

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 3, Part II: Chapter 13: “The Principal Notion of Objectivity” & Self-Knowledge

[0:00]

- The Principal Notion of Objectivity
- Principally, objectivity is contained in a patterned context of judgments:
- A is. B is. A is a Knower. *A is not B.*
- The principal notion of objectivity is (at least) four judgments; each of which is an instance of absolute objectivity, which in turn are conditioned by normative and experiential objectivity.
- This is the principal way in which we know that we know beings which are really distinct from, which are not dependent upon, ourselves or our thinking them.
- Thus the principal notion of objectivity solves the problem of transcendence, i.e. knowing objects as existing and as distinct from ourselves.

[6:16]

- Student question: Could one replace “A is.” with “I am”?

[7:23]

- What can we not know on the counterposition of knowing, knowing as taking a look?
- One cannot know oneself as a knower, if knowing is taking a look:
 - We cannot see the intelligible unity of the ‘self’, i.e. as a unity-identity-whole.
 - We cannot see the data of consciousness or the activities of consciousness (sensing, inquiring, insight, reflecting, etc.) that are the very activities constituting the self.

[12:40]

- Student question about Lonergan’s work with respect to Kant, that there are all sorts of things we know by not taking a look.
 - The Kantian solution does not solve the problem of knowing reality in itself; Kant recognizes the inadequacy of naïve realism but retains the same notion of reality and concludes we can only know phenomenal reality.
 - What is missing from Kant, from Lonergan’s point of view, is the unrestricted desire to know, and judgment as unconditioned positing of ‘is’.

[16:36]

- Student question about the potential naïve realist objection that Lonergan still gives up too much to the idealist by starting with the data of consciousness and therefore cannot result in genuine objectivity.
 - Lonergan’s account of the principal notion of objectivity (patterned context of 4 judgments) is the proper answer to the objection.
 - Certain philosophers claim that starting with consciousness means you cannot break out of it and get to the real world.
 - Lonergan, however points out that their notion of consciousness is flawed.
 - Moreover, objectivity is not extroversion. Objectivity is making virtually unconditioned judgments about what is.
 - A real lack of principal objectivity would consist in never making any judgments – never experiencing, inquiring, or engaging in the self-correcting cycle of knowing.
 - Person who holds that knowing is by extroversion, cannot ground the truth of that statement in extroversion.

[22:02]

- Further discussion on this same question of how consciousness attains objective knowledge.
- Inverse insights play a role – the very expectation of what knowing is must be reversed.
- Chapter 14 discusses “problematic metaphysics” – metaphysics as learning, the process of human learning (individually and as a race) about the relation between knowing and the known.
- Lonergan differs from Descartes insofar as he never tries to prove something external exists, but only asserts that consciousness objectively performs certain activities, and that such performance constitutes knowledge of beings distinct from the knower.

[27:16]

- Self-Affirmation: Subject-as-subject, or subject-as-object?
- Is self-affirmation knowledge of the subject-as-subject, or subject-as-object?
 - Subject-as-object: it seems that the content of judgment is distinct from the judging subject (p. 344).
 - Subject-as-subject: how can self-affirmation of the knower be knowing the subject as subject?

[32:53]

- Student responds using a distinction between ‘intending’ versus ‘consciousness’ in self-affirmation.
 - Discussion of experience as tantamount to consciousness, and how sense data always implies consciousness and thus a concomitant (self) awareness.
 - Moreover, the subject is more than self-experiencing; it is a unity/identity/whole which is however not given immediately, but known by understanding.
- The implicit analogy of looking is inappropriate for self-knowledge, which does *not* amount to taking a look at oneself!
- The problem of subject-as-subject vs. subject-as-object arises from the tacit construal of judging and understanding on the model of taking a look – one cannot look at looking, but one can understand understanding and one can judge judging.
- Looking is a spatial form of perception, yet understanding and judging are not spatial forms of knowing.

[40.21]

- Introspection fails as a model of self-knowledge.
- The looker is always behind the look, whereas the judgment is not behind the judger. Rather, a person simultaneously fulfills the condition for the affirmation in consciousness while making the judgment.

[41:34]

- Self-affirmation means the self both affirms and is affirmed.
- Mistake to think of my real self as identical with the experience of consciousness, rather than my real self as the self affirmed.
- The real self is not identical with the experience of consciousness, but is a fuller self in which the data of consciousness is an essential constituent.

[43:01]

- Series of student questions:
- Question as to whether the object and subject are at that moment an identity.
 - Realization that actually engaging in the process of self-affirmation involves many layers and self-correcting cycles.

- Where does Lonergan get the phrase unity/identity/whole?

- Question about the value, philosophically or psychologically, of grasping the subject as an object?
 - In philosophy, there is much discussion, particularly in Sartre, who holds that consciousness is nothingness, not being.
 - The impossibility of self-objectification is taken for granted in much contemporary philosophy, with many repercussions.
 - But Lonergan does not agree, because of their presumption about what knowledge would have to be ('objectification' on the model of taking a look).
 - Self-affirmation is a genuine form of self-knowing and is the basis for further knowing.