

Lecture 13, Part I: Chapter 7 §8.6, “Cosmopolis and Philosophy”

[0:00]

- Introductory remarks on chapters 7 and 8 and their relation to the whole of *Insight*.
- Review of Lonergan’s characterization of the natural world and of the construction of human subjectivity in relation to emergent probability.
- Brief discussion of insights as phenomena *within* the process of emergent probability.
- Chapter 8 as seemingly discontinuous in relation to the preceding chapters.
- The question of the cycles of progress and decline.
- Lonergan concerned to develop a philosophy that would provide guidance in addressing the problem of decline.
- Brief discussion of redemption (addressed in Ch. 20 & *Topics in Education*)

[6:05]

- Problem of Historical Cycles: Why do Human Achievements Decay?
- The effects of group bias:
 - How it interacts with the self-correcting cycle of intelligence
 - How it twists the social order so the latter no longer conforms to a coherent set of ideas; they lack intelligible connectedness with one another.

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- Dialectical development – interference of two principles, which in doing so, modify each other.
- Only a fraction of ideas, those associated with power, are left remaining.
- Biases develop and become more complex in response to intelligible normativity.
- Produces the social surd: mutilated remains of ideas, a mixture of rational and irrational (as in “real numbers” which are syntheses of rational to irrational numbers).
- Interactions are a combination of rational and irrational actions and responses which interfere with one another.
- Thus Lonergan’s aim is to account for irrationality in society (as a deviation from the normative self-correcting intelligence.)
- Yet group bias tends to create the principle for its own reversal.
- When the injustices of group bias grow, reform or revolutionary groups use their commonsense techniques and methods to replace the biased groups.

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- Yet common sense cannot correct general bias.
- The latter limits the effectiveness of common sense, for it is only adapted to deal with concrete, short term results.
- Examples of how general bias resists challenging, longer-term views:
 - Rachel Carson’s *The Silent Spring* warned against environmental hazards;
 - Machiavelli’s political thought emphasized the principle of power over intelligence;
 - The cultural and political chaos that arises in the absence culture of a critical philosophy and/or adequate theology.
 - Quote on the social consequences of the collapse of the medieval synthesis in philosophy and theology (*Insight*, 256).
- Lonergan firmly held that a coherent socio-political order requires a critical philosophy and a sound theology.

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- Student question about when decline is mistakenly perceived as progress, and whether this is due to bias.
 - Overall, yes. General bias is the series of small accommodations of people saying, “I don’t see any *immediately* bad consequences that will come of *X*.” But the longer cycle is so gradual, and it also gradually changes people’s commonsense habits of mind and heart. So they find acceptable certain outcomes that the early generation would have found abhorrent – but the earlier generation could not foresee that *X* would lead to such outcomes.
 - For instance, people initially opposed the notion of enlightened self-interest as a principle of economic behavior, versus the common good mediated by a sovereign power; yet this is an idea that we all now accept. But we struggle with the consequences. For Lonergan, the problem is to discern the intelligible from the unintelligible (since common sense is a mixture of both).

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- Student question as to whether group bias can pose as a seeming defense against general bias (a kind of academic elitism).
 - Discussion on how common sense cannot account for every new strange situation. In our inventory of insights, we also need insights that relate to the long term, the invariant, to matters that transcend the immediate. Rather than an elite intellectual class, therefore, Lonergan advocates widespread form of education that cultivates theoretical thinking in combination with practical thinking.

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- The Problem of Historical Cycles, continued.
- How general bias combines with group bias to erode human achievements:
 - The short cycle of group bias, (e.g., the cycles of alternating predominance of political parties)
 - The longer cycle of general bias.

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- Cosmopolis
- What is Cosmopolis?
 - It is defined heuristically as an *X* that answers the problem of the longer cycle of decline.
 - It discovers, approves, and teaches the insights beneficial to the long term.
 - It makes operative the timely and fruitful ideas that are otherwise inoperative.
 - Lonergan very much has in mind the ideas about political power that led to WWII.
 - It combats the idea that only ideas backed by force can be operative.

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- Cultural products, in addition to philosophy and science, are needed to help reverse decline.
- Philosophy can only sway a pure intelligence, which human beings are not.
- A philosophy of self-appropriation is needed to understand the basic dynamics of history, and to distinguish between the intelligible and unintelligible – appropriating oneself as intelligent as the basis for this distinction.

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- *The importance of the radical distinction between intelligibility and unintelligibility sets up the importance and the placement of Chapter 8 in Insight.*
- Because human beings are not only pure intelligences, but “compounds in tension.”
- Self-appropriation is essential as a grounding for the human sciences.
- Humans are marked by affectivity and intersubjectivity, and this interferes with their intellectual functioning.
- The importance of the nonintellectual, cultural aspect of learning.
- Culture’s role is to cultivate, not repress affectivity, in accordance with the self-correcting process of insight.

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- Question about whether Lonergan contradicts himself in a certain passage (quote from p 267).
 - Discussion of how Cosmopolis is indeed capable of reversing decline, exploration of culture versus compromise (the latter reinforces decline).
- Question about how secular movement of the 18th century would be viewed by Lonergan.
 - Lonergan would see secularism as a phenomenon of general bias, as a doctrine that reality is purely immanent and naturalistic. Yet a way of thinking about transcendence is needed to reverse the longer cycle of decline.
- Question as to whether it is ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ to vaccinate a child; in light of Kantian reasoning versus economic risk assessment.
 - ‘Rational’ is behaving in accordance with the unrestricted desire to know, leaving no question aside unanswered. ‘Irrationality’ is anything that interferes with the self-correcting process driven by the unrestricted desire. Extended discussion of rationality and common sense. Usually by “rational” people mean “commonsensical,” but common sense is not identical with fidelity to the pure unrestricted desire of questioning. Discussion of common sense as intellectual and commonsense belief, and of disease as a nonsystematic process.
- Question about the lack of a higher viewpoint from which to perceive general bias.
 - More precisely, it is common sense that cannot reverse the longer cycle of decline, being inherently committed to general bias. Further elaboration of what higher viewpoints are and how they relate to common sense.

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End of Part I.