

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 12, Part I: Chapter 18: “The Possibility of Ethics,” §2

[0:00]

- Review of previous class: the centrality of the exigence for the consistency between knowing and doing, and the question of the kind of knowledge with which doing must be consistent
- The question of knowing of value and obligation

[4:46]

- Method of Ethics in *Insight*
- Analogous to the method of metaphysics, the method of ethics was supposed to be derived from the expansion of consciousness into the compound structure of knowing and doing
- This would involve a heuristic anticipation of all ethical positions, and of the structure of the good, parallel to the way he proceeded in the case of the method of metaphysics
- One would expect, therefore, that the method of ethics should begin with an explication of the compound structure of knowing and doing
- But Lonergan does not do this

[8:32]

- The Structure of Knowing and Doing:

Lonergan gives something like the structure of knowing and doing in §2, rather than at the beginning of Chapter 18

- Lowest (0th) Level: The Canon of Statistical Residues (Chapter 3) characterizes the preconscious, natural, environmental setting of our ethical activity as known by natural science
- Our experiencing is not completely determined by external natural events; because of statistical residues, there is a degree of autonomy already at the level of patterning of experiences (i.e., utilizing the non-systematic potencies of brain activity)
- First Conscious Level: “Underlying sensitive flow” – our sensations as patterned, setting the conditions for our questions and answers
- Second Level: Practical insights into possible courses of action
- Third Level: Practical reflections questions about motives, consequences, obligation regarding the intelligible courses of actions from practical insights
- Fourth Act (but in *Insight* not a 4th level) has to do (implicitly) with questions for decision and acts of deciding.

[17:11]

- Genuineness (authenticity) in knowing was a matter of asking and answering all the further pertinent questions.
- So also, authenticity in ethical matters would seem to be asking and answering all the further pertinent questions in this expanded structure, and the ways this implies a method of ethics
- But Lonergan does not proceed in this fashion
- This is because Lonergan considers the acts in this structure not for their implications for a heuristic structure of ethics, but for their significance for the question of freedom.

[18:30]

- The significance for freedom of canon of statistical residues lies in the way it disposes of the most obvious objection to the possibility of freedom – i.e., that scientific determinism undermines human freedom and ethics. Lonergan’s response to Kant’s problem
- Survey of how the Newtonian tradition led to the extra-scientific opinion of determinism
- Lonergan hints, however, that there are *real* impediments to human freedom, not the illusory

impediments attributed to the scientific laws of nature

[29:22]

- Student question regarding the levels of consciousness in the structure of knowing and doing
 - In *Insight*, Lonergan speaks of “the expansion of consciousness” to include doing along with knowing.
 - He does not however speak in *Insight* of an addition level of consciousness that comes into play with the expansion to include doing.
 - §2 is more or less a recapitulation of the three levels of acts of consciousness treated earlier in *Insight*
 - Clarification that the fourth level that appears in the preceding diagram reflects Lonergan’s post-*Insight* thinking, and is not the position of *Insight* itself

[33:01]

- The significance for freedom of the “underlying sensitive flow”:
- Although the natural world conditions our exercise of freedom, we exercise a degree of autonomy relative to nature when we pattern our experiences
- Once developed, mere sensitive routines are set outside the realm of genuine freedom and ethics
- Examples of cerebral palsy and addiction as affecting sensitive flows, are therefore not immediately matters of freedom or ethics

[38:29]

- Practical insights and their relation to human freedom: students propose the significance has to do with properly assessing the situation, and with possible courses of action
- Properly understanding the situation includes understanding the situation as part of the unfolding of the emergent probability of proportionate being

[42:42]

- Student question about a dramatic, urgent event (e.g., child in peril) – if could slow the process down, would we still see that process of deliberation, rather than an “almost instinctive,” unconscious reaction
 - “Almost instinctive” suggests the presence of something like the structure of practical reflection is operative
 - But the broader context is something Lonergan discusses in §1.2 of this chapter
 - Willingness often presupposes a high degree of training, practice and learning prior to the emergency to which one responds
 - So the structure is operative, but not in the present moment of the emergency; it is present in the past as preparation
 - Relationship to Aristotle’s account of virtues

[48:42]

- Lonergan’s concern is to reveal that freedom in the proper sense does not reside in practical insights
- Practical insights do not automatically determine what one will do

[52:20]

- The relevance of practical reflection to freedom:
- What is practical reflection?
- It involves asking further pertinent questions, arriving at a virtually unconditioned, meaning that the practical insight about which one reflects is correct.

- How can a practical insight be correct if the course of action is not yet realized?
 - Discussion; answer not clear from the text
 - The text does not really help us explore what we are doing when we are reflecting practically as it does in the areas of cognitional reflecting
 - Lonergan seems to be hurrying to the discussion of essential and effective freedom
 - Lonergan does say there is an internal term wherein one grasps as virtually unconditioned the certitude that the possible course of action is indeed possible, or agreeable, useful, obligatory
 - But ultimately the reflecting is practical – it is for the sake of doing, the external term

[1:10:42]

- Student question about “how we make being” when we make a decision
 - The dynamism of finality is constitutive of the reality of the universe, of proportionate being
 - Human beings make being by setting the conditions for the emergence of something
- Further questions as to whether one’s decision itself is also an addition to being
 - It is.
 - In a general metaphysical sense, our decisions, and the way they set conditions for emergences (“the making of being”) is the same as everything else sets conditions for emergences
 - It is different because our setting of conditions rests upon practical insights and practical reflections, unlike every other entity in the universe

[1:18:03]

- Inventory of some of the further questions that take place in practical reflection
- Lonergan never explicitly says that the criterion of reaching the internal term, the correctness of the practical insight, is the absence of further pertinent questions, but the passages in *Insight* certainly point to that conclusion.
- Invitation to the viewer to reflect on the activities that follow when one asks, “*Should* I do it?” (question guiding practical reflection) vs. “*Will* I do it?” (question for decision)
- To be a moral knower is to be someone who heeds the call to pursue all further pertinent questions that are prompted by “Should I do it?”

[1:22:47]

- The expansion from rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness – giving ourselves reasons for that we do. Lonergan’s nod to Kant, though profoundly reconstructed

[1:24:08]

- Difference in the rationality involved in rational self-consciousness vs. rational consciousness – rationality in the latter sense is the non-interference with ongoing inquiry.
- Whereas the rationality of the doer is positive consistency between knowing and doing

[1:26:51]

- The unique, radical contingency of human acts of decision
- The contingency of the act of will, of human decisions, is the imposition of further intelligible order upon merely coincidental manifolds at lower levels
- The radical form of contingency is that which comes to be *only* through human deciding
- The fact that people don’t do what they know they are supposed to do, is evidence

[1:29:39]

- Human radical contingency of the will is *sui generis* – there isn't anything else like human deciding anywhere else in the universe

[1:31:10]

- Student question about passage stating a radical difference between the contingency of willing (deciding) vs. all the other forms of contingency in the universe
 - Radical difference in things that emerge because of human decisions
 - The natural contingent events fall short of being genuinely free
 - Contrast with the affirmation of freedom at every level in Whitehead's thought
 - In natural, non-volitional contingency, which depends on the non-systematic character of the universe, once the conditions are given, the event must occur – contingent necessity
 - But in human freedom, even though the conditions are given, the act of decision does not have to happen
 - The non-systematic processes in nature have contingency, but it is not the special contingency that characterizes human freedom.

End of Part I.