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.
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.

§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.

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.

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?”

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.