

Lecture 12 Chapter 7: “Common Sense as Object” & “The Good as Developing Object” (*Topics in Education*, Chs. 2 & 3)

[0:00]

- What Lonergan means by “Object” in all 3 chapter titles:
- Influence of Hegel: “*Objective Spirit*” – how “Spirit” gets objectified in society
- The emergence of intelligence as a principle underlying social orders implies a new notion of “the good” over and above the primitive notion of the social good having to do with immediate intersubjectivity and the satisfaction of immediate desires.

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- Not only the social good but also the historical good – the good of the historical human community.
- Challenge of promoting the good of history, as the key to understanding the entire project of *Insight*.
- The notion of “the good under construction” from Flannery O’Connor is the key to all of Lonergan’s works.

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- Common Sense as Historical
- Lonergan's project of introducing history into Catholic theology.
- More than merely the challenge of integrating critical historical research into biblical research and into the study of church history.
- Not just understanding the history of the past, but understanding and transforming the history in the midst of which that we stand.
- A challenge to cooperate with the positive dynamics of history and help heal the negative ones.

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- Student question about the boundary between philosophy and theology.
 - Philosophy deals with what finite human reason and how knowledge of the knower allows humans to know somethings about the whole (finite and transcendent), without yet knowing everything about the whole. Theology has to do with what can be known from an additional dynamic: transcendent grace.
 - Further discussion about historical communal enterprise grounded in religious experiences. Theology gives special attention to the traditions of those historical communities.

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- Lonergan thinks of Common Sense as Object in terms of 3 dynamics (but only 2 in Chapter 7).
- Three Types of Historical Dynamics (analogous to Newton’s Principles of Motion)
 - Pure progress (analogous to straight line motion)
 - Social decline (analogous to deviation due to external force of sun’s gravity)
 - Recovery or redemption (further complications due to gravitational forces of other bodies)
- The Principles of Progress, Decline and Recovery are intellectual development, bias/sin, redemption, respectively.
- In *Insight* these are treated in a purely philosophical context; in *Topics in Education* Lonergan addresses them in a theological context and using theological terms.

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- Redemption and recovery from bias.
- Again, Lonergan uses both Christian theological terms and non-theological terms such as ‘New Soil’ to look at the recovery from bias.
- Escaping the intractable biases or bitterness of a social situation.

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- Lonergan’s use of a metaphor from calculus to characterize the dynamics of human history: “the differentials” of the human good, as developing object.
- Illustration of calculus of the graph of a curve which advances, declines, and recovers.
- Lonergan’s concern with long historical cycles: economic and cultural cycles.
- The young Lonergan was concerned with the problem of economic progress and decline; the influence of Schumpeter *et al*, who argued that economics must be a historical science.
- Little imperceptible things happening which, over many decades, accumulate into progress or decline.
- Lonergan was also influenced by Toynbee’s studies of the rise and fall of civilizations.

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- Lonergan asks why humanity repeatedly tends to destroy the achievements of classic civilizations.
- Lonergan thought he had gotten to the root of that problem in his account of the dynamics of history.
- The cyclical nature of the human good (developing, declining, and recovering).
- Explanation of Diagram of “differentials” and how the three forces interact to shape the three dynamics of human history.
- “Differentials” as the little acts that people do, which then accumulate into historical movements.
- Small, individual human acts of intellectual development, bias, and recovery/redemption that happen at all moments in history.

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- Student question about the difference between the force of recovery and the force of progress.
 - Recovery serves to heal the wounds of bias and clear the way for progress. Bias can be an accumulation of hurts, giving rise to recrimination, etc. Illustration: Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.
 - A new principle eliminating retaliation is needed.
 - Generic meaning of bias: whatever interferes with and disrupts the spontaneous, natural, self-correcting cycle of inquiry and insight.

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- Student question about what motivates recovery from bias, and what distinguishes it from intellectual progress.
- The source of recovery is ultimately something distinct from the unrestricted desire that generates the self-correcting cycle of inquiry and insight. Lonergan does not take this up until Chapter 20 in *Insight*.
- Further discussion and examples: actors from the TV program *The Wire* good illustration of the concrete ways in which forces of progress, decline, and redemption interact. Some of the actors from that TV series now working with young gang members, and undoing the accumulated effects of bias in their lives, as examples of reversing decline.

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- Student question: if sin and bias are defined as flights from understanding, does Lonergan leave room for pure evil, or are we left with the Platonic notion that moral errors are only intellectual errors. Does this account do justice to the evil of the Holocaust?
 - Yes, Lonergan also identifies sources of evil that are not reducible to intellectual errors, but not until later in *Insight*.
 - Discussion about evil as emerging from preceding situations of accumulating bias and the ideas promulgated.

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- Question about whether all evil is ‘explained.’
 - All evil is radically unintelligible; describing the dynamics of history is not tantamount to explaining evil.

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- Question about whether bias and redemption are necessary in order to take us to a higher level of good.
 - Bias/sin is not necessary for a higher level of grace or of good.
 - But concretely in history, one of the most important effects of grace is to undo the destructive effects of bias/sin, and thereby make possible a higher level of good.

[1:01:18]

- Question as to whether theology and philosophy can be kept separate if redemption is involved. Can one really talk philosophically about recovery without explicitly invoking Christ?
 - Discussion of how Lonergan does indeed distinguish them.
 - Differences among ways he treats these issues in *Insight* vs. in his theological writings.
 - Uses the philosophical clarification of the dynamics of human history to then offer a better theological interpretation of what is meant by redemption in Christianity, without importing that doctrine into the philosophical investigation.

[1:04:30]

- The analogy of differential as infinitesimal.
- In an infinitesimal instant of time, a individual’s deed can originate from either the self-correcting process, bias, or redemption.
- We can feel that our small, individual actions don’t make any difference.
- But in fact every action, small or grand, is always already situated in a complex set of dynamics, and becomes a contribution to something larger – whether progress, decline, or redemption.
- Each of our actions does matter, in the ways that they contribute to these dynamics.
- Which is why self-appropriation of these dynamics of history is so important.

[1:09:46]

- The place of philosophy in the Good as Developing Object – Good Under Construction
- One of the most significant sources of decline is the general bias against theoretical pursuits, such as philosophy.
- The importance of Lonergan’s philosophy of saving practicality from itself, from the inevitable social and historical consequences of general bias.
- Need for a human science grounded in self-appropriation that can discriminate between the facts that result from intelligence and those that result from bias.

- Counterexample of a human science which does not critically engage the unintelligibility of bias: Machiavelli's capitulation to practicality in *The Prince*.
- Capitulation to practicality makes it impossible to discern between the intelligible and unintelligible.

[1:17:05]

- Implicit philosophy: Everyone has an implicit philosophy, a personal view of what we are doing when we are knowing, what's real and not real; what's good, and what's not; what's just, true, beautiful.
- Explicit philosophy: systems explicitly expounded by philosophers.
- Critical philosophy of self-appropriation.
- Simply in virtue of the fact that each of us is an intelligent and reflective being, we are situated in history, what we do as a result of thinking well or not affects history; and we are affected by the history that others have bequeathed to us.
- The philosophy of self-appropriation can help correct the unfolding of human history.
- It can interact with human praxis and human sciences in ways that can enhance human cooperation with the positive dynamics in history and mitigate attraction to the negative dynamics of the biases.
- Common sense as object, as historical, is a *succession* of social situations ("Goods of Order")
- Self-appropriation is of ourselves as always already participants in those institutions and social situations, and as participants in the historical transformation of succession.
- Once again, Lonergan raising the Question of the Whole: the wholeness of human living, as built upon and a prolongation of the emergent probability of the natural world.
- Chapter 7 is pointing toward clarifying further the question of the whole of nature, human history, human good, all that is real, all that is good.

End of Part I