

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 3, Part I: Chapter 13: “The Notion of Objectivity”

[0:00]

- Topics unfinished from previous lecture: the tripartite structure of objectivity, and the question of whether self-affirmation is of subject-as-subject, or subject-as-object.

[0:54]

- Review of Lonergan's notion of Objectivity.
- Objective knowing amounts to the cognition of reality.
- “Startling strangeness” of the realization that knowledge of reality results from this cognitional structure.
- Why should knowing result from experiencing, understanding, & judging?
- The counter-positions falsely attribute objectivity to one component or activity of knowing (e.g., the myth of knowing as looking).
- Mistaking one act of consciousness for the whole occurs not only in epistemology, but also in ethics.
- Difficulty with the counterpositions on knowing is not that what they emphasize is not a component of knowing, but that they regard it as the whole of knowing.

[8:12]

- Knowing as looking amounts to naive realism.
- Empiricism is a very consistent form of naive realism, rejecting any knowledge that isn't confirmed by taking a look.
- ‘Knowing as looking’ leads to the model of objectivity as the *already out there now* and *immediately accessible*.
- Looking is one way of having unmediated, uncomplicated, direct access to reality.
- Touching is similarly direct and perhaps more primal, as Piaget showed in his studies of integrating tactile & visual sensations.

[15:13]

- In the counterposition, what is obvious in knowing (or in ethics) is taken for what knowing obviously is.
- What would be excluded as objective knowledge – as merely subjective – on the counterposition of ‘knowing-as-looking’?
- Thoughts and feelings would be regarded as merely subjective.
- Discussion of the objective expression of feelings, i.e. body positions, voice changes. Can we see anger itself?

[19:38]

- Student question about whether such expressions are being part of anger’s essence, i.e. in animals we recognize such responses.
 - Discussion of socially constructed *versus* natural constructions of emotions. We mediate visual cues of emotions by means of concepts, but we never perceive emotions as such.
 - So we can't know that animals have emotions simply by looking. On the counterposition, that means we cannot know that animals have anger.

[23:35]

- Other things that would have to be ‘merely subjective’ on the counterposition:
 - causes (Hume) and relationships.
- Question whether attractions are objectively knowable.
- Question of whether discrimination among sensations can be objective on the counterposition.

- Discussion of how logical positivism attempted to build up perceptions and higher concepts from objective sensations using language and logic.
- Question as to whether judgment as having a reflective meaning.
 - For the counterposition, judgment has no objective meaning.
- Meaning in general would have to be a subjective projection, if knowing were only taking a look.
- Other ‘merely subjective’ things: substances, atoms and molecules (Mach), scientific theories in general (conventionalism), evolution – since they cannot be directly observed, similarly for evolution.
- Additional ‘merely subjective’ entities include families, institutions, societies, and cultures; history, ethical principles, God.

[33:35]

- Student question about how the time frame for ‘taking a look’ is determined. When is an ‘instant’ over, and what about continuity of perceptions?
 - The problem of what counts as a perception is indeed debatable; there is the question of continuity versus the instant. For some, the entire observable duration is allowable; but when the observer falls asleep there is a problem of discontinuous perception. Although the observer reorients his new to remembered perceptions automatically, there is still an interruption.

[37:40]

- Student question whether there is objectivity in language, or it is a means of expressing what we know subjectively?
 - Different philosophers have different views. Logical positivism defined meaningful language as that which could be reconstructed from sense sensations.

[39:25]

- Whatever cannot be known by sense contact is regarded as a merely subjective projection on external reality.

[40:47]

- Student question about a blind person's ability to know objectively.
 - Discussion of sight and other paradigms of knowing in western philosophy (cf. Shubert Ogden).

[42:40]

- Question about Lonergan’s references to ‘illumination’ and other ways in which he uses metaphors of light.
 - Discussion of illumination and insight, and how the latter always presupposes a visible image upon which understanding supervenes.

[45:41]

- Any reality that is constituted by meaning, is excluded from any model of objectivity that is modeled on sensations (on knowing as ‘taking a look’)
- This is one reason why Lonergan’s account is much more inclusive – it is open to realities that are constituted by meaning.

[47:37]

- Breaking the duality in knowing is necessary to accept (appropriate) that understanding correctly is indeed knowing reality.
- Being is known in understanding correctly and judging thereupon.

[50:00]

- ‘Knowing-as-looking’ vs. Self-Transcendence.
- Objectivity is the result of authentic subjectivity (*Method in Theology*) that follows the standards of the dynamism of our self-correcting structure, of our self-transcendence.

[53:00]

- Series of student questions:
- Question about why we trust the desire to know.
 - Many people in fact don’t trust it as the legitimate criterion for knowledge of reality.
 - Inquiry begins as spontaneous and innocent, until something prompts us to stop trusting it.
 - Self-appropriation consists in winning back this initial state. The structure of knowing and the unrestrictedness of knowing together ground its ability to produce objective knowledge.
 - Crucial questions are not about others, but about oneself: Do *I* perform the structured cognitional activities? Do *I* have and unrestricted desire giving rise to my inquiries?
 - The answers to these 2 questions are the basis for answering, why should we trust that desire.
 - Discussion of the element of *desire* in knowing and its unique form of manifestation.
 - We “know” this desire by letting it be, giving it free rein, by letting rational consciousness freely pursue its inquiry.
 - The unrestrictedness of desire is the precondition for arriving at the virtually unconditioned.

[1:04:05]

- Structured Objectivity: the Tripartite Structure of Cognition.
- Human knowing is a structure of several operations, not a single one, and so objectivity is a combination of distinct properties residing in several operations.
- Three-fold Objectivity consists in **experiential objectivity, normative objectivity, and absolute objectivity**. (The fourth objectivity, ‘principle objectivity,’ combines and goes beyond these 3).
- But not in a simplistic sense – *not* that 3 levels of acts automatically implies 3 kinds of objectivity.

[1:07:00]

- Experiential Objectivity is mediated givenness.
- The pragmatist Wilfred Sellars, in “The Myth of the Given” critiques the idea that knowing is based on givenness – which seems to contradict Lonergan’s assertion of experiential objectivity – but upon closer reading, Sellars is making the same point as Lonergan.
- Mediated and Immediate Givenness.
- Cognitional activities and their relationship to reality are:
 - Not sense experiences, but the intention of being provides our *immediate* relation to being.
 - Our relation to being is only *mediate* in the data of sense and of consciousness (since the intention of being makes use of such data).
- Hence, even though objectivity does not consist solely in the givenness of experience alone, yet some portion of objectivity does involve the experiential givenness of data.

[1:14:33]

- Question about the constitution of reality versus constitution of experience.
 - The present issue is how *objectivity* is constituted, not *reality*. Discussion of the role of the given in the objectivity of our knowing; and how our experience of objects is *not* immediate.

[1:17:39]

- Normative Objectivity is not just the correlative of the second level of consciousness (intelligence), because it has to do with all questioning – questions for intelligence and questions for reflection – not just questions on the second level of consciousness.
- Normative objectivity is grounded in the unrestricted desire to know; it results from unprejudiced inquiry.
- The opposite of normative objectivity – prejudice, bias – is interference with the unrestricted desire.

[1:20:05]

- Student question about whether this unrestricted desire to know allows us to connect to the third level of identifying desires and then letting them go.
 - Not all desires, but the unique, unrestricted desire.
 - The unrestricted desire is the desire for inquiry, and letting it have its way brings us to a knowledge of reality.

[1:21:18]

- Absolute Objectivity.
- The unconditioned judgment is no longer relative to the person who articulates it, or the time or place of the judgment.
- Absolute objectivity asks “is it so?” under any conditions, after all pertinent questions have been asked.
- The publicity of objectivity results from intersubjective agreement, born of the commonly shared and unrestricted desire to know.
- Agreement, even agreement, of all human kind, does not ground objectivity (because of *general* bias); but absolute objectivity grounds the possibility of human agreement.

End of Part I.