

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 11, Part II: Chapter 18: “The Possibility of Ethics”

[0:00]

- Continuing from the previous discussion, student question: since being is to be known by the totality of true judgments, and since people make incorrect judgments, is the realm of meaning therefore greater than the realm of being.
 - Correction – being is what is *to be known in* the totality of correct judgments
 - Lonergan’s approach would be to say that when one makes and expresses an incorrect judgment, that *expression* is therefore an act of meaning within being, and the task of the interpreter is to understand and re-express that expression
 - In explanatory interpretation, that involve situating the incorrect judgment in relation to other acts of expression (to understand and express how it is situated in being) using a dialectical method
 - Such an interpretation will be an expression of the disparities between what was expressed, what was meant, and what is (regarding the purported objective referent of the expression)
 - (So this implies that the realm of meaning is not greater than the realm of being after all)

[4:45]

- Difficulty of comprehending Chapter 18 of *Insight* “The Possibility of Ethics”
- Central claim of the chapter is the existence “an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing”

[6:27]

- Overview of the table of contents of the chapter, which seems to indicate that *freedom* is the central preoccupation of the chapter
- Important distinction between essential and effective freedom
- Kant’s central preoccupation is with the problem of essential freedom
- While Lonergan has his own approach to the problem of essential freedom, his own central concern is with effective freedom
- Because of Lonergan’s divergent accounts of human knowing and science, the scientific determinism that threatened freedom in Kant’s view has been met with the account of the non-systematic character of the scientific knowledge of the universe
- For Lonergan, the question of the possibility of ethics is not primarily the problem of essential freedom; rather, the principal problem is posed by the fact of moral impotence – is ethics possible, given its threat to *effective* freedom
- Moral impotence is the facticity of human inconsistency between knowing and doing
- The degree of human willingness to act in conformity to knowing is formed by cultures, which *de facto* include biases
- Cosmopolis does not have the resources to deal with moral impotence

[17:00]

- Chapter 18 is therefore about freedom.
- Lonergan affirms essential freedom, but argues that our effective freedom is impaired
- Therefore, this poses a serious obstacle to the possibility of ethics

[19:17]

- On the other hand, the central point is about the exigence for consistency between knowing and doing
- But the discussion of doing is located oddly in the chapter – he does not clearly differentiate

choosing and doing

- The gap we think we sometimes experience between making a decision and acting on it, is really a matter of not yet having fully made the decision, and this may account for his undifferentiated treatment of choosing and doing

[24:08]

- With what *kind of knowing* does our doing have to be consistent?
- Up to this point, Lonergan's treatment has been with knowledge of facts.
- Most pertinent to the problem of ethics, is the factual knowledge of our miniscule but nevertheless real role in the emergence of the universe of emergent probability
- So our doing is the doing of affecting the course of emergent probability, and knowledge of this as a fact affects our doing
- Yet alludes to another kind of knowing: knowledge of what is "morally obligatory"
- Judgments about moral obligation are not equitable to judgments of fact
- The classic "Is/Ought" problem – Hume; knowledge of "ought" cannot be derived from knowledge of "is"

[32:18]

- Yet Lonergan claims that we can arrive at the judgment that a proposed course of action is obligatory
- But Lonergan's account of knowing in no way prepares us to comprehend how reflection can arrive at knowledge of obligation

[33:42]

- A hint of how to think about knowledge of obligation – that *practical* reflection has a *different dynamic* from the dynamic of knowing being – it is always already about "What am I to *do*?"
- One does not reach the proper term of practical reflection merely in "internal" knowing that stops short of doing
- Yet there is a kind of "internal" term to practical reflection in the grasp of virtually conditioned judgments regarding a practical courses of action, including judgments about obligatoriness.
- But what is the nature of practical reflection that leads to such judgments?
- The terse treatment of practical reflection in comparison to reflection leading to judgments about what is, is disappointing

End of Part II.