

might be looked to for an answer to Dr Leavis's objection to 'the wounded surgeon' passage in *East Coker*. I suggest he might reply that all parts of the poem are religiously explicit, but in different ways for different readers, 'the measure of probability necessary for certainty varying with the individual mind'. (p 58).

In conclusion I should like to respond briefly to Professor Swanston's invitation to consider the place of the image in Newman's way of appreciating the world. When I spoke of cliché I had in mind Newman's reference to 'moor' and 'fen' in *Lead, Kindly Light* rather than to the 'angel faces' in the next line. Even so, I would be inclined to argue that they are not so effectively realized as are the Angels in the passage cited from the *Apologia*, with its echo of St Augustine, who 'by a playful device' may have concealed themselves from the dreaming boy. Starting from the essential image of Jesus Christ – 'the original instrument' of our conversion (p 53) – our conversation might soon arrive at icons and their place in the arousing and teaching of religion, and especially in the liturgy; but we should also want to discuss the interrogative form which images take in diverse cultures – secular and non-Christian.

I should also like to respond to Dr Cockshut's enlarging references to Keble and Hopkins. What is the secret of Hopkins's appeal to sensibilities so much at variance from his own? This might lead us to the fundamental mystery – our firm assent to the word of God obscurely revealed.

Lonergan and Hume – I

Epistemology (1)

J Fitzpatrick

There are several reasons for undertaking a comparison of Lonergan and Hume. It is my intention to move the discussion on to the realm of philosophy of religion and as the author of the most powerful critique of religion ever written in English, Hume lays strong claims for inclusion. It will, I trust, be interesting to see how Lonergan's argument for the existence of God copes with Hume's famous objections and to see further how a Lonerganian response might be fashioned to meet the various facets of Hume's critique.

But before going on to philosophy of religion it will be necessary and profitable to compare and contrast the epistemologies of the two philosophers since these underpin and are presupposed by their respective positions on religious belief. Besides, there is a growing awareness today that the dispute about religious belief is at heart a dispute about rival conceptions of human rationality. It is surely significant that philosophy of religion, as a subject, dates back to the rise of empiricism.¹ Before then there had been, to be sure, disputes, frequently acrimonious, over interpretations of religious doctrines and so forth, but it was not until then that men were affected by a profound unease surrounding religion as a *phenomenon*. For the first time since the classical age the legitimacy of religious belief of any kind was called in question. From the vantage-point of the twentieth century it is becoming increasingly clear that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the importation into philosophy of what was believed to be the method of science, there arose a new and revolutionary conception of human rationality that rendered religious belief problematic. As a systematic thinker truly representative of his age Hume acts as a lens through which we can view what we might call the Enlightenment conception of rationality. The relevance of Lonergan to the enduring philosophical debate about religious belief is that his epistemology and philosophical method represent yet a new conception of human rationality at variance with that of the Enlightenment, to the extent that some of his closest disciples speak of him inaugurating a new Enlightenment. Whatever history makes of that judgment, it remains supremely true that questions of philosophical method cannot be overlooked if we are to tackle the roots of modern philosophical scepticism regarding religious belief and not merely treat the symptoms. A close comparison of the epistemologies of Lonergan and Hume will serve to bring out and lay bare these deeper issues. Finally, of possible historical interest is the internal evidence, which I hope will emerge in passing, that in working out his theory of cognition, Lonergan addressed himself to a number of issues or problems first raised and discussed by Hume.

I

It is striking how the two philosophers, Lonergan and Hume, set out on similar enterprises and with remarkably similar tactics. On tactics, Lonergan quotes with approval Hume's remarks in the Introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature* that 'one does not conquer a territory by taking here an outpost and there a town or village but by marching directly upon the capital and assaulting its citadel'.² Hume's intentions at the outset of his enterprise are clearly stated in the same Introduction:

'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even *Mathematics*, *Natural Philosophy*, and *Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and could explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings.³

Lonergan's ambition is not dissimilar:

Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.⁴

It is in their manner of understanding understanding that the two philosophers differ. Hume states his with his customary clarity: 'And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation'.⁵ Hume never questions this basic methodology and when he speaks of 'experience and observation' he understands these terms in a very strict and narrow sense. Where Locke before him had wished to examine the understanding in order to discover 'the utmost extent of its tether' but had never doubted that knowledge can signify an extramental reality, Hume conceived the problem in a bolder and logically more rigorous manner. All we have knowledge of, he says, are our perceptions and these he divides into a) impressions and b) ideas. Impressions, which derive from 'unknown causes', are the immediate data of sense and Hume frequently speaks as if they were images which reveal their nature immediately. Ideas are copies or 'faint images' of impressions and there can be no idea without a corresponding impression. The acid test of the validity of an idea for Hume, therefore, becomes, 'from what *impression* is that supposed idea derived'? It is by means of this test that he gets rid of Locke's notion of material substance and Berkeley's notion of spiritual substance: we have no sense impression of either. We can see that for Hume knowing is highly analogous to sensation since ideas, which make up what we know, derive from sensation and have their validity tested by reference to sensation. Indeed, so frequently are we struck by the pictorial character of Hume's examples that we might be allowed the oversimplification of saying

that he comes close to suggesting that knowing is 'taking a good look': correct knowing is looking and seeing what is there; incorrect knowing is claiming to have an idea of something which looking does not reveal to be there, the mistake made by Locke and Berkeley.

For Hume the world is basically a manifold of impressions, the mind a bundle of perceptions and one of the problems that faced him was to explain the unity which we perceive in the world. If each sensory impression is 'loose and unconnected' as he maintains, why do we not experience the world as a chaos or disjointed flux? (This was the same problem faced later by Kant, which Kant overcame by means of the synthesising power of his a priori forms and categories). The reason we see ideas in certain familiar patterns, Hume explains, is owing to the power of the association of ideas which gives rise to beliefs and habits that guide the imagination to impose a unity on the manifold of impressions. In performing this operation the imagination is particularly guided by the qualities of resemblance, contiguity in time and place, and cause and effect. The association of ideas, then, supplies the 'cement' that binds together the Humean world in place of the discarded notion of substance. But there is a distinction to be drawn between the relations of resemblance and contiguity and the relation of cause and effect. For whereas resemblance and contiguity are given in sensation, causality is not. What do we mean, Hume asks, when we say that one thing is a cause and another its effect? In sense perception we have an impression of flame and an impression of heat, but we have no impression of a *cause* linking the flame with the heat, nor could the idea of cause arise from a simple comparison of the idea of flame with the idea of heat. Hume's answer is that causality is nothing more than temporal and spatial succession, on the part of the object, and, on the subject's part, an expectation that when A happens B will follow.

This account of causality entails grave problems for science not only because the causal explanations of modern science frequently lead to the postulation of *unobservable* entities but also because the inferences of modern science are grounded on their *explanatory* power, while Hume's account of causality as spatial and temporal contiguity leaves explanation out of account. Perhaps a more serious difficulty for Hume is that, having made sense impression the touchstone of valid knowing he has thereby imprisoned knowledge within a screen of percepts, since it is impossible to get behind the screen and see whether the percepts correspond to objects in the world. ' 'Tis vain,' he says, 'to ask, whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings'. His scepticism becomes complete when, having

reduced the external world to an impenetrable screen of percepts, the ego itself is flattened into the same screen. Hume clearly sets out with a profound belief in the efficacy of scientific method as he conceived it – experience and observation – but ends up sadly unconvinced that science has any rational foundation. But apart from a number of inconsistencies that tend to arise in the effort to establish some kind of unity on the flux of impressions, Hume's work is remarkably systematic and true to his initial decision to rely only on experience and observation. The many philosophers who have tried to get round him have generally failed so long as they have stuck to the same basic method of operation. Hume has been over the ground very thoroughly and blocked most possible routes of escape.

II

Lonergan does not accept Hume's premises. He advances on his capital and assaults his citadel. In particular he attacks Hume's basic contention that all valid knowing is built up from impressions or what twentieth century philosophers call sense data. Lonergan's reply to Hume is that knowledge does not consist of sensation alone nor of images of what we sense; rather the process of coming to know is a structured activity, the three main moments of which are experience, understanding and judgment. By experience he means the deliverances of sense and the deliverances of consciousness (a notion I shall return to later). By the deliverances of sense is meant that which is given when we see, hear, touch, smell, taste. But sense experience does not by itself constitute knowledge. I cannot see, smell or taste what happened in the past, what you are thinking of the mass or electrical discharge of a proton. Experience simply provides the material for inquiry which leads to understanding. It leads to such questions as, 'What is that?' 'How does it work?' 'why did it happen?' etc., the questions that promote the intelligent subject from the level of experience to the level of understanding. I cannot, for example, experience an electron. But I can experience, by seeing it, a streak on a photographic plate; and I can think of various ways of accounting for it, including the passage of an electron. Experience gives rise to questions which, if successful, yield insight into the nature or meaning of an object, of words, of an activity.

Insights are not like Humean ideas which remain loose and unconnected except in so far as they are bundled together by the power of association. Insights occur under the pressure of the inquiring subject who wants to know something. To take another example, the prisoner wishing to escape sees a few loose bricks, a plank of wood and a piece of rope and says, 'An escape route!' Sherlock Holmes calls this kind of thing a 'deduction', but it is

clearly not a logical deduction from given premisses. Rather it is what Lonergan calls an insight, an act of understanding that unifies the data (a bit of rope, a plank of wood etc.) by placing them in a single explanatory perspective. As this small example illustrates, the concept of an escape route does not drop ready-made out of the sky; nor is it normally grasped in one single insight, but emerges at the end of a number of insights which coalesce to yield an answer to the question of the search. Over a period of time insights accumulate and cognitive dispositions and habits are built up enabling us to 'read off' facts or situations without apparent effort; or we commonly take over the insights of others and these become part of our habitual mental furniture. But most of us on occasion move from ignorance to answer through original insights of our own and it is the structure of these that Lonergan develops in expounding his cognitional theory.

Once insights are formed we do not spontaneously remain at the level of concepts and hypothetical conclusions and there remain the questions that promote the subject from the level of understanding to the level of judgment: 'Is it so or is it not so?' 'Is it probable or improbable?' These are questions looking for a definite answer, asking for affirmation or negation, moving the subject from the strictly conceptual level to the ontological level. By a series of tests the prisoner may be able to check whether his belief in an escape-route is well-founded or illusory; and the scientist can perform a whole battery of tests and experiments to discover whether the passage of an electron is the most satisfactory of available accounts. For it is only by testing our understanding that we can distinguish fact from fiction, proof from fancy, reality from wish-fulfilment and reach the truth and, through the truth, reality. Reality is known through the truth and the truth is what is intelligently understood and reasonably affirmed in judgment.

Although Hume ends up by doubting the reality of the physical world (*Treatise* p 187), his notion of the mind at the outset of his investigations is of a passive system receiving impressions from "out there". The world is a given, reality is already-out-there-now and objectivity is a matter of seeing the world as it is and not seeing what is not there. Lonergan does not conceive of reality as already out there nor of knowing as taking a good look at what is already there. For the same reason, objectivity for him is not spontaneous extroversion to what is already there. What is already there is not reality but data: sounds in the air, marks on a page, the contents of acts of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting. Any significance attaching to data comes from understanding. It is understanding which allows us to say that what is seen is a typewriter or tape recorder, what is heard is a symphony or a scream etc. Unlike

Hume who speaks as if impressions were pictorial images which reveal themselves immediately and who appeared to believe that certain relations between ideas, such as resemblance and contiguity, were revealed by sensation, Lonergan contends that mere looking or mere hearing tells us nothing. It follows that understanding is what we generally mean by interpretation. There are no brute facts and no bare facts and no epistemologically privileged facts in Lonergan's cognitional theory to act as building blocks for the construction of further facts. There are no non-interpretative descriptions of so-called literal facts. There may, it is true, be levels or degrees of interpretation: two people seeing the same object may agree that it is made of copper; one may go further and say that it is a coal scuttle, while the other reserves judgment on this point. But even the agreed opinion that the object is made of copper is not a *given*, but emerges from an act of interpretation. All that is given are data and data in so far as they remain data are not yet meaningful.

III

This is Lonergan's cognitional theory in very summary outline. He has been able to work it out because experience not only refers to the deliverances of sense but also, as I said above, to the deliverances of consciousness. The notion that besides experience as sense there is experience as consciousness is crucial to Lonergan's claim that we can analyse the process by which we come to know something. For if consciousness is not something we experience there is nothing on which to ground an analysis of knowing. Hume, when he considers the question of personal identity, considers the claim that we are in all our activities 'at every moment conscious of what we call self' and places his objections.

For from what impression could this idea be derived? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must necessarily be answered, if we would have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.

(He continues):

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure.

I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. The mind (he concludes) is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.⁶

Throughout his cogent analysis Hume takes consciousness to be perception (which he takes to be knowledge). Lonergan, in answer to Hume's objection, would agree with Hume so long as consciousness is simply equated with perception. For 'if consciousness is knowledge of an object, it can have no constitutive effect upon an object; it can only reveal its object as it was in its proper reality prior to the occurrence of the cognitive act or function named consciousness'.⁷

Lonergan continues:

if without consciousness John has no other psychological unity beyond the unity found in the objects of his knowledge, then by consciousness John is merely manifested as having no psychological unity beyond the unity found in the objects of his knowledge. (Ibid.)

This far Lonergan is in agreement with Hume. But he goes on to drive home even more rigorously than Hume the consequences that follow from an identification of consciousness with perception:

Again, if without consciousness John cannot possibly be the conscious subject of physical pain, then by consciousness John is merely manifested as being incapable of suffering. Similarly, if without consciousness John cannot be the consciously responsible principle of his own intelligent, rational, free, or responsible acts, then by consciousness as knowledge of an object John merely knows himself as neither consciously intelligent, nor consciously rational, nor consciously free, nor consciously responsible. (Ibid.)

The notion that consciousness is nothing more than perception, Lonergan continues, 'overlooks the fact that consciousness is not merely cognitive but also constitutive. It overlooks as well the subtler fact that consciousness is cognitive, not of what exists without consciousness, but of what is constituted by consciousness'. (Ibid.)

The point to grasp is that what is known is known to be known. Were it not, Hume could not begin to talk about perceptions since unless consciousness not only allows me to perceive but allows me further to be aware of myself as a perceiver (constitutes

me as a perceiver), it would not be possible for me to *know* that I had perceptions. On strictly Humean terms it would be impossible to be aware of perceptions at all. From what impression could the idea of perception be derived? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity'. Man's consciousness is, if you like, raised to the power of two: it is because he is present to himself that anything else can be present to him; and when he is not present to himself, as for example when he is in a deep sleep, nothing else can be present to him. It is by attending to this presence-to-himself and affirming it that Lonergan seeks to fashion a theory of cognition. The awareness that accompanies sensing, understanding and judging supplies the data on which such a theory can be based. To deny such data is to remove the basis for philosophical inquiry, as happens when it is declared that only what is reducible to the data of sense can be considered meaningful or valid; philosophical propositions are not normally about sensibly observed matters of fact. By recognising the data of consciousness as well as the data of sense Lonergan makes possible a cognitional theory that is at once empirical and coherent. It is the task of philosophy to think systematically about what is already going on, to seek to understand what we are doing when we claim to understand or to know something and to make explicit and objectify this understanding. Mathematical, scientific and common sense knowing are already occurring. By examining these forms of knowledge, or more precisely by discovering ourselves as subjects who understand and know in any of these fields of inquiry, we will grasp what is the pattern of the process of coming to know. Lonergan invites each of us to practise introspective awareness, to catch on to what we are doing when we claim to come to know something, and in that way to test the validity of his analysis.

- 1 *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* by J C A Gaskin, Macmillan, 1978, p 183, n 21.
- 2 *Insight* by Bernard Lonergan, Longman, Green & Co, 1958, (now with Darton Longman & Todd), p xxx
- 3 *A Treatise of Human Nature* by David Hume, ed. Selby-Bigge, Oxford 1888.
- 4 Lonergan, *op. cit.* p xxviii.
- 5 Hume, *Ibid.*, p xvi. As has been frequently noted, Hume is here involved in something of a *petitio principii*. On the one hand, he suggests that the other sciences need as a basis the fundamental science of man; on the other, the method by which he aims to tackle and unfold the science of man is what he understands to be the method of those other sciences.
- 6 Hume, *Treatise*, pp 251-252.
- 7 *Collection* by Bernard Lonergan, ed. by F E Crowe, Darton Longman & Todd, 1967, p 176.