

Lecture 14, Part II: Chapter 10 “Reflective Understanding”

[0:00]

- Third level: Reflective Understanding and Judging
- How do we proceed from “Is it so?” to a judgment in a way that is truly?
- Only on the basis of grasping the sufficiency of evidence in reflective insights.
- Reasoning comes from the Latin *ratio*, which comes from the Greek *logos* and means the conversation one has with oneself in order to arrive at the grounds for making a reasonable, rational judgment.
- Reasoning is bringing ourselves to a rational, reflective understanding to support our judging.
- In order for its utterance to be a reasonable and rational, judgment must be supported by a grasp that it is reasonable, rational to make this judgment.

[3:58]

- Lonergan speaks metaphorically of reasoning as “marshalling and weighing the evidence.”
- How is evidence weighed or evaluated?
- Different scales are used to evaluate different kinds of insights.
- Different kinds of reasoning and reflection are surveyed in Chapter 10, in a strategic order (simplest to most complex) for the sake of self-appropriation.
- But even these do not exhaust all the kinds of reasoning.
- The kind of reasoning depends upon the particular insight (or ‘direct borrowed content’).

[8:16]

- Overview of the different forms of reasoning and reflective understanding, section by section.
- Reasoning always takes its clue from the kind of insight that is being asked about.
- General Form of Reflective Insight illustrated in a logical syllogism, but this is only the most elementary illustration.

[11:07]

- §1. The “Virtually Unconditioned in General” – “virtually” meaning “having the power of” the unconditioned.
 1. The event as *conditioned*.
 2. The *link* between the *conditioned* and *conditions*.
 3. The *fulfillment* of conditions.
 - Example of a conditioned event: whether a frozen lake will support a certain weight depends on conditions.
 - Any event that is contingent is a conditioned event.
 - Its realization is due to classical correlations and statistical probabilities bringing it about.
 - The *virtually unconditioned in general* is something that might come about if the proper conditions are fulfilled.
 - The fulfilling conditions give the power to the conditioned as if it were unconditioned.
- Example of Hurricane Katrina: actually *having actually happened* it remains with us as an undeniable reality, which makes it *like* (virtually) an unconditioned that always had to be.

[18:16]

- Lonergan takes the general idea of virtually unconditioned and applies it to the example of judgment.
- To ask “Is it so?” reveals “it” – the content of the judgment – as merely a conditioned, intelligible possibility.

- We then search for links to the conditions under which a judgment would be virtually unconditioned, that is, to know the conditions needed for affirmation and denial.
- Reflective understanding grasps the sufficiency of evidence for affirming or denying an insight.

[22:25]

- “Grasping a proposition as virtually unconditioned means: knowing what you’d have to know in order to affirm it, and knowing that you know that.”
- The *conditioned*: the proposition as merely entertained or understood.
- The *link*: knowing what conditions would be needed for affirmation or denying it.
- The *fulfillment of the conditions*: knowing that those conditions are fulfilled.

[24:07]

- The *syllogism* as an illustration of the virtually unconditioned.
- Starting with the conclusion and inferring the premises needed (Aristotle’s method).
- Reasoning beyond the limitations of logic: how do you know if the premises are true?
- Reflective insight also uses “more rudimentary elements” in cognitional process so as to reach the premises as virtually unconditioned.

[27:22]

- Two examples from literature:
- An excerpt from Sherlock Holmes: the use of tacit knowledge to arrive at conclusions.
 - Holmes *grasps* the blue chalk *as* sufficient evidence – as the final fulfilling condition – for his judgment.
- *The Search* by C. P. Snow gives a vivid illustration of a young scientist trying to assemble the conditions he would need to affirm his scientific hypothesis – and his realization that the data actually invalidate his hypothesis. .

[37:55]

- Student question about whether a term paper aims at the virtually unconditioned.
 - When a term paper involves making a case for a certain interpretation, then the paper attempts to grasp the interpretation as virtually unconditioned.
 - Here the interpretation would be “the conditioned” and the term paper attempts transform it into a virtually unconditioned interpretation.

[39:28]

- Question about the hierarchy of conditions in the Sherlock Holmes example.
 - Discussion of how conditions are related, anticipating the missing piece of the puzzle, etc.

[42:04]

- Question as to whether two people can legitimately arrive at different judgments.
 - If, as Aristotle says, both people understand and mean the proposition in exactly the same way, then the answer is no.
 - Discussion of the problem of generalization and inducing universal truths from particulars.
 - Empirical residue (space, time and individuality) can differ without compromising universality.
 - Discussion of related complications.

[45:48]

- Knowing Sameness and Knowing Change.
- §2. Concrete Judgments of Fact
- The structure of “knowing change”
- From Chapter 8, how a thing’s intelligible unity is the same, despite differences in data.
- So conditions for knowing change include knowing the intelligible sameness and also difference in data at different times about those things.

[49:13]

- §3. Insights into Concrete Situations; Knowing Sameness.
- Conditions for the correctness of insights not to be found primarily in sense data, but lie instead somewhere else.
- Insights as *invulnerable* is Lonergan’s most important contribution to epistemology.
- Linking an insight to its conditions is done by asking further questions, until there are no further pertinent questions (the point of invulnerability).
- If there are not further pertinent questions in the self-correcting process, then there is no way of making the insight more correct – because it is fully correct.
- Empirical sense data alone cannot bring us to this point; the invulnerability of the insight does.

[55:41]

- Recognizing when the point of ‘no further questions’ has been reached.
- Authenticity as living in fidelity oneself as an inquirer; respecting one’s own questioning process as the grounds for knowing.

[58:52]

- Student question about the relation of Lonergan to Freud, psychology, and psychoanalysis.
 - Lonergan’s familiarity with Freud’s work, and his critique of the latter’s extra-scientific assumptions.
 - The real question might be, “Why do we ignore our own questioning process?”

[1:01: 35]

- Question about whether a responsible judgment presupposes a community.
 - Discussion of common sense judgments, their proximate source (in the individual) and their remote source (in the community), which raises questions the individual overlooks.
- Further question about how one lives, practically, prior to arriving at verified judgments.
 - Common sense judgment are exactly those that help with immediate concerns.
 - “Pertinence” is the key criterion here; the originating insight will determine what is meant by “pertinence.”
 - Meanwhile, one must appropriate one’s strengths as well as one’s vulnerabilities. Moreover, one can always withhold assent.

End of Part II.