

Summarizing Lonergan's Notion of the Subject

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Lonergan's notion of the subject is understood by adverting to consciousness (the condition or state of our being conscious); hence, consciousness is an interior awareness that one is alive and that changes in awareness affect who one is at any given time. By being conscious of one's life and being, one is aware that one is a human subject. One is aware of one's subjectivity: who one is as a subject of different acts and what one can do as a subject of different acts.

Roots exist in Augustine as we advert to two different kinds of presence or object. One: a presence or object which refers to something that is the terminus or term of a cognitional act (whether it is an act of sense or an act of reason). If one sees one's face in a mirror, one's face is experienced as an object, an external object. It exists cognitively as an other: it is other than one's act of cognition although it also exists as the term of one's cognitive act.

Two: presence or object refers to an experience of self-presence or self-awareness. We refer to an implicit form of self-consciousness: one not only engages in certain acts but one experientially knows at the same time that one is engaging in certain acts and not in other kinds of acts. A person is aware of him or herself as a subject and what act happens to be operative in what a given subject is doing or receiving at any given time. In the experience of any given act, an object is made present to one's consciousness through one's act and the act itself exists as an inner object or datum of one's consciousness (a datum that one refers to in one's inner experience of self which is to be contrasted with outer kinds of experience which refer to things that are other than one's experience of self).

Being conscious differs from being self-conscious although self-consciousness requires consciousness as a prior condition: one cannot be self-conscious without first being conscious. Being conscious exists before one attends to one's awareness in a shift that heightens or increases one's consciousness as one moves from a mere consciousness of self to being self-conscious. For example: in going down a flight of stairs, one tries to take a lower step only to discover that one has already reached the floor. An awareness of misstep breaks into one's consciousness and one quickly becomes self-conscious.

On the basis of a difference between self-consciousness from consciousness, one can specify more clearly what is meant by consciousness. In self-consciousness, the term or object of one's consciousness is also itself conscious. A conscious act simply as a conscious act refers to a conscious subject: a subject as a subject. The object or term of one's consciousness is not conscious. By our conscious acts, every person is constituted as a subject, a conscious subject, although by acts that vary in nature and intensity. Through consciousness (through one's self-presence), different acts are constituted and, by different conscious acts, a subject also grows in consciousness. A subject is made conscious through participating or engaging in different acts of consciousness (different conscious acts) although the quality of one's consciousness will vary according to the presence or absence of any given conscious act and any combination which can exist among these acts. Consciousness exists in terms of inchoate consciousness, empirical consciousness, intellectual consciousness, rational consciousness, and moral or responsible consciousness.

When any conscious activity exists, a subject always ceases to be more than just a substance. As only a substance, one would be existing as a subject in only a potential or in an unrealized way. Where

consciousness is absent, one would be less than a subject.

On Lonergan's distinctions (object, act, and subject): an object is made present “as *that which is intended*, the act is present as *that by which the object is intended*, [and] the subject is present as *that which intends*.” For example: in an act of understanding, the object refers to an idea or meaning. In an act of conceptualization, the object refers to an inner word or concept. Through a succession of acts and inner objects, the natural being [*esse naturale*] of something which is other than our knowing is approached and perhaps it is understood and known through the intentional being [*esse intentionale*] which exists in our inquiring, cognitive consciousness. The intentional being of our mediating consciousness functions as a cognitive medium and so it is to be distinguished from the natural being of things which exist as other to our consciousness (even if accessible to the knowing which can exist in our human). But, no object of any kind can be experienced or known if a subject is lacking in consciousness. Through intentional consciousness, different things are known and, by means of this same consciousness, an order or world of real objects is mediated into the consciousness of a human subject. A world is made present and also a world is constituted by our acts of understanding. From an understanding of our intentional human consciousness, a base exists for understanding how acts of meaning or failures in acts of meaning have constituted the flow or the ups and downs of human history.

In a second shift which occurs, from self-consciousness can come self-knowledge where, in mere consciousness, a subject experiences him or herself implicitly and somewhat dimly, and then, in self-consciousness, a subject begins to experience him or herself explicitly *as an acting subject*, in self-knowledge and so in moving toward self-knowledge, a subject begins to experience him or herself as an objectivized or thematized subject: the subject becomes present “as an object.” A heightening of consciousness occurs and this introduces further clarifications in one’s self-understanding of things. One’s self-knowledge transforms oneself as a subject in a way which would not occur if one’s knowing were limited to a kind that is fundamentally akin to knowing an object *as an object* since, in knowing an object as an object, an object is not itself changed by the knowing that is had of it (even if, to some extent, a knower is changed in some manner whenever it comes to a knowledge of something in the consciousness which it possesses). By adverting to the inner experience that one has of one’s consciousness and through introspective self-reflection, the consequent awareness which results perhaps reveals the reality of the psychological subject for the first time (a psychological subject as opposed to other kinds of subject). From a deepening awareness of self, a person is taken and turned into a psychological subject: subject in potency becomes subject in act.