier reflections on the nature of truth, I shall begin with a note on how St. Augustine understood truth and from there proceed to St. Thomas Aquinas. For many years, Lonergan read deeply into the philosophy and theology of Aquinas and, as one looks at Aquinas's understanding of truth, we can find a line of development that moves within Catholic thought toward the kind of analysis which Lonergan offers in his theory of truth that attempts to meet a number of concerns and questions which had arisen within the subsequent development of modern philosophy in western Europe.

Beginning with St. Augustine, to understand his notion of truth, we can begin by looking at four scattered passages taken from his *Confessions* (the 4th and 5th books) which explain why, for many years, St. Augustine held a number of erroneous beliefs.¹ These read as follows:

My mind still moved through corporeal forms; I defined the beautiful as that which is attractive in itself, and the fitting as that which is attractive because suited to something. I made this distinction and bolstered it with corporeal examples. I turned my attention on the nature of the mind, yet the false opinion which I had concerning spiritual things did not permit me to see the truth. The very force of the true was assaulting my eyes, yet I turned my throbbing mind from the incorporeal reality to shapes and colors and swollen masses, and, since I could not see these within the conscious soul, I was of the opinion that I could not see my soul.

...it seemed disgraceful to me to believe that Thou wert possessed of the shape of human flesh and limited by the bodily outlines of corporeal parts. And since, when I wished to think of my God, I knew no way of thinking, except in terms of corporeal mass (for it seemed to me that nothing whatever existed which was not like that), in that lay the greatest and practically the only reason for my inescapable error.

I also felt it was better for me to believe that Thou hadst created no evil (which in my ignorance seemed to be not only a substance, but even something corporeal, for I did not know how to think even of a mind except as being a subtle body, a body, however, spread out in different parts of space)...

If I had been able to think of a spiritual substance, all their stratagems would have been immediately destroyed and cast away from my mind. But, I could not. In

¹St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), pp. 94, 120-1, 127.

truth, I did decide, by making more and more considerations and comparisons, that most of the philosophers had views which are much more probable, concerning the corporeal aspects of this world and every nature accessible to bodily sensation.

In his early years, Augustine could not conceive of how anything real could be anything other than some kind of body which one sees or imagines. What is real is what is known by us through an act of sense and not by any other kind of act. If something is true, it is because it is experienced by an act of sense. Truth is associated with corporeality, a position which Augustine adhered to until he encountered difficulties which could not be resolved until he came to another view on the nature of truth.

In the 7th Book of the *Confessions*, as we reread this text, Augustine's struggles begin to assume a shape and a form which evidences a number of stages that eventually led him to a new notion of truth. Augustine is faced with a problem. How are we to account for the existence of evil? What is its cause? Evil undoubtedly exercises a great influence in the world. Can its existence really be denied? But, how can evil be explained if, on the one hand, God exists as a supremely good and powerful being? The two do not jive: God's goodness and God's power. The existence of evil appears to undermine the reasonableness having any belief in the being of an all powerful, perfect deity. And so, as here Augustine begins his discussion, he admits that, initially, he could not conceive of anything real if it could not be sensed or imagined.² Hence, it follows that evil is to be understood as if it were some kind of sensible, corporeal thing whose existence is a source of suffering and trial. However, if evil exists as a source of suffering and trial and God is supremely powerful, incorruptible, and good who cannot but make things that are good and not evil, then, of course, it cannot be said that God has brought evil into existence. Evil cannot be regarded as a created thing. And, at the same time, it cannot be regarded as an uncreated thing since, if this were so, evil would be on a par with God who is entirely lacking in any kind of imperfection and who cannot be said to suffer from any kind of evil. Necessarily, what is incorruptible and what is corruptible exclude each other. As Augustine says it, "the incorruptible is better than the corruptible."³ And so, in the end, it is not possible to speak of evil as if it is a being or a reality (whether it is created or uncreated). Evil is something which lacks being; it lacks reality. It is not a thing; it is not what Augustine refers to as a "substance." However, if evil is to exist (and it does exist), its existence presupposes things which are goods since the existence of any given thing is itself inherently a good.⁴ Mere existence is a good even if it is a minimal good. Evil cannot exist unless good first exists through the being or the existence of different things. Hence, if some kind of meaning is to be apprehended as regards the cause or the meaning of good, this cause is a privation of some kind within the being of concretely existing things. Evil, moral evil, is a perversity or a perversion which exists within the will or the willing of rational beings.⁵ It is an internal thing which cannot be experienced by any act of sense, but which can only be known about through a process of self-reflection which identifies an act of consciousness which exists within ourselves as human beings (as opposed and differing from an

²*Confessions*, 7, 1, 1-2.

³*Confessions*, 7, 4, 6.

⁴*Confessions*, 7, 12, 18.

⁵*Confessions*, 7, 16, 22.

outwardly directed, extroverted act of sense). Evil is not caused by God but, instead, by rational beings who change themselves in causing evil, becoming bad beings through misusing the freedom which they have in rebelling against God and against the order of things which God has created.⁶ A truth is known thus not by an act of sense but as the conclusion of an inquiry and by arguments which have moved from acts of sense toward realities that are known as the term of some form of self-reflection. Hence, truths are not simply known. No simple, single act accounts for the knowing or the existence of any truth which exists within our minds, within our rational consciousness (the experience of self that we have when we find that we know about the being of a certain truth). As the upshot of all this: what is given by the bodily senses is to be distinguished from that which is given to us by the “light of our minds.”⁷

Turning to Aquinas’s notion of truth and an understanding which rejects any thesis which would try to argue that truth is known by some kind of simple, single act (an intuitive kind of act), Aquinas speaks of two distinct operations of the mind that relate to our acts of sensing in a way which leads us toward experiences of truth. The starting point is an inquiry into the nature or the form of scientific inquiry. What does a scientific question consist of? What are its parts? What is its intention? What is its meaning? And so, in trying to answer these questions, Aquinas noticed that, in the *Posterior Analytics* of Aristotle, Aristotle had postulated that all questions in science and philosophy can be reduced to four basic types: whether there is an *X*; what is an *X*; whether *X* is *Y*; and why *X* is *Y*. However, as we examine the articulation in Aristotle’s subsequent discussion, we find that he reduces these four questions to two basic types.⁸ The first basic type groups together “What is an *X*” and “why *X* is *Y*”, because these can only be answered by offering or postulating an hypothesis which can relate a number of distinct elements or parts into a relation that joins these elements into an understood unity. The second basic type of question groups together “whether there is an *X*” and “whether *X* is *Y*”, because these can only be answered by saying either “yes” or “no” in a decision which exists as a verdict. The responses between the first type of question and the second type of question totally differ. The prior asking of what and why questions creates an orientation that determines specific activities which a potential knower must engage in cognitively if he or she is to find an answer for a specific question as in “what is the cause of this?” or “what is the cause of that?”. But, this orientation is quite unlike a second orientation which is created whenever matters of fact have to be decided upon through a second, distinct form of inquiry.

According to the manner of differentiation which Aquinas uses, as Aquinas argues, for instance, in the *De Anima*, acts are distinguished from each another on the basis of the different objects which they intend or desire.⁹ Hence, a “first operation of the mind” (*prima mentis operatio*) proceeds from a first set of questions that have a distinct object (a “what” or “why”), but this operation prepares the way for a “second operation of the mind” (*secunda mentis operatio*) which follows a second set of questions that have a different object.¹⁰ Thus, in moving from acts

⁶*Confessions*, 7, 3, 5.

⁷*City of God against the Pagans*, 8, 7.

⁸Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 2, 2, 89b36-90a6; Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum*, 2, 1.

⁹Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata De anima*, a. 13.

¹⁰Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 6, 9, 1239. “In speculative matters...there is a

of sensing into acts of understanding (one kind and then the other), our human knowing functions in a self-assembling kind of way as it moves through these different stages. Although human knowing begins with human sensing, through a dialectic of questions and answers that is constitutive of our human inquiry, our cognition always passes from the givenness of experience toward an apprehension of form or meaning, and then from a form or a meaning toward an apprehension of truth or reality. Citing Aquinas's own words, "the first operation of the intellect regards the quiddity [the essence or "whatness"] of a thing; the second regards its existence or being."¹¹ Understanding refers to "intellectual apprehension" while wisdom refers to "intellectual judgment."¹² Human knowing possesses its own order, its own finality or teleology as it moves from an initial lack of understanding toward a fuller understanding that concludes in an understanding which exists as a judgment. The human mind exercises a specific causality of its own as it tries to move towards a knowledge of reality by means whose term is an act of judgment, an act of judgment existing as an act of reflective understanding.

To understand Aquinas's notion of truth, we must accordingly try to understand his notion of judgment where, by uttering a "yes" or a "no," a person either affirms or denies that a possible fact or an actuality exists. Relations between things are either affirmed or denied as facts since, in judgment, a synthesis is confirmed or it is posited or it is denied through an assent which leads one to realize that, essentially, in our human knowing, "to know...is...to judge."¹³ Knowing is to be equated with judging. Through judgments, through a truth that is grasped in our judgment, as

twofold operation of reason: first, to discover through inquiry and, then, to judge about the discoveries," my translation. In the *Quaestiones de quodlibet* 2, q. 2, a. 1, it is noted that "the question 'Is it?' is different from the question 'What is it?'"

¹¹Aquinas, *Super I Sententiarum*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 7; cf. Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2; q. 3, a. 2; q. 14, a. 1; and *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 6, 4, 1232. In the *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, Aquinas speaks of two mental operations:

The intellect has two operations, one called the "understanding of indivisibles," by which it knows *what* a thing is; and another by which it composes and divides, that is to say, by forming affirmative and negative enunciations. Now these two operations correspond to two principles in things. The first operation has regard to the nature itself of a thing, in virtue of which the known thing holds a certain rank among beings, whether it be a complete thing, as some whole, or an incomplete thing, as a part or an accident. The second operation has regard to a thing's act of existing (*esse*), which results from the union of the principles of a thing in composite substances, or, as in the case of simple substances, accompanies the thing's simple nature.

Cf. Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, c.; q. 9, a. 5 c.; *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 5, a. 9 c.; and *Lectura Super Ioannem*, c. 1, lect. 1.

¹²Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 672.

¹³Aquinas, *Peri Hermeneias*, 1, 3, 4, cited by Peter Hoenen, *Reality and Judgment according to St. Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 6, my translation.

human beings, we connect with reality since, in every judgment, something real is known through a truth that is posited within the affirmation of a judgment.¹⁴ Truth and being or truth and reality are convertible. By a second operation of the mind, a meaning is pondered and considered in a manner which hopefully will lead us toward an affirmation of truth or reality.¹⁵ In order to make a judgment (a good judgment), a detached, a contemplative type of attitude is required if a person is to engage in acts of reflective understanding which are constitutive of one's judgment.

As a point of departure: a person has already engaged in acts of sensing and has enjoyed initial acts of understanding which have grasped or postulated a meaning which exists as an idea. But now, the methodological object or the proper procedure is a kind of self-reflection that can fully turn back upon our prior acts of cognition to think about what proportion exists between our thinking minds and something which would exist as some kind of other: one's understanding, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, what one's understanding is apprehending through the understanding that one has had. Does a conformity exist between our minds and an object if a knowledge of reality is to exist within the understanding that we have as potential knowers?¹⁶ In other words, is our experience of understanding the same as an experience of knowing?¹⁷ As Aquinas had noted: "distinctions drawn by the mind are not necessarily equivalent to distinctions [which exist] in reality."¹⁸ We can understand the form of a thing without necessarily knowing whether or not its form exists in a way which transcends the being or the givenness of our understanding.¹⁹ While an identity already exists in our understanding between an initial act of understanding and that which is understood through it, how do we move toward an identity that would exist between how we exist *as a knower* and the being of that which is known by us

¹⁴*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 9, 6.

¹⁵*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 1, 8, 125; *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 6, 4, 1236.

¹⁶*De Veritate*, q. 1, aa. 1-3; *Summa Theologiae*, q. 16, a. 8, ad 3.

¹⁷*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 11, 760; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 16, a. 2. Cf. William E. Murnion, "Intellectual Honesty in Aquinas and Lonergan," (paper presented at the Third International Lonergan Workshop, Erbacher Hof, Mainz, Germany, January 2-7, 2007), pp. 4-5.

¹⁸*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 50, a. 2, quoted in *St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. by Thomas Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 13, n. 40.

¹⁹*De ente et essentia*, 4, 6. Cf. *Quaestio disputata De anima*, a. 6; *De Potentia*, 7, 2, ed. 9; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 2, q. 2, a. 1. As Aquinas had argued in the *De ente et essentia*, 4, 6; translated as *On Being and Essence* by Armand Maurer (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949) p. 46:

...every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being known of its existing. I can know what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it exists in reality. From this it is clear that the act of existing is other than essence or quiddity, unless, perhaps, there is a being whose quiddity is its very act of existing.

Cf. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change? The World's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1985), p. 75; *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 121.

through the self-transcendence of our cognition: a being which, in its existence, is to be clearly distinguished from the kind of natural existence which we have of ourselves as knowers who, through our reflective understanding, seek to know a being which is other than ourselves and *as other than ourselves*? How do we have or move into objectivity? How can we move from our subjectivity and through our subjectivity toward that which exists as objectivity?

Since a prospective judgment seeks a different kind of intelligibility than that which is the answer to a “what” or “why” question, an intelligibility which properly belongs to a reflective judgment would have to work from some other kind of ground or base. If an intelligibility is to be affirmed as real, it now needs to be verified with evidence which can move the mind of any thoughtful inquirer internally *from within* toward making a completely free act which would exist as a reasonable, rational assent.²⁰ In the self-reflection which occurs within judgment, because all initial acts of human understanding have moved from the data of outer senses toward internal activities and receptions that apprehend the meaning or the form of a known idea, a judgment always begins with a form of self-reflection that goes back and attends to all the acts or the operations that we have employed to reach both our subsequent acts of understanding which are now under review, this self-reflection at the same time leading us toward a possible understanding of ourselves in terms of the kind of understanding which properly belongs to us as human beings.²¹ We advert to the links which connect our previous acts of understanding with corresponding images or phantasms that have been grasped by us through our prior acts of imagining. We have moved from initial acts of sensing through into acts of imagining toward the reception of our initial acts of understanding. In every judgment, however, we move toward another higher goal. We grow in our autonomy as we attend to how we are understanding ourselves in the context of our self-reflection. We achieve or we assume a greater degree of personal responsibility as now, through a form of self-evaluation and self-measuring, through our self-understanding, as human beings, we judge ourselves with respect to what has been the character and quality of our sensing, imagining, and understanding.²²

To identify which conditions have to be met if we are to make a valid claim that we really know something in particular, in Aquinas, in the language of Aquinas, true meaning only emerges through a kind of reduction or a resolution to the first principles of intellect and sense: hence, a *resolutio in principia* which is effected by our acts of reflective human reasoning and which makes conscious how our previous acts of human reasoning have moved from our initial experiences and acts of sensing toward our later experiences and acts of understanding through the bridge that exists in our acts of imagining.²³ In judgment, as in our initial acts of understanding, we always move from effects to causes or we move from consequences toward sources or origins.

In judgment, there are two major steps. First, we work with our given understanding (our

²⁰*De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 1; cf. *De Malo*, q. 6, a. 1, obj. 10.

²¹*De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 9; *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 5, 11, 912; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 85, a. 2.

²²*De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 2.

²³*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 1; a. 8, ad 10; q. 11, a. 1, ad 13; q. 12, a. 1; a. 3; q. 14, a. 1; a. 9; q. 15, a. 1; q. 17, a. 1; q. 22, a. 2; q. 24, a. 2; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 7; q. 79, a. 8; cf. a. 12; 1a2ae, q. 74, a. 7.

previous understanding) to identify the particular act of understanding that has led us to apprehend a form within matter (a form within material conditions),²⁴ a form which presents itself to us as a bright idea or an appealing hypothesis. “Hypothesis” refers to a more technical expression. In doing this, we want to determine all the relevant principles which have informed our minds in a way which has led us to our given initial act of understanding.²⁵ We start with the possible meaning under investigation, a form or an essence which currently exists within our understanding comprehending minds and, from it backwards, we move toward identifying a series of cognitive causes which exist, relatively, as principles or as points of departure for us: one type of cause or principle, at the start, leading us or conditioning the emergence of a later subsequent cause or principle in a manner that does not fall into any kind of contradiction. In the kind of language that Aquinas uses, we look back and, from secondary causes or through secondary causes, we move to primary causes or primary principles: all the principles which have allowed us to move from the concreteness of our sensing experience and inquiry toward an act of understanding which has detached or which has abstracted a meaning from our sensing experience. To reiterate a bit: a prospective judgment (as it moves towards possibly making a correct judgment) attempts to identify a series of cognitional causes or a series of cognitional principles as these are most immediately present to us within our experience of them (starting with secondary proximate causes) and then, from these proximate causes, beginning with the most proximate cause, we go back toward first causes or first principles which are also given to us within the cognitive awareness that we have of ourselves as thinking inquirers. Together, as we line up all these causes or principles in how they relate to each other, we move in a sequence which passes back from initial principles to later principles: from demonstrable or a provable first principles which exist as secondary principles within a particular discipline back toward undemonstrable first principles which would ultimately refer to the basic laws of our human mind (laws which are operative within the being of any kind of human inquiry).²⁶

To try and explain what we mean here, Aquinas distinguishes between primary or basic first principles which we all have as human beings and other principles which only exist in some persons: principles which would exist as secondary proximate principles. The secondary principles are all known by us through how we are asking questions within a given field of study (within the inquiries of a particular science). To know a given set of relevant second principles requires, from each of us, some kind of initial “discovery [that is given to us] through [our] experience, or through [our] teaching” (*per inventionem secundum viam experimenti, vel per disciplinam*), quoting Aquinas. In other words, in order to know a proximate secondary principle or, in other words, if a secondary principle is to be grasped and understood by us within a given context of inquiry, we must employ pertinent, apt images or phantasms that exist only within a given discipline. For example, according to a secondary principle or as a law which exists within the conduct of mathematics: the sum of all the angles which exist within all triangles must always equal two right angles (the sum of 180 degrees).²⁷ This principle exists as a secondary principle or as a secondary law and at the same time too, relative to mathematics, it exists as a first principle within the praxis of mathematics although not as a secondary principle or first

²⁴*De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 9.

²⁵*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 47, 7.

²⁶*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 112, a. 5.

²⁷Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 27-28.

principle, relative to the being of other disciplines. However, please note: this principle or this law cannot be grasped by employing any kind of image whatsoever where, here, within mathematics, we need to work with an image of spatial extension as this can be constructed by us as we engage in our mathematical operations. We draw a triangle. We form the image of a triangle and, through the vertex, we draw a line that is parallel to its base and from the equality of alternate angles, as soon as we see this in our image which acts as a phantasm, an act of understanding is given to us. We realize that the angles of a triangle must always equal two right angles (the sum of 180 degrees). From an image of spatial extension, we have an act of understanding which grasps a meaning or an intelligibility which refers to a principle which exists as a law within the practice of mathematics and no other image works or suffices to give us an understanding which exists as a mathematical act of understanding. Within any given discipline or within other disciplines, other secondary principles exist as proximate first principles if we move within ourselves from an awareness that is first given to us within the data of our cognitive awareness, an awareness which exists as an intellectual kind of awareness (not simply or merely an awareness of sense but an awareness of understanding that is given to us if we find that we are in the presence of an apt, suggestive image). If, for instance, physics is the science or the study of matter in motion, physical principles or physical laws are known if, within our inquiries, we should find an apt, suggestive image; if a suggestive image is given to us. A traditional account with respect to the scientific discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton speaks about Newton sitting under an apple tree and about being hit by a falling apple: the incident immediately triggers an insight into the laws of gravity, the role of gravitational force within the physical order of the universe.²⁸ From secondary first principles, as we move toward other principles or laws that exist more remotely for us, we move toward other laws or principles that are subsequently primary or basic. In the functioning of our human inquiry, without fully understanding or knowing the remote first principles which govern how we think and reason, we apply these first principles which are already given to us.

Because remote first principles apply in a universal way to how we think and understand things, to understand the meaning of any primary first principle (whether the principle of identity, the principle of contradiction, the principle of excluded middle, or the principle of sufficient reason), any kind of image or phantasm suffices as the means which will help trigger a desired act of understanding that would grasp the meaning of a primary first principle.

For example now, when we think about the being of undemonstrable first principles, we can think about the law of non-contradiction. In Aquinas's own words, "the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time."²⁹ We can attend to how, in their ultimate grounding, secondary principles are ordered to primary first principles: how they are grounded in first principles and how, also, they are transcended by the being of first principles. Within a given context of inquiry, what principles have been invoked as secondary principles as we move from common first principles which exist universally (across all disciplines) toward specific secondary principles and the term of an act of understanding which allegedly discovers a new intelligible

²⁸Cf. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/the-core-of-truth-behind-sir-isaac-newtons-apple-1870915.html> (accessed April 26, 2017).

²⁹*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2; 2a2ae, q. 1, a. 7. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 18, a. 6; *On the Eternity of the World against the Grumblers*, cited by *An Aquinas Reader*, ed. Mary T. Clark (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1972), p. 179.

relation that had not been known before? What principles exist within our intellectual consciousness such that, through their order, they have led us toward conceptions whose truth we have now to try to judge and evaluate? By such principles (the primary and the secondary – all of them), as Aquinas says, “we judge all things.”³⁰

From this point of departure thus, in the kind of language which, to some degree, we find in Aquinas,³¹ we identify a set of formal conditions which refer to a combination of primary and secondary principles which, together, have allowed us to move from initial experiences of sense data and acts of inquiry toward a direct act of understanding which, in its intellectual or spiritual way, has detached a meaning from an experience and a presence of material conditions. The moving that we do as we move from proximate secondary principles toward remote primary principles allows us to distinguish between primary and secondary principles and it also points to how, in every science, a distinct procedure exists (a distinct methodology) since each science necessarily asks its own sets of questions. A given set of questions determines a formal, intelligible object which exists as a specific anticipation of real being,³² and so, from these questions, from a pattern that emerges in the relations which exist among these questions, we can

³⁰*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 7, ad 3 (4th set of objections).

³¹In the *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 47, a. 15, Aquinas distinguishes between primary universal principles and other universal principles which can be referred to as secondary universal principles. While it is said that primary universal principles are known “naturally” (*naturaliter nota*), secondary universal principles require “discovery through experience, or through teaching” (*per inventionem secundum viam experimenti, vel per disciplinam*). In the functioning of human inquiry, persons apply first principles without fully knowing what their meanings consist of. To understand the meaning of any primary first principle (whether, for example, we speak about the principle of identity, the principle of contradiction, the principle of excluded middle, or the principle of sufficient reason), any kind of image or phantasm will suffice as a means which can help trigger a desired act of understanding that will grasp the meaning of a primary first principle. However, if a secondary first principle is to be understood, we must employ images or phantasms that exist only within a given discipline. In his *Verbum*, p. 69, Lonergan had argued, for instance, that the principle of inverse squares is a first principle in mathematics (and so it does not exist as a first principle in physics, or chemistry, or in any other discipline) and so it cannot be grasped by employing any kind of image whatsoever. We need an image of spatial extension as this is constructed by a mathematician or by someone who is engaged in mathematical operations. No other image will do.

³²Yes, through questioning, by asking questions, we can heuristically determine or move toward a formal or an intellectual object which initially exists as an un-understood or as an unknown although, at the same time too, we can also say that, from an anticipation of being as this refers to a would be term or a would be content of understanding and knowledge that has yet to be grasped and known by us, we can say that, from a perspective that works from a heuristic anticipation of a real being which is reached through anticipations of formal or intellectual being (this being existing as an intended object), from a standpoint that refers to this kind of being or object, we can move toward questions; we can have determinations of questions which can lead a potential knower toward the object of his or her anticipations. Our questioning reveals objects which exist as distinct beings. They are other than ourselves. But, conversely also, the objects or the beings that we have yet to understand and know reveal our questions. They elicit our questions. They determine what questions we should ask and attend to.

move toward desired acts of understanding which respond to the being of our questions. The questions determine how we may best proceed in a transition which moves from acts of sense toward our acts of understanding through the mediation which exists in our acts of human imagining.

After all this, secondly, we work with our acts and data of sense to determine relevant acts and data of sense, the contents of our acts.³³ Since our first operations of the mind grasp forms in phantasms (insights into data), the identification of first and secondary principles necessarily turns to determining the prior acts of imagining and sensing which, in the first place, have provided materials for the inquiries and activities of our active intellects which have sought to abstract a form or meaning from an imagined phantasm or datum of sense. As Aquinas notes, “since the senses are the first source of our knowledge, we must in some way reduce to sense everything about which we judge.”³⁴ For every act of sense, a corresponding content exists from which images have been received and which have been refashioned to produce suggestive images that have provoked acts of understanding which exist as the first operations of our minds. The instrumental object in the kind of understanding that we are seeking which is constitutive of judgement is a reflection that thinks about the relation that connects data of sense with terms of abstractive understanding as these have been conceptualized in outer words that reveal the meaning of internal (mental) words. By experiencing the interactive relation which connects data, on the one hand, with our understanding, on the other, a rational assent now becomes possible through a second kind of intellectual emanation (another kind of rational compulsion) which accepts the reality or rationality of an idea as a truth of fact. The ground is a basis in our experience. A retroactive analysis has grasped all the necessary, facilitating conditions that are needed in a prospective judgment and, by referring to the data of cognitional consciousness which are immediately available to us as potential knowers, we immediately know if all these conditions of sense and intellect have been fulfilled. As persons are able to move from one reflective act of understanding to another, each person grows in wisdom which, as wisdom, is to be identified as the virtue of good judgment.³⁵

On the basis of the kind of understanding that we find in St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, in turning now to Bernard Lonergan’s notion of truth and how his notion goes beyond the understanding which had been enjoyed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, a number of points merit mention. First, conceptually, in the articulation of his thought, Lonergan distinguishes a “notion of being” or “notion of reality” from an idea or a concept of being or reality. Simply and baldly stated, an idea of reality refers to the term or the effect of an act of understanding. If a person moves toward an understanding of being or reality and comes to understand being or reality, the term or fruit of this understanding will be an idea. It would be an inner word which awaits its articulation (its conversion into communicable concepts). Once put into outer words, simply stated, this idea of being would exist as the concept of being and it would not be just as an idea of being. In any case, within this context, by having or enjoying an idea or a concept, we would have an understanding about everything which is or exists. Our

³³*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 9.

³⁴*De Veritate*, q. 12, a. 3.

³⁵*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 45, a. 2; see also Ivo Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method: The ‘Universal Viewpoint’ in Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 21.

understanding would be unlimited. An unrestricted meaning implies an unrestricted act of understanding. However, no human being enjoys an unrestricted act of understanding. Only God enjoys such an act. However, if we each advert to the fact that each of us desires to move into unrestricted understanding, an unrestricted understanding that understands everything about everything, on the basis of this human cognitional desire, it is possible to speak about an unrestricted notion of being that each of us has as human beings. By our desire to know, by a conscious intentionality that exists within our curiosity and the questions that we would like to ask, we are immediately related to everything which exists and even to everything which could possibly exist. By our desire to know which exists as a perfectly natural inclination that we can identify within ourselves (within the data of our conscious life), we can posit and claim that we are immediately related to all of being or reality although this reality of being is not fully grasped and known by us within the enjoyment of our knowing. In other words, by a conscious striving that exists within our questioning, we are positively related to reality in an incipient manner. Our inquiry does not suppose any kind of complete separation but that we can begin to relate to the whole of reality through acts of inquiry that can lead us to questions whose answering forges more intimate bonds between who we are as potential knowers and what can be known by us through acts of understanding which are completed by rational acts of judgment.

Moving on thus, as had been the case with both Aristotle and Aquinas, Lonergan distinguishes between two operations of the mind. Acts of reflective understanding known as judgments succeed initial, abstractive acts of understanding which grasp meanings within images or phantasms that refer to our acts of sensing and imagining and their respective contents. However, where, according to Lonergan,³⁶ Aquinas speaks about a reduction through basic principles of the mind to acts and data of sense which trigger intelligible emanations that effect our acts of judgment,³⁷ Lonergan speaks about acts of meaning and the difference between a hypothetical meaning and an absolute or rational meaning which exists as a “virtually unconditioned.”³⁸ In a human judgment which says that something exists, the existence which is affirmed and posited is a species of absolute since an affirmation of existence totally excludes any claim that would speak about any kind of non-existence or an absence of existence. The absolute that is known exists as a conditioned whose conditions of existence have all been met or fulfilled. And so, since its conditions for existence have all been fulfilled, it exists not as an “absolutely unconditioned” but as a “virtually unconditioned.” That which exists as an absolutely unconditioned is a being or a reality which is lacking in conditions. Its existence is never contingent. It is not subject to any qualifications. A formal absolute is to be distinguished from a virtual absolute. As soon as conditions for a conditioned have been fulfilled, the conditioned exists as an unconditioned. In his writings, for example, Lonergan speaks about Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon River in his march on Rome.³⁹ The crossing of the Rubicon was a contingent event. Things could have been different. Caesar could have decided not to cross the river. The fact that he did cross the Rubicon is a truth, however, which can never be

³⁶Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 73, p. 77, p. 150.

³⁷*De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 1; cf. *De Malo*, q. 6, a. 1, obj. 10.

³⁸Giovanni Sala, “Lonergan on the Virtually Unconditioned as the Ground of Judgment,” <http://www.lonergan.org/Sala/Lonergan%20on%20the%20Virtually%20Unconditioned-T2.htm>.

³⁹Bernard Lonergan, “Philosophy and Theology,” *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J.*, eds. William F. J. Ryan, S. J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S. J. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), p. 193.

denied. As a truth, it is timeless. It is an eternal truth which always holds even if it refers to a contingently existing event.

This reference to an historical event in the life of Julius Caesar accordingly points to the prevalence of concrete judgments of fact within the performance and the experience of our concrete human knowing, a cognitional fact that Lonergan adverts to in his understanding of judgment. In this matter, Lonergan adheres to a thesis that had been propounded by Aquinas. Human knowing is structured in such a way that its proper object is something which presents itself to us initially by way of an act of sense. Proper human knowing is incarnate human knowing. The object is an insight into concrete presentations of sense or phantasms, *intelligere in sensibili*. Everything else which is known by us as human beings is known through analogies that work from the nature of our human understanding as this nature is known by us through a process of self-reflection which reveals both the powers and the limits of our human knowing. Hence, if our human knowing or our human cognition is to move toward an act of judgment which can affirm the reality of an intelligible relation that is first known (or first experienced) by us in an act of abstractive understanding, the means is one which works by way of a return to our acts of sense (our acts of sensing). The object is “the groundedness or the absolute of a contingent” which, in fact, happens to be or exist.⁴⁰ Our understanding turns back on itself to attend to objects that exist within the experience which we have of ourselves, engaged in the cognitive process. Lonergan’s understanding of judgment differs little from Aquinas’s understanding of it excepting the fact that Lonergan explicitly speaks about our human consciousness and the structure of our human consciousness as had not been the case with Aquinas who had dealt with other concerns and questions, preferring to speak from a metaphysical perspective and not from a cognitional perspective. While Aquinas did speak about the experience which we have of our acts of sense and our acts of understanding, in the context of his time, he refrained from engaging in a process of articulate self-reflection whose object is to speak about transitions which occur within human consciousness as these allow us to distinguish between the being of different acts which are constitutive of our consciousness as we move from potential human knowing toward partial knowing, and then, from there, to instances of actual knowing. Lonergan’s analysis of judgment accordingly proposes a theory of truth that is grounded in our experience of consciousness if verifiable judgments alleging truth are to be reasonably and rationally made.

In general, the key to this approach is an introspective form of analysis which first distinguishes three kinds of presence or three kinds of object.⁴¹ There is, firstly, a local, physical, or ontological presence or object that exists apart from our cognition (as when we experience the presence of our faces which cannot be directly seen by our eyes); secondly, a presence or an object which is the term of a cognitional act (whether an act of sense or an act of reason as in thinking about this or thinking about that); and thirdly, a presence or an object which is the self-presence or the self-consciousness of a person who engages in certain acts and who therefore knows that he or she is engaging in certain acts and not in other kinds of act. While the second kind of object is not itself conscious (although it is the term of a conscious act), the third kind of

⁴⁰Sala.

⁴¹Bernard Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, unpublished manuscript translated 1989 by Charles C. Hefling, Jr. from the original Latin of the *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press *ad usum auditorum*, 1964), pp. 179-182.

object is conscious because it is a conscious act which refers to the consciousness of a conscious subject. By acts which are themselves conscious, a subject is itself conscious and it becomes more conscious than it would otherwise be. A human being *as a subject* then ceases to be more than just a substance: a being or a person who would be existing as a subject in only a potential or in an unrealized way. A person can be sometimes less than a subject through lack of activity although, with activity, a person is identified with a subject.⁴² A person exists as a subject. Thus, through differing conscious acts which lead to each other as conditions that prepare the way for the emergence of other, later conscious acts in our human cognition, a human person *as a subject* grows in a consciousness of self. A person becomes more aware of who he or she is and what he or she can do as a potential knower. A subject becomes is more present to him or herself. One is more fully conscious. And so, as a result, by a heightening of consciousness which occurs through our reflexive activities of self-knowing, a person grows in detachment and balance. A person becomes more able to make good judgments.

As a person grows in subjectivity, the subjectivity of a given subject undergoes change. A person is able to do more things. A person's horizon or outlook on life expands as it encompasses more factors (deals with more variables). The knowing of a subject *as a subject* transforms a subject in a way which transcends the value of any knowing that is the knowing of an object only *as an object*. Admittedly, in knowing an object as an object, to some extent, a knower is changed as something which is known now enters into a knower's consciousness (our acts of sensing and our acts of understanding).⁴³ However, by attending to the inner experience of our own consciousness, the psychological reality of our subjectivity manifests itself to us in a way which helps to train our cognition, our ability to understand and know. With every growth in our self-knowledge, with every little advance, a true and a more exact knowledge of other things becomes more probable. Self-knowledge is crucial. It serves as a basis or a foundation from which we can move to other things.

From a standpoint that is grounded in an explicit thematization of all the acts that are constitutive of our human consciousness, the self-reflection that, at times, had been referred to by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas now becomes a systematic which more exactly distinguishes between the intellectual consciousness that belongs to our acts of understanding from the consciousness that belongs to our acts of sense. Instead of immediately turning to an extroverted act of sense for evidence which can be used to say that something is true or real, we turn instead to the data that exists within our conscious life and we compare and attend to the different elements that we find within it. If, for instance, through our self-knowledge, we know that acts of understanding occur within sense and that they are triggered by apt images that have been adapted from the data of sense, we know that our acts of understanding transcend our acts of sensing even as they are never severed from a relation to our acts of sensing. In other words, as the self-reflection of judgment tries to move toward a knowledge of truth and being, it realizes that all knowledge of reality is mediated by experiences of intelligibility and not by experiences of sensibility. Oddly enough, in judgment, sensibility is approached through intelligibility and

⁴²Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 190; p. 198.

⁴³Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, pp. 183-4, p. 198; see also Bernard Lonergan, *Collection*, "Christ as Subject: A Reply," eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 165.

its constitutive principles. For instance, what is contradictory is not intelligible.⁴⁴ A square circle exists as an unintelligible thing. We do not ask questions about it. But, if we have an insight which grasps, for instance, what is man's nature, if we have a definition which specifies the being of a universal meaning, we would have a meaning which suggests what conditions need to be fulfilled if we are to speak about the being of existence or reality.⁴⁵ In our concept of a man, a form is inseparably joined with a material principle which refers to that which exists as "common matter" (the materiality that is common to all instances of men and women). Our definition, after all, is meant to apply to all instances of men and women. Hence, as a universally applicable definition, the material component refers to a generic species of matter which is referred to as a common matter. It is understood by us in an act of understanding, an act of understanding which leads to a concept or a definition. The common matter is not itself a datum of sense but, as matter, as a specification of matter, it suggests the kind of experience which is needed in terms of a possible specific act of sense if our definition is to be affirmed as a truth which truly knows a reality. An act of sense is specified which can apprehend an instance of particular matter that is distinct from the aforementioned common matter and which, yet, is structured in a way that it is delimited by our definition or our concept of man. From an analysis of a hypothetical meaning, an act of sense is determined if we are to proceed toward verification. This example perhaps illustrates the fact that the acts of sensing that are needed for verification may not be too obvious as we try to move from a prospective judgment toward a judgment whose term is either an affirmation of being or a denial of being. Our recourse to sense is never direct nor is it as simple as what we might initially presume and suppose.

If the above example is not a very good one for speaking about the kind of reflection which occurs in judgment, an example taken from the history of modern science might be more apt. The Italian astronomer and physicist, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was interested in the study of the free fall of falling objects.⁴⁶ The received Aristotelian view on the free fall of falling objects said that objects fell with rates of speed that varied with weight. A heavier object fell more quickly than a lighter object. It would fall with a greater acceleration. However, Galileo had doubts. He noticed that hailstones differing in weight fell to the ground at the same time. The heavier stones did not fall before the lighter. And so, he postulated that objects fell at the same speed regardless of what could be their weight. A constant acceleration was to be postulated with respect to the speed of fall. This was his insight. And, as he pondered his insight, he realized that, if he were to affirm his theory as a truth or a fact, he would need to find a way to measure the speeds of falling objects in intervals of time. In order to take accurate measurements, he needed to construct inclined planes that would slow the falling, downward speed of a moving object and also find a way to measure shorter intervals of time, a problem that he resolved by using half-second musical beats. By these means, he was able to generate a set of measurements which proved that, as we create conditions that approximate the condition and being of a vacuum, it can be affirmed that all falling objects in and about the earth's surface fall at a speed which exists as a constant acceleration. As every second passes, a dropped object falls to earth with an ever increasing velocity, a velocity which has been determined to be 32 feet per second per second. Since the discovery of Galileo's law for the free fall of falling objects near the surface of the earth, other laws have been found in the study of matter in motion as the

⁴⁴Sala.

⁴⁵Sala.

⁴⁶Stillman Drake, *Galileo* (Reading: Cox and Wyman Limited, 1980), p. 22.

particular subject matter in physics and, with the discovery of each new law, Galileo's law has been verified in a cumulative, ongoing kind of way.

In conclusion then in our look at Lonergan's notion of truth, since every reflective judgment elicits an affirmation or a denial that is grounded on specific, limited presentations of intellect and sense, it cannot be said in general that truth is to be understood as a purely relative commodity. Truth cannot be regarded as if it were a species of myth even if we should speak about the possible being of a likely myth (a story or an account that appears to be true or plausible). A real distinction is to be adverted to in terms of the difference which distinguishes an opinion from a truth. In the context of any given prospective judgment, an unlimited number of conditions do not have to be identified. A knowledge of one part or thing in the world does not imply or require that everything else be also known. Every act of human understanding which ends in a judgment is limited by the incremental character of our human knowing. However, this gradualness cannot be used to argue as a basis for denying that some truths can be reasonably and truly known. Our human knowing, the depth of this knowing, can advance over time and amid many different conditions and circumstances.