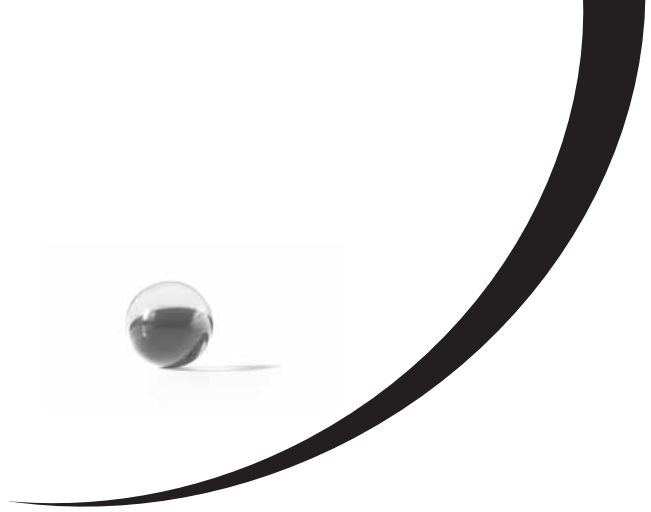


THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION



Motivated by Lonergan's cognitional theory as developed in his book Insight, we explore human perception as an act that selects and focuses on our external and internal experiences. In particular, by using St. Augustines' notion of 'Amor Dei' and 'Amor Sui' as a heuristic, we analyze the connection between our desires and the focusing process, especially within the context of what Lonergan describes as the "pure desire to know," and the desires associated with the fourfold bias of common sense.

di
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Recently I taught a course entitled “Un’introduzione al pensiero di Bernard Lonergan”, based on the book *Insight*¹. It was my first time to teach it and it went surprisingly well. In particular, the students’ reactions and self-analysis of their own perceptions came as quite a surprise. Together, we realized that perception was more than just awareness of data coming from the senses, but also included our awareness of our emotions and feelings, desires and motivations. Moreover, in the process of distinguishing perception from sensing we became quite aware (as Lonergan also points out) that there is, indeed, a process of selection that allows us to filter the content of our senses, and this process of selection had both a positive and negative aspect. The objective of this essay is to clarify our understanding of human perception in terms of act and content of the act with a particular focus on the selection process that both fosters and inhibits perceptions.

What is perception?

On the side of the subject, «all perceiving is a selecting and organizing»². Indeed, as Lonergan notes, «it has an orientation of its own and it selects, out of a myriad of others, just those impressions that can be constructed into a pattern of meaning»³. On the side of the object, there would seem then to be four different types of perception⁴, which we can then subdivide into external or internal perceptions, depending on whether they arise from internal or external experiences⁵. On the first level there is our perception of sense data. We see red, hear sounds, smell gas, feel cold, and taste ice cream. It relates primarily to our experience of the sensory object. As soon as we awake, we are aware of colors, sounds and smells, and unless we are deprived of our senses, there is really no way we can avoid being in direct contact with the world around us. The story of Helen Keller teaches us that without sight and hearing we would struggle immensely to relate to the outside world, and might experience the anger and frustration of being

1) B. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Longman, London 1957.

2) B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Longman, London 1972, p. 61.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 5.

4) Mystical experiences and the beatific vision of Christ can in the broader sense of the term be also perceived. However, we will not include them in this essay.

5) As regards to the meaning of the word “perception”, in a private communication, Prof. Brendan Purcell, of Notre Dane University in Sydney writes: «At least traditionally, Scholastic philosophers would use perception more or less in the same sense as Aristotle’s *sensus communis*, or common sense (not Lonergan’s ‘Common Sense’), that is the kind of clearing house that all our sensations are delivered to and somehow combined--so perception came to include our capacities for imagination and memory. It was on these ‘percepts’ that our understanding and deciding got to work. Obviously, as with ‘common sense,’ in ordinary English, ‘perception’ has a very wide range of meaning, but more technically, I’d feel it’s better limited to pre-intellectual consciousness».

Bearing this in mind, we note that also for Lonergan the act of perception corresponds to a *pre-intellectual* orientation and selection of data. Indeed, he notes that «the flow of sensations, as completed by memories and prolonged by imaginative acts of anticipation, becomes the flow of perceptions» (*Insight*, p. 73). In this essay, following the tradition, we too will only use the word *perception* in the context of *pre-intellectual consciousness*.

locked in. Helen Keller was able to perceive the world around her only through touch and smell, and was totally frustrated in her early attempts to communicate with others and have them acknowledge her presence as a human being. Without the senses, perception is restricted only to the inner experience of self. Conversely, without adequate perception, we may be overwhelmed by our senses (as in some cases of ADHD) and not be able to focus properly. A person in this case may feel constantly perturbed by a random invasion of unfiltered sense data which continuously distracts him or her.

As mentioned, there are also perceptions related to our own inner experience of self, which can be subsumed under the names feelings, desires and emotions. Our feelings, desires and emotions can be many. Our emotions and feelings can be expressed with such words as happy, sad, angry, apathetic, embarrassed, exuberant, aggrieved, bored, lonely, and so on. Our desires function on a biological, aesthetic, rational and dramatic levels of existence.

And last but not least there is another aspect of our inner experience of self that we call consciousness. It can be defined as «an awareness immanent within cognitional structure».⁶ We are capable of focusing on consciousness in a way that is analogous to how perception selects and organizes sense data. However, there is a difference. Focusing on consciousness is an intentional act related to questions of inquiry, whereas the selecting and organizing of data associated with human perception is pre-intellectual and comparable to animal⁷ perception. In other words, although we experience our consciousness, we do not perceive it⁸.

6) B. Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 320.

7) Aristotle and Aquinas classify a human being as “a rational animal”. However, both of them were not constrained in their definition by current positivist underpinnings of science and Darwinian evolutionary theory. In this essay, to avoid contemporary reductionist theories in which human beings are considered as only a product of “natural selection”, we distinguish human beings from animals. We recognize that humans have many characteristics of animals but would also argue that as humans we are more than mere animals. In the words of Lonergan «the animal pertains to an explanatory genus beyond that of the plant; that explanatory genus turns on sensibility ...» (*Insight*, p. 265). In contrast, while recognizing that sensibility is constitutive of humans, we also point out that «inquiry and insight, reflection and judgement, deliberation and choice, are a higher system of sensitive process» (*Ibid.*, p. 266).

8) Lonergan is quite clear in his book *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ* (255) that it is incorrect to identify «consciousness as a perception of oneself on the side of the object». However, he is also clear that «by the ‘self-affirmation of the knower’ is meant that the self as affirmed is characterized by such occurrences as sensing, perceiving, imagining, inquiring, understanding, formulating, reflecting, grasping the unconditioned, and affirming» (*Insight*, p. 31), all of which are characterized as conscious acts. It is also clear from his essay entitled “Cognitional Structure” that «where knowing is a structure knowing knowing must be a reduplication of the structure». Consequently, while consciousness is not perception of self on the side of the object, but experience of self on the side of the subject, nevertheless, we do have the ability through the process of reduplication to select and focus, through reflective consciousness on certain cognitional acts of which we are conscious. For example because of consciousness we can inquire into our acts of insight. Again, in *Method in Theology* (14), Lonergan speaks of «applying the operations as intentional to the operations as conscious». These intentional operations begin with acts of inquiry. This means that animals are conscious while perceiving but they

Consciousness pertains to our experience of a cognitional act qua act, while perceiving is a cognitional act that allows us to select and arrange some aspect of the experiential data that interests us in the present moment. It follows that while perceiving is itself a conscious act, conscious acts are not perceptions. Acts of understanding, judging and choosing are all conscious acts and can therefore become the focus of our inquiry, but they themselves are not perceived but rather are part of a dynamical internal unfolding of different cognitional acts. For example, a dog perceives the external world but it cannot perceive its own consciousness, meaning that it cannot select and focus on its own process of focusing and selecting. There is no perceiving the perceiving or any other cognitional act as percept. Nevertheless, as humans, because of our ability to ask questions, we are able to focus on our higher cognitional acts associated with intellectual inquiry and the acts of reasoning. «Consciousness-as-experience is broader than consciousness-as-perception»⁹. For this reason, consciousness is the underlying integrator of all our experience including our perceptions, in that we are conscious of all that we experience.

On another level, feelings, desires and fulfillment of desires can also be related as initial, effective and final causes, mediated by the emotions which can serve both as an initial or final cause of desire. For example, the emotions associated with loneliness can cause a desire for companionship resulting in happiness if the desire is fulfilled. Emotions can be constructive or destructive depending on the types of desire and how those desires are realized. In themselves, emotions are neither good nor bad but they can lead to good or bad desires, which in turn can lead to good or bad actions. For example love and lust, can be used to characterize healthy or unhealthy interpersonal relations respectively.

At the same time not all desires necessarily result from emotions. For example, our feeling hungry may result in our desire to eat and give way to a feeling of satisfaction or of being happy after a good meal. On the other hand, our feeling of being incomplete may result in a desire for fulfillment, which will then be fulfilled emotionally when the desire is actually fulfilled. But the feeling of incompleteness may express itself in many ways and also find fulfillment in different ways. On a purely biological level this may be identified with desiring a mate and seeking sexual gratification. On a more aesthetic level, the incompleteness may result in a desire for self-expression through a work of art, which may then be fulfilled (at least temporarily) as an experience of joy or satisfaction. The sense of incomple-

do not perceive their consciousness. Finally we note that as a consequence of the isomorphism between the structure of knowing and the real, the distinction between external and internal experiences are secondary. The fact is that within Lonergan's framework, we know through experience, understanding and judging regardless of whether the experience is external or internal. If we can perceive external experience through the senses, then we can also perceive internal experience like anger. Likewise, the higher conscious acts like inquiring which is experienced on the side of the subject can become the object of our selecting and focusing. This act of selecting and focusing pertains to intellectual inquiry and not to perception.

9) B. Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, U. Press, Toronto 2002, p. 255.

teness may also be experienced on the intellectual level, which in turn gives rise to a desire to know, which then finds some partial fulfillment in an answer to a question. Finally, on the dramatic level of daily living, our incompleteness may express itself in a deep desire for meaning and self-transcendence. Our feelings and desires remind us that we are not always fulfilled and may lead to frustration especially when we realize that our ultimate end is never actually achievable.

In reality, human desires are considerably more polymorphic than the desires of animals; they are not just an expression of biological extraversion functioning according to evolutionary forces. Unlike the animals, we also have a desire for self-transcendence and authenticity, manifested as a pure desire to know, a desire to love, a desire to do good, a desire for communion and unity with each other, a desire to embrace the Mystery and to be in union with the divine.

Ultimately, we can say that we are all driven by a desire to be happy. However, if such a profound desire persists continuously throughout our lives, it is also a confirmation that it has never been fully fulfilled, and that the source of our longing has never been reached in that it is unrestricted and seeks self-transcendence. Moreover, this desire is both nuanced and polymorphic. We do not all seek fulfillment in the same way. Some seek fulfillment in religion, others in inter-personal relations, others in academic life, while others seek it in money, sex and lust for power. Indeed, in our quest for happiness, we all too often discover our incapacity to achieve it, and experience inner brokenness, especially as we get older. Here lies an aspect of the mystery of original sin.

Nevertheless, the quest itself can become the source of our happiness and give meaning to our lives. Such a quest is characterized by what Lonergan calls the «pure desire to know»¹⁰, or «the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know»¹¹. By our very nature, our perception gives rise to questions, followed by answers and then further questions, in a never-ending ongoing process. It defines transcendental method, meaning that as a method «it is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operation yielding, cumulative and progressive results»¹². It is transcendental «for the results envisaged are not confined categorically to some particular field or subject, but regard any result that could be intended by the completely open transcendental notions»¹³. Its objective is Being, although this is not something that can be demonstrated by a logical argument. Rather each person must discover it for his or herself.

Amor Dei and Amor Sui

It would seem based on the above that our desires are not only themselves perceptible but also guide our focusing and selection process. We could say that perceiving is to desires as insight is to inquiry, with the caveat that in humans

10) *Ibid.*, p. 348.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 380.

12) Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 14.

13) *Ibid.*, p. 14.

both the act and content of desires can be themselves perceived, just as the act and content of inquiry can also be grasped by insight. An animal desires to eat because it perceives hunger. It is a fulfillment of a biological act. We too can also feel hunger, but in addition we also perceive the longing to eat. In a similar way, we can perceive a desire to understand, a desire to do good, a desire to love and a desire for meaning and authenticity. All of these can be considered expressions of «the pure and unrestricted desire to know». Likewise we can perceive a desire not to understand and not to know, a desire for revenge and not to do good, lustful desires and so on. At the base of all of these is undoubtedly the desire to be happy and fulfilled, and yet ironically our pursuit of this happiness oftentimes leads in opposite directions.

These opposed desires can be subdivide into two, namely the pure desire to know characterized by the quest for authenticity and meaning, and the desires that cause us to deviate from that quest. Both are dialectically related to each other. St. Augustine captures them very well in his *Confessions*. His analysis could be described as a journey to the center of the person. There we find an autobiographical account of a soul in search of meaning, which ultimately blossoms into the realization that «You have formed us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace until they find rest in You»¹⁴. Moreover, this realization does not occur in a vacuum. Augustine is greatly aware not only of his struggle to find truth but also of his passions. This finds expression in his later work *Civitas Dei* in which he distinguishes between the City of God motivated by *Amor Dei* and the city of this world motivated by *Amor Sui*. In fact, our initial desire for happiness essentially subdivides into the dialectical interplay between love of God and love of oneself. Lonergan captures the same tension by contrasting the *pure desire to know*, whose objective is Being, with all of the other desires that we might have. Later in *Method in Theology* this is worked out in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity characterized respectively by intellectual, moral and religious conversion as opposed to a life where no conversion takes place.

As noted, these desires are dialectically intertwined within us. A really evil person will be characterized primarily by love of self. A saintly person will be characterized primarily by love of God and neighbor. In real life, most people are somewhere in between, caught in this inner dialectical struggle. This struggle is most acute during moments of temptation, captured so well by St. Paul when he notes «For I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but the evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing» (*Rm 7,1*). It is also very beautifully narrated by Dostoevsky in his book *Crime and Punishment*. There Raskolnikov is torn between his conscience which wants him to admit that murdering the old money lender was in fact wrong and between his "Napoleonic" image of himself as one who was destined to be someone great and consequently beyond good and evil¹⁵. The fact is, in spite of our best intentions, we are not fully integrated as human beings. Theologically we are told, and in practice experience, that we

14) St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Penquin, New York 1984, p. 21.

15) K. Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky his Life and Work*, U. Press, Princeton 1971, Ch. XIII for an interesting description of this dialectic in Dostoevsky's book *Crime and Punishment*.

have a propensity to sin. No matter how much we try to live authentically, we experience a division and struggle within ourselves. Indeed, Cardinal Newman, in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* notes that his belief in the doctrine of original sin comes not because it is imposed on him by the Church but because he perceives it within himself. At the core of his humanity, he is aware of not being fully integrated which he then succinctly expresses (using the third person) as follows:

He will *perceive* that there is much in him which ought not to be in him. His own natural sense of right and wrong tells him that peevishness, sullenness, deceit, and self-will, are tempers and principles of which he has cause to be ashamed, and he feels that these bad tempers and principles are in his heart. As he grows older, he will understand this more and more. [...] Thus he will learn from *experience* the doctrine of original sin, before he knows the actual name of it¹⁶.

The role of conversion

At the basis of our choice of *Amor Dei* over *Amor Sui*, at the basis of our choice to give free reign to our pure desire to know and not succumb to biases, at the basis of our being authentic as distinct from being inauthentic, lies the notion of conversion. Indeed, following the lead set by St. Augustine, we not only differentiate two categories of desires, but we can also ask what determines them, and what are the consequences of allowing one desire to dominate the other? It is here that we arrive at the notion of conversion.

Loneragan distinguishes three types of conversion: intellectual, moral and religious. Intellectual conversion takes place when we give free reign to the pure desire to know. Our perceptions are overwhelmed by awe and wonder at the possibility of knowing. This desire moves us beyond perceptions to questions to insights and then to further questions. It seeks to know and in the process grasps either explicitly or implicitly that to know is to know the real. For Aquinas this is described as participation in the eternal light of God¹⁷, for Cardinal Newman it is described as *the illative sense*¹⁸. For Lonergan it is the realization that full human knowing means knowing the truth, means knowing the real. We know the real because we are not neutral observers looking at reality from without, but instead are constituted by the very reality we are trying to understand. The “thing in itself” for Lonergan is not the “noumenon” of Kant. Rather it can be affirmed to exist by means of a reflective insight in response to the question “Is it so?” If all the conditions necessary to say “yes” are met then the “thing in itself” is real and I

16) J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 8, Longmans 1908, pp. 116-117. Also www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume8/index.html

17) Tomas Aquinas, *C. Gent.*, 1, c.59, no. 2 and 3; *C. Gent.*, II, 77, par. 5; *Sum. Theol.*, 1, q.84, a.5.

18) J. H. Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, Chap. 9.

can know it. Moreover, questions give rise to further questions, which seek further answers, only to be followed by further questions which ultimately, if authentic, intend Being. Intellectual conversion rejoices in knowing because to know is to know the real is to participate in Being as we seek it.

But knowing gives way to action and action requires a moral commitment. As our awareness of this moral commitment grows, Socrates becomes for us the exemplar of the good man. Not only did he call the people of Athens to moral conversion, but he also accepted a death sentence instead of compromising on his values. Socrates quest was further pursued by Plato and Aristotle. We are reminded by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that «actions are called just when they are such as the just and temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them as just and temperate men do them»¹⁹. In other words, right living is not only about doing the right thing but first and foremost, it is determined by the quality of the act as measured not by external actions but by our internal disposition. It is the discovery of virtue. Without moral conversion, or equivalently, without “a self-transcending subject”, there can be no moral living in a Lonerganian sense. For example, James Cox notes that in the Puritan society of early North America «every Virginia minister was required to read the “Articles, Lawes and Orders” to his congregation every Sunday, and, among other things, parishioners were reminded that failure to attend church twice each day was punishable in the first instance by the loss of a day’s food. A second offense was punishable by a whipping and a third by six months of rowing in the colony’s galleys»²⁰. Moral conversion in such a society risked being a mere façade. One could well envision that a person in such a society would obey the moral laws out of fear of being punished and not necessarily because he or she was a “just and temperate” person as defined by Aristotle.

Religious conversion, as Lonergan describes it, is *other-worldly falling in love*²¹. It is where the quest for meaning and the pure desire to know converge in awareness that the quest is the meaning and that happiness is the quest. If we live motivated by this *Amor Dei*, we find that life becomes always simpler and that the desire to know, and the desire to be good, are now transcended by the desire to know, love and be in God. It means that moral conversion is sublated with a religious one and that living according to moral norms is transformed into a life of total freedom where one experiences as did St. Augustine that it is sufficient to *love God and do as one pleases*. It is the life of the mystic, who has understood the folly of this world, and leaves everything to follow the Gospel. It is the life of someone who, like Pavel Florenskij, *perceives the mystery* and recognizes in that perception an authentic vocation and follows it.

Where does the pure desire, latent in some and dominant in others, come from? Given Aquinas’ treatment of grace, we could say that it initiates with the

19) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, iii,4; 1105b 5-8, cited by Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 14.

20) J. Cox, *Bilboes, Brands and Branks: Colonial Crimes and Punishments*, (www.history.org/foundation/journal/spring03/branks.cfm).

21) B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 240.

grace of God and if followed, gradually become habitual²², or in the more modern language of Lonergan we could say that it reflects «the dynamic state of being in love with God»²³ without restrictions. It is also true that one may experience that desire and in no way identify it with God. Indeed it is interesting that within the class-room setting when asked to describe their own experience of this desire, the majority expressed it in terms of a religious conversion, the perception of the mystery, or of a calling to follow God. Only one student expressed it in terms of the desire to want to know and understand. In other words, for the majority of the students at the *Sophia University Institute*, the objective of their desire was perceived as a loving mystery which in certain moments entered their lives and touched their hearts²⁴.

Distorted Perceptions and the Biases of Common Sense

Although the pure and disinterested desire to know may be identified with what is most noble within us, it is often obscured and ignored in favor of other desires. We might wonder as to why this happens. Certainly, no simple answer can be given. On a theological level we might see this as an expression of a love of darkness, derived from original sin, which gives rise to what Voeglin calls a “pneumapathology”. On a philosophical level it might be identified with ideology and the prohibition of questions. On a psychological level, it might be identified with the lack of faith «in the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen», at least in any immediate sense. Consequently, there arises the need to fill this void with a more immediate gratification or sense of security especially if one is paralyzed by fear. The peculiarity of this pathology is its refusal to recognize that anything is wrong and that things could and should be otherwise. And although the presence of the pure desire is always capable of emerging, it can easily be ignored or not given its full significance. Where this happens, the selection process associated with perceptions, which in the case of the pure desire helps us focus on what is necessary to get to the truth and right living, is now distorted by a process that seeks not self-transcendence but rather self-fulfillment in the here and now²⁵. It can be perceived as a lust for power, money, sex and drugs which in the extreme

22) B. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom in Thomas Aquinas*, U. Press, Toronto 2000. This book, which is essentially Lonergan's doctoral dissertation, gives a comprehensive analysis of the notion of grace as developed by Aquinas.

23) B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 107.

24) Obviously such an observation does not constitute a scientific study. To do so would entail making multiple observations over many years and also at other academic institutions.

25) R. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology*, U. Press, Toronto 2005, pp. 109-143. Doran has suggested that in order for the pure desire to fully emerge we need a “psychic conversion”, which as he says «effects a habitual *conversion ad phantasmata*, a restoration of a ‘natural orientation’ of incarnate spirit» (p. 110). In other words, psychic conversion is a guarantee that the focusing and filtering process associated with perception is both pure and healthy and not distorted. It should be noted that the notion of psychic conversion comes from Doran and not Lonergan.

case can become an addiction. In other cases, it can be perceived as fear of the unknown or fear of being rejected.

Loneragan has analyzed these perceptual disorders in terms of what he calls the biases. He lists them as the dramatic, the individual, the group and the general biases of common sense²⁶. We will say a little about each one of them. To the extent that all four biases are deformations of the pure desire to know, we can see each one as a different expression of the *Amor Sui* described by Augustine.

The dramatic bias for whatever reason fails to want insights. It is happy to curtail questions that make it uncomfortable or upset its life style and it «favours a withdrawal from the outer drama of human living into the inner drama of phantasy»²⁷. At times, we might all have a tendency to withdraw into our inner phantasies, however, in certain cases it can become a real aberration with the withdrawal from the real world resulting in a distortion of common sense. This can be seen perhaps in some of the great tyrants and dysfunctional leaders of history. Hitler in his last days had become such a recluse that he could not face the reality of a Germany being destroyed systematically because of his short-comings and failure to surrender. He was prepared to let Berlin be destroyed street by street, and house by house rather than admit that he was defeated. We can also see the same tendency and refusal to understand in any form of addiction. An addicted person, who is in denial, refuses to accept that he or she has a problem and that his or her isolation is a self-imposed withdrawal from the world. It gives rise to what Lonergan calls a «scotoma», that is a blind spot. Although, it primarily functions on the sub-conscious level, nevertheless its repercussions affect our perceptions of the real world and consequently, «the aberration of the censorship is primarily repressive; its positive activity is to prevent the emergence into consciousness of perspectives that would give rise to unwanted insights»²⁸, including the inhibition of images that might lead to them.

The second deformation considered by Lonergan is the individual bias which is essentially characterized by egoism. It is a very overt expression of the *Amor Sui*

26) A detailed analysis of «common sense» is given in chapters VI and VII of *Insight*. Specifically, «common sense, unlike the sciences, is a specialization of intelligence in the particular and concrete» (p. 175). It «has no use for a technical language and no tendency towards a formal mode of speech. It agrees that one must say what one means and mean what one says. But its correspondence between saying and meaning is at once subtle and fluid» (p. 177). Consider, for example, the meaning of the word water. For a scientist it has a very precise technical meaning encapsulated in the formula H_2O . However, on the level of common sense, water is what we find in the river and the ocean, what we use for cooking and cleaning etc. We may not be able to formally define it, yet because of our common sense we know what it is and how to recognize it in a non-scientific way, in a variety of manners. Also, common sense encapsulates the customs and traditions of peoples and nations, our ways of behaving and doing things, and precisely for that reason the common sense of one person can be very different to the common sense of another. For example, for someone living in the UK, common sense will dictate always carrying an umbrella to avoid being caught unexpectedly in the rain. For someone living in Tucson, Arizona, common sense will suggest wearing a hat to avoid sunstroke and always to carry water with you, especially when taking a road trip.

27) B. Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 191.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 192.

of Augustine. In this case, what is desired are only those insights that may help the person obtain his or her own end. Egoism is, in the words of Lonergan, «neither mere spontaneity nor pure intelligence but an interference with the development of intelligence». It tends to involve a devious use of intelligence and becomes manifest as selfishness, which is then reflected within the “uneasy conscience” of its subject.

The third deformation is referred to as a group bias. We are all part of a group from the first moments of our birth. We are (with rare exceptions) born into a family, which is part of a larger society or group. The values of this group are passed on to us for better or for worst. Indeed, much of the common sense of the group is needed for practical living, and for that reason we tend to adhere to the group values and benefit greatly from it. However, we also desire acceptance, and tend to adhere to the group values even if they are not always laudable. Moreover, «the advantage of one group commonly is disadvantageous to another». We perceive our group as being better than another, and if it is not so, then the fault has to be assigned to another group. Many Irish for example tend to blame the English for their own shortcomings as a nation. Many inhabitants of South American countries will place all the blame for their economic downfall on the presence of multinationals within their respective countries, without be willing to recognize that much of the downfall is due to ineptness or corruption.

Finally, the last bias reflects the fact that our development as creatures of this world is more often dominated by common sense than by the full use of reason. «Every specialist runs the risk of turning his specialty into a bias by failing to recognize and appreciate the significance of other fields». Laissez-faire economics suggested that the Irish-famine was a natural phenomenon that could not be averted but failed to recognize that the plight of the poor in Ireland was due to unjust legislation against Catholics. Similarly, common sense would suggest that if Americans were to impose more gun control in their society they would have less violence. The majority of Americans on the other hand, believe that gun control essentially means that individuals will not be adequately able to protect themselves when the need arises. Each perceives the world differently and fails to see what the other side sees.

The Prohibition of Questions, the theory put to the test.

One aspect of the suppression of the pure desire to know can be subsumed under the expression «the prohibition of questions»²⁹, as characterized by Eric Voegelin. Beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia*, in which the conditions necessary for having a perfect society are described, there is also the awareness that such conditions cannot be met in this life. The necessity of overcoming poverty, sickness, death, the need to work and problems related to sexuality in order to

29) E. Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Gateway, Chicago 1968, p. 23.

have a perfect society will always be hampered by the presence of «the serpent of superbia»³⁰.

Unfortunately, this “superbia” is overlooked in ideological attempts to found the perfect society. For example, in the Leviathan of Hobbes, the transcendent end of history is transformed into an immanent end in which the reign of God is to be brought about on this earth. Unfortunately, to achieve this aim, it is necessary to control people’s passions not by appealing to the *summum bonum* of God’s love but by constraining them to live in fear of the *summum malum*³¹. In reality, the so-called reign of God on earth, is replaced by a reign of suppression and in some cases by an outright reign of terror, as characterized by the Salem witch hunt. The failure of Hobbes to recognize that the enforced suppression of people’s passions by a gnostic prophet who himself was dominated by his own “lust for power”, constitutes an aspect of the “prohibition of questions”. The Leviathan could never bring about in practice the reign of god, because the very passions that he perceived as preventing this reign became the very passion necessary to invoke the reign. In Hobbes construct there is no pure desire seeking a transcendent end because to acknowledge such a desire would mean that his underlying premise that «the law of nature, and the civil law, therefore, contain each other, and are of equal extent»³², would not be valid. In the Leviathan, a pure and unrestricted desire for the *summum bonum* does not exist.

A third case to consider with respect to the “prohibition of questions” is positivism. Comte considered himself the *fondateur de le religion de l’humanité* which he hoped to model on the Catholic Church. This religion of humanity identified the “objective” search for truth with a pseudo-scientific method. All perceived and relevant data had not only to come from the senses but also had to be measured. Moreover, the natural sciences were given a privileged position in that if something could be quantified it was to be considered rational and objective, otherwise it was to be classified as subjective knowledge. As a consequence, to quote Voegelin, «the use of method as the criterion of science abolishes theoretical relevance»³³. In other words, all facts were considered to be worthy of science, «regardless of their relevance, as long as they resulted from a correct use of method»³⁴. Ironically, although Comte’s arbitrary division of history into the mythical, metaphysical and scientific phases would seem to have violated his own principle of objectivity and although the basic axioms of positivism were not themselves quantifiable, this did not seem to bother him. Indeed, during his first Lecture of his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, in order to curtail possible «objections to his construct, he bluntly dismiss[ed] them as idle questions»³⁵. This produces a peculiar psychological phenomenon in which the pure desire is dismissed as irrelevant, while some prejudice against reason is given free reign. It is worth noting

30) *Ibid.*, p. 101.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 102-105.

32) E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, U. Press, Chicago 1954 quoting Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Chap. xxvi, p. 174.

33) E. Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p. 8.

34) *Ibid.*

35) *Ibid.*, p. 26.

that Comte was well aware of St. Augustine's distinction between *Amor Dei* and *Amor Sui*, but since his system was essentially agnostic, it was important that the new *religion de l'humanité* be founded on comparable principles. Consequently, he coined the word *altruism*³⁶ to replace *Amor Dei*. Again, one would have to ask the obvious, although positivism refused to ask it. If within positivism, value statements are meaningless then how can *altruism* have any meaning in a value-free system? Indeed, why is it even worth mentioning?

A fourth case, examined at length by Voegelin is Marxism. Here we have an elaborate construct to avoid any relevant question that could bring down the system. For Marx «man is directly a being of nature», where «nature as it develops through history [and] ... as it develops through industry ... is true anthropological nature»³⁷. Consequently, «all so called world history is nothing but the production of man by human labor»³⁸. Since, Marx had no rational justification for his construct, he had to be sure that questions that could bring down his system were to be avoided. And so he wrote «when you inquire about creation and nature and man, you abstract from nature and man», as if there were something wrong with the question. However, rather than confront the obvious, Marx insisted that you should «give up your abstraction and you will give up your question along with it». Again he wrote «do not think, do not question me»³⁹. He further declared that «for socialist man» such a question «becomes a practical impossibility»⁴⁰. It seems incredible that such sayings were permitted in a so called “scientific system” of thought.

Perception as a form of knowing

The peculiarity of the biases also raises the question as to their specific content. In the end, if one has a bias it will also follow that the content of the bias will project itself onto our perception of the “real” world. For example, if someone has a bias against a certain race of people it is usually because he or she “knows” that they are evil, or stupid, or inept etc. The peculiarity of this type of knowledge is directly related to our perceptions. Indeed, if we define full knowing as a structure composed of experience, understanding and judgement then the knowing due to mere perception will stand in dialectical contrast to it⁴¹.

The fact is our animal traits develop faster than our ability to reason as human beings. Like an animal when we awake in the morning we have our bodily needs to meet. We need to go to the bathroom and we also need to eat something. Our biological condition does not allow us to be otherwise. They function by instinct. Indeed, if we operate merely on the level of our senses, we can be quite effective

36) *Ibid.*, p. 85.

37) *Ibid.*, p. 23.

38) *Ibid.*, p. 24.

39) *Ibid.*, p. 25.

40) *Ibid.*

41) B. Lonergan, *Cognitive Structure in Collection*, U. Press, Toronto 1994.

in negotiating our environment. Animals are a more efficient solution to biological extraversion in accordance with Darwinian evolution. They are more efficient and have more capacity than plants in adapting to their environment. Their knowing is equivalent to what they perceive, imagine and remember. A dog, for example, will hide his bone in order to return to it at a later time. At the same time a dog while conscious of his object, unlike humans, cannot reflect on its own consciousness. The content of animal knowing is called a "body" by Lonergan and is defined «as an already out there now real»⁴². The animal knows strictly by means of the senses and responds to his appetites in accordance with what the senses and perception dictate. It perceives bodies.

Humans too have the same capacity. However, unlike animals, humans also have the ability to ask questions, seek answers, and check to see if their answers are correct. The objects of full human knowing are not bodies but things. We know of the existence of atoms and water molecules not because of our senses but because of our ability for scientific inquiry, which entails abstract thinking and the ability to measure and relate data to each other. We learn to gather data, form abstract concepts and implement a verification process that allows us to affirm whether our understanding is correct, or possibly correct or even false. However, as human beings, we tend not to spend all of our time functioning at the higher levels of reasoning. To fulfill our daily chores, common sense knowledge and the knowledge that we obtain from our perceptions function quite adequately and in many ways more effectively. Abstract theories do not put bread on the table, although some knowledge of biology and chemistry might make food production more efficient. Consequently, while a "body" as perceived by an animal is merely the object of the senses, the body as perceived by a human oftentimes combines both sense data and «any confusion or mixture of elements taken both from the notion of thing and from the notion of a "body" in its primary sense»⁴³. In other words, human perceptions are not only made of sense data but also combine with our common sense knowledge and biases to imagine a world of bodies beyond our senses. The notion of "absolute space and absolute time" as conceived by Newton and Kant would fulfill our definition of "an already out there now real". As it turns out, it was and is a flawed concept. Likewise, when our prejudices combine with our senses, we can inadvertently perceive that all multinationals really

42) B. Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 250-254. For an animal, like a dog, a bone or a bowl of water are examples of an 'already out there now real.' The dog does not have a concept of *water*, or words to describe it. The dog's response is purely on the level of the senses, perception and images. It sees and smells the water, and if thirsty, the dog responds to its biological stimulus by drinking it. Neither common sense nor scientific knowledge are involved. It is a "knowing" that comes purely from a stimulus response. In the language of Lonergan, the object of such a stimulus response is called a *body*, as distinct from a *thing-for-us* which refers to an object of common sense (consider the use of the word *water*), or a *thing-in-itself* which refers to a thing which is known scientifically (consider the use of the formula H_2O .) Unfortunately, when it comes to human beings, 'the already out there now real' in addition to being merely a response to stimulus can also include "ideas" and concepts which are not grounded in pure reason and more often than not are an expression of some prejudice.

43) *Ibid.*, p. 254.

are evil, that people are out to get me because they want to deprive me of drugs or alcohol or that people are intrinsically evil and should never be trusted and so on. It's a world governed by our fears and passions, in which we are prone to be a slave to our prejudices.

Conclusion

We have in this short essay, tried to analyze human perception. By way of conclusion, we note that all knowledge whether good or bad begins with our perceptions. In many ways we perceive what we want to perceive, sometimes quite spontaneously, sometimes in accordance with the *pure desire to know* and sometimes as a consequence of a deliberate censoring process that we impose on our desires. We have noted that authenticity requires conversion and without this conversion, we may end up living a life of delusion and perversion.

Men and women are not animals but if conversion is not recognized or at least implicitly desired we risk living a life lower than the animals. In the end, Saint Augustine's distinction between *Amor Dei* and *Amor Sui* is as valid today as it was in his time and indeed, before his time. It defines that inner dialectic that in turn becomes expressed as a tension between full human knowing and our animal knowing, between authenticity and inauthenticity, between the quest for meaning and a meaningless quest. In a certain sense, we can say that we perceive our desires and desire our perceptions, and that this desire is authentic when it perceives the other as a gift. In this way *altruism* becomes an expression of the *Amor Dei* of Augustine, of the perception of Mystery in that being orientated to our neighbor we are orientated towards Being, the Good and The Mystery while at the same time our altruism is itself orientated by Being, the Good and the Mystery. It constitutes both our beginning and our end, both the Alpha and Omega of true human living.

Finally, in terms of the classroom situation, student's benefit a lot from being asked to describe both their own pure desire to know and also at least one of their biases. Not only does it help them develop as human beings but it also enables them to discover Lonergan's cognitional theory for themselves. Indeed, I was very impressed by their honesty and willingness to self-appropriate throughout the course.