

II. HUMAN LIFE

Theme 5: The human intellect

a) The role of human intelligence

- We will now discuss the human intellect and its role in obtaining intellectual knowledge, which is one of the most wonderful things that take place in the human being; human knowledge is essential for our daily life, but as occurs with other basic realities, it can be difficult to explain
- As a starting point, we can define the human intellect as the capacity that a person has to go out of himself, beyond himself, to enter into contact with the world around him, understand it and come to possess it in an immaterial manner
 - In a certain sense, through his knowledge, a man goes out of himself and “becomes” the things that he knows
 - He is the street that he sees, with its trees, noises, cars, etc; he knows these things, understand them, and in that sense, he possesses them
 - In a certain sense the street is inside him otherwise he wouldn’t have known of its existence
 - This type of possession of something through knowledge is called intentional, immaterial possession because in fact, the person is not actually the street, the light, the noise, etc
 - He is a person who contemplates and knows these things; this is part of the mystery of knowledge
- We also know the world through our senses, but human knowledge reaches its fullness and perfection in intellectual knowledge; we will now see the characteristics of intellectual knowledge that distinguish it from and put it above sense knowledge
 - Immateriality: to know something through our external senses, we need to be in direct contact with that object through our senses and we only grasp sensitive aspects such as smell, colour, shape, etc
 - ⇒ The intellect does not need physical contact with the object in order to know it; and it knows external things in a much deeper

way as it gets to know them by reaching that which a thing is, in essence;

⇒ If I do not have a rose beside me, I cannot smell its perfume; I have to get close to it so that the fragrance reaches me;

⇒ The intellect does not have this limitation; although all the roses in the world were to disappear, I could still know what a rose is;

⇒ Neither the smell, nor the colour permit me to understand that I am standing beside a particular type of flower called a rose; I only reach the essence of a thing and know what it is through my intellect

➤ Reflexivity (the capacity to reflect) is the other characteristic of intellectual knowledge. The human intellect is capable not only of thinking, but of thinking about the fact that it is thinking, how it is doing so, etc.

⇒ We can never feel that we are feeling, nor smell the fact that we are smelling; or see the fact that we are seeing, etc

⇒ But we can know and at the same time know that we are knowing = be aware that we are knowing something or someone

➤ Spirituality of the intellect: this immateriality and capacity for reflection brings us to affirm the spirituality of the human intellect and the person who knows

⇒ This way of being, or existing of the human intellect, is over and above that of corporality or materiality

⇒ Through the intellect, the person can reach out of himself to the world around him and introduce it into himself through knowledge, without being transformed into this world that I am knowing

⇒ I can understand although I may have nothing in front of my eyes; I can “go” wherever I want with my intellect

⇒ However, this spirituality does not mean total independence of the intellect regarding matter and the body because, as we have seen, man is essentially a corporal being and his intellect uses and needs an organic-corporal base in order to be activated, as we shall see

- ⇒ The intellect is also more than the simple brain as it can reflect on itself, while the brain cannot; for this reason the intellect is above the brain and is spiritual
- Knowledge as interaction: through knowledge the subject goes out of himself and he opens up to the world in a way that involves the whole person; knowledge is not just an automatic act of my nature
 - I know because I wish and need to do because I am a being that is incomplete; the human person needs the world around him, people and things, to develop myself, perfect myself and enrich myself
 - The knowing process is passive (I receive the world as it is when I know it) and it is active in that I must make an effort to know using more or less sophisticated strategies (study, work, research, travel, money, etc)
 - ⇒ I never carry out this process in an independent and individual way; rather through other people, cultures, institutions that make up the context in which a person lives and grows
 - Although the knowing process is immaterial, the objects known do modify the inner world or the person, giving rise to some type of answer
 - ⇒ Some new knowledge requires little interior adaptation, for example in issues related to quantity
 - ⇒ But on other occasions, the truth, person of fact known can affect us deeply and bring about an important change in our lives; in these cases, the person needs time to assimilate the new knowledge
 - ⇒ This occurs, for example, in the case of a person who moves to a new country where the customs, mentality, etc is different and can introduce a new world of questions, possibilities, etc. which need to be weighed up, reflected upon, in order to be able to integrate them into one's own personal existence
 - ⇒ In some cases, even though some new idea may be true, if it goes against one's deepest convictions it can create serious inner conflict which, in the case that the person is not capable of modifying their inner structure and of adapting themselves to this data, may bring them to reject this idea as a way of survival
 - ⇒ this all points to the fact that the person who knows is not a spiritual faculty, but rather, a specific subject that knows through a certain faculty and needs to integrate the knowing process into the whole of his activity, objectives and desires

- Objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge: is it possible for us to acquire objective knowledge of the world, given that each person who knows is different, has different viewpoints, etc?
 - In the knowing process there is an objective element. This means that things in the real world have their own existence independently of man and so, we can get to know them in their basic aspects without deforming the object we are knowing through our own subjectivity
 - We can ascertain that we have obtained objective knowledge of the thing by communicating to others the information that we have acquired; if these other people are capable of understanding us and of replying in a meaningful way, this indicates that they are understanding in the same way as ourselves; this implies that our knowledge is not merely subjective but also intersubjective (other people understand basically the same as myself), and so, objective, that is, things are, objectively, the way that we know them
 - The fact that knowledge is objective does not mean that each person knows things in exactly the same way
 - ⇒ Each person knows a partial aspect of reality that does not always coincide with the part that other people have known
 - ⇒ Each person has different intellectual capacities; so, we understand things differently in terms of depth and content; a musical person will discover in a piece of music elements that another person does not even imagine that they exist; while this person may be able to discover aspects in a mathematical problem that others could not imagine
 - ⇒ The things that we know can be very complex and with many elements to them; there may not be one single criteria for determining the objectivity of our knowledge of such things and we need to accept that some things are open to being understood in very different ways
 - ⇒ We know things in our social context and within a traditional form of thinking, which can differ greatly from one place to another
- So, knowing is an objective process as it brings us to know things as they are in reality, but it also has a subjective dimension because it is an individual person who knows, and intervenes in important issues such as determining the field of knowledge, knowing some aspects rather than others, degree of understanding, etc.

- These are the subjective elements that intervene in every objective knowing process

b)The knowing process

- We shall start from what may be called the basic or primary knowing activity.
 - Through the activity of the senses, the subject enters into contact with the real world (both internal and external) and grasp or captures the world around him, filling his inner world and memory with contents
 - ⇒ Experiences, people, history, traditions, theories, countryside, animals, situations, feelings, sensations, etc. through the external senses
 - ⇒ This material fills the inner world of the subject, configuring his mental structure and obliging him to carry out a secondary intellectual activity which involves ordering, assimilating, deepening and coordinating all these contents
 - ⇒ This second step is carried out using the internal senses: perception, imagination, memory, common sense; a phantasm is developed (initial image of the known thing)
 - We can underline two issues regarding this activity:
 - ⇒ Our knowing patterns develop and evolve as we grow older and they need a long period of time before they can reach the fullness corresponding to the adult person
 - ⇒ In reality, man's knowledge is of both a sensitive and an intellectual nature simultaneously; that is, man does not know the sensitive world first through the external senses, and then the essence of things through the intellect;
 - ⇒ Rather, he gets to know things in a simultaneous and unitary way through the intellect and the senses at the same time
 - ⇒ This is compatible with the fact that we can distinguish the elements that make up the act of knowledge and analyze them separately; we can even carry out acts of knowledge where one or other way of knowing predominates, but habitually, they are present in a simultaneous and united way

- Intellectual knowledge can now begin; there are three essential elements in the knowing process:
 - Abstraction: the process through which the intellect works on the phantasm presented to it by the common sense and eliminates the sensitive aspects of the reality known and retains the central nucleus which is common to all those things that have the same nature
 - ⇒ This nucleus is called the concept and is universal in nature; when I say “dog” I am not thinking of a specific dog, but rather, of those characteristics that are essential to all dogs and which are intellectually gathered together through knowing many or one dog
 - ⇒ So, concepts are meaningful units which have overcome the multiplicity that characterizes the real world and that are very important for communication
 - ⇒ We can only communicate with each other and understand each other if we have our knowing structures in common; the concept, which is universal and objective is ideal for this
 - Judgment: this is the moment of truth.
 - ⇒ It occurs when the subject relates his knowledge or concepts to the real world and so, determines their veracity or falsehood. The dog is white; the person is seated = these are examples of simple judgments in which we can ascertain or discover the truth
 - Reasoning: this is the process through which we establish complex relations between pieces of knowledge and we carry out deductions which allow us to advance in our knowledge by establishing new truths
 - ⇒ One of the most amazing results of the knowing process is the development of different forms of science, be it experimental, philosophical, social, mathematical, etc.
 - ⇒ Science is the fruit of man’s knowing activity, which is complex and involves all the elements of knowledge: intuition, judgment, elaboration of concepts, etc.
- Types of knowledge: each human being is different and so there are also different types of intellect
 - Theoretical/speculative intellect: such an intellect aims at knowing for the sake of it in itself; it is more contemplative and aims at knowing for the sake of the truth that is apprehended in itself

- Practical intellect: such an intellect gets to know things in order to be able to act on that knowledge; it is a directive, creative intelligence; concerned with the human activity that must be carried out and directed
- The numeric and abstract intellect proper to the mathematician
- The organizing services necessary for setting up businesses and other projects
- The theoretical intelligence necessary for developing doctrines and theories
- The aesthetical intelligence proper to artists
- This variety is normal, considering that the intellect is a property of the individual subject-person
- Avoid the mistake of identifying intellectual activity with conceptual reasoning. This is one part or aspect of the knowing activity; it is a sophisticated way of exercising the intellect, but not the only way
 - Intuition, through which know something immediately as one and multiple, the thing in its globality and in its details is a more perfect form of knowledge
 - Drawing a picture or writing a poem are also intellectual activities of an elevated and a creative nature, but they do not require a reasoning process
 - So we see that intellectual activity is not reduced only to reasoning but exists in other forms too.

c)What is truth

- What is truth? This is one of the most often asked questions because the truth will be our reference point in life; if there were no truth, or we could not identify it, we would not know what to do nor how to act in life
- The most precise definition of truth that has been developed so far is that of Scholastic thought: Truth is the “agreement (adjustment, adaptation) of the mind with reality” (Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1.)
 - The truth is found when the idea that we have in our intellect regarding some aspect of reality actually coincides with or corresponds to that reality itself; when our knowledge coincides with the way things are in reality

- This is the nucleus of the question regarding truth and the basic element necessary for ensuring that our knowledge is objective
- Human knowledge is objective because we can know truly, that is, we can know how things are in reality
- However, knowing the truth is not always as easy as it may seem from this definition; it can be difficult to reach and thus becomes an ideal to which we aspire; we can take a further look at the issue of the truth to discover some of its complexity
- Oneness and plurality of the truth:
 - If reality is one, the truth through which we know it ought to be one also; because things either are, exist, in a certain way, or they do not; so we will be knowing the truth if we know things as they are in reality, and this is one and unique
 - ⇒ So truth would seem to be one
 - But things are not always so simple; the real world is complex and has many dimensions; it is made up of different links and connections, like the Internet, in which it is not always easy to know where we are, and in which we can always get more deeply involved
 - In the real world we may also distinguish between facts and acts; according to the facts, things are the way they are in reality and there is only one true way of knowing them, according to the way they are
 - Regarding acts: often, there is no single true way of acting; there can be many different true and possible ways of acting in some circumstances. For example, there are many ways to get from Mombasa to Nairobi and we cannot say that any one of them, is the absolutely true way of doing so
 - The variety of true answers in some cases and the existence of only one true answer in other cases, may also lie in the difference that exists between practical truth and speculative truth
 - ⇒ In the case of speculative knowledge, truth is the conformity of the intellect with being, with that which the things are in reality;
 - ⇒ In the case of practical truth, it will depend on practical knowledge and whether or not this is used to actually make something that conforms, now to the idea of the inventor

- Another cause of variety in truth is the difference between a moral principle which may be one and true, and the applications of this principle whereby there may be many possible, true applications of the principle
- The subjective dimension of knowledge implies that there is also a certain subjectivity in the issue of the truth; as our knowing processes are not identical, our grasp of reality can also be different, giving rise to differences in that which is regarded as true or not
- In many cases, truth will be one and definitive; but in other, often practical cases, the truth may be multiple; there may be many possible true answers
- The search for the truth
 - The search for the truth forms part of each person's life project; no-one wants to be deceived, but rather, hopes that he is being told, taught the truth
 - The search for the truth, then, is not a neutral activity that only affects the intellect; rather, it is an activity of the person as a whole which requires certain dispositions in order that this search be fruitful
 - ⇒ Readiness to learn, effort and perseverance, attention, etc.
 - Above all, for a person to reach knowledge of the truth, he needs to be prepared to freely accept the truth as it comes, be it hard or easy to accept
 - ⇒ When a truth is hard to accept, the person needs moral authenticity and personal commitment so as not to turn aside from the truth nor avoid it;
 - ⇒ In other circumstances, acceptance of the truth will require time as it can be a slow process
 - In any case, the truth and its acceptance, can and ought never to be forced on anybody; the dignity of the person with intellect and will implies that we ought to assimilate the truth freely, because we want to
 - ⇒ The truth ought to be presented in all its splendour so that the person realizes that it is worthwhile taking on the truth as it is the best way to direct his life towards true fulfillment
 - A frequent obstacle in the process of seeking the truth may be prejudices that a person can have; these are mistaken and unjustifiable convictions which prevent us from knowing reality in an objective way, the way it really is

- ⇒ Prejudices are basically a dislike for some person or some group, based on a defective and inflexible judgment; this negative attitude regarding certain people, etc. can prevent us from getting to know the reality with an open and objective spirit
- ⇒ The problem is not that there is a pre-judgment of the person, etc., but that the prejudgment is deformed and erroneous, and so, prevents us from finding the truth
- In order to overcome possible prejudices, we need:
 - ⇒ Critical spirit: a mentality that brings us to deepen in our knowledge of things and people and to overlook incorrect opinions or schools of public opinion that criticize deeds, persons, or institutions without a basis for their affirmations
 - ⇒ An open attitude that permits us to grasp the positive elements that are to be found in all doctrines and attitudes;
 - ⇒ a closed and wary approach to whatever is new or simply different is a prejudice to the person's growth and development as it brings one to enclose oneself in one's own beliefs, blocking out the external world and anything that may harm or upset those beliefs
 - ⇒ This type of attitude also impedes one from overcoming their prejudices because we end up rejecting any information which may weaken that prejudice, before it can overcome the person's defense system, which perceives this information to be a threat and so, eliminates it
- Finally, we also need to seek our own personal truth, the truth about ourselves, who we are, what we are meant to achieve in life, etc., so that we can struggle to attain personal fulfillment in all aspects of our lives: professional, family, religious, etc.