

Insight and Beyond

Class 25, Part One: April 7th 2010

“Truth of Interpretation”

“The Universal Viewpoint”

**Interpretation as One of Eight Functional
Specialties**

(Insight, Chapter 17 §3)

Class 25, April 7, 2010

Chapter 17 §3: “Truth of Interpretation”

Chapter 18: “The Possibility of Ethics”

Summary of Material

With regard to interpretation, Lonergan’s focus is more on expression than on understanding.

In expressing, a person depends upon a large array of insights into resources for communicating an insight.

Four kinds of interpretation: commonsense, simple (historical), reflective, explanatory (scientific).

Review of commonsense interpretation: includes both commonsense understanding and commonsense expression.

Approaching interpretation as expression also enables Lonergan to develop methodological guidance for the problem of understanding the expressions of another time or culture.

“Simple Interpretation” — a new expression to a different audience that does not share the same background as that of the original audience.

“Simple Interpretation” is not that simple — it is the kind of interpretation that historians do.

It is “simple” only in comparison with reflective and explanatory interpretations.

How is “simple interpretation” possible? What is required of the interpreter?

Discussion.

Cognitive structure and the unrestricted desire to know (notion of being) are the conditions for the possibility of simple interpretation — because they are the conditions of the possibility of transcending the limitations of one’s own historical and cultural situations.

But the problem of understanding an expression from another culture and time is structurally exactly the same as understanding the expression of another person from one’s own culture — both rest upon the unrestricted desire to know and the accumulation of an inventory of insights.

“Historical sense” is similar to common sense — an accumulation of insights.

The acquisition of historical sense — the accumulation of insights — is the condition of the possibility of arriving at a virtually unconditioned correct judgment that one’s own insights into foreign expressions are the same as the original insights expressed by those expressions.

Student question about the problem posed by the fact that the original historical audience is not any longer around to answer your questions — so one has to rely on one’s own contemporaries to answer one’s questions about the foreign expression.

- In fact only relying upon one’s *experiences* of one’s contemporaries’ expressions.
- An expression is initially just marks on paper or stone.
- But meaning resides in being, not in marks as merely experienced.
- One does not have the advantage of the short cuts that a contemporary has to check one’s understanding with other contemporaries.

- Instead, have to check against a self-correcting series of questions and answers that arise out of a collection of many other historical documents.
- But we have a similar difficulty even with one's own contemporaries.

Student question about the difference between understanding and interpreting an author.

- Beyond understanding the original author there is the challenge of expressing that interpretation for a different audience.
- Knowing that one's own insight is identical with that of the original author is not a matter of getting inside the consciousness of that author.

“Reflective Interpretation.”

A reflective interpretation goes beyond a simple interpretation by adding the knowledge of the situatedness of the present expression in relation to the original expression.

Reflective understanding adds an understanding of the original and contemporary audiences' self-awarenesses (self-understandings) of where they stand in intellectual development.

Where simple interpretation purports that its understanding is the same as the original understanding, in reflective interpretation there is an explicit understanding of that identity.

“Explanatory (Scientific) Interpretation.”

A nuanced development of reflective interpretation.

Explanatory interpretation requires a method of anticipating (heuristically) the habitual background understandings of all possible audiences.

Explanatory interpretation would therefore escape the relativity to some particular audience.

This includes, but is not limited to, transcending relativity to the biases of audiences.

Role of the “protean notion of being” in interpretation.

“Protean notion of being” means the changing, dynamic senses of being — the ever-shifting sense of reality.

Comes from the Greek myth about Proteus, the primordial, shape-shifting sea-god.

The shifting sense of reality affects what we will tend to regard as meaningful as well.

Methodological need to gain some perspective on the shifts in our senses of reality and meaning.

The shifting, protean notion of being results in dialectical sequences of expressions.

“Universal Viewpoint”: Interpretation and Extrapolation.

A text is initially only marks on paper.

Interpreters go beyond those marks, adding acts of consciousness to give the marks meaning.

The interpreter adds everything, beginning with her or his patterning of the experience of those marks.

“Universal Viewpoint” = heuristic envisioning all the possible ways human beings go beyond.

The interpreter begins with her or his own experiences, understandings, judgments, and extrapolates beyond them by adding further paterings, understandings, judgments in fashioning an interpretation.

Extrapolation begins with one’s own experiences, understandings, judgments, and works backwards by adding further experiences, understandings, judgments.

This is aided by self-appropriating how this meaning and its intervening interpretations and distortions may have helped to shape one's own horizon.

Explanatory interpretation, therefore, is principally a matter of situating oneself within a heritage — a genetic and dialectical history of meanings, and thereby relate oneself to the expression under investigation.

Universal viewpoint as heuristic anticipation of possible alternatives of interpretations.

Tools for framing this heuristic have been fashioned in the preceding chapters of *Insight*.

Student question about how meaning is located within the universe of being.

— Meanings are real.

— Example: the problem of understanding of recent earthquakes around the world.

— Physicists, geologists and engineers understand some things about earthquakes.

- But there is still more to be understood about their reality that has to do with the meaning of these disasters to those who suffer losses (e.g. homes), especially insofar as those losses are of human patterns of interactions underpinned by their meanings.
- The only way to understand those meanings is from human expressions about them, and by interpreting them.
- This is to interpret the reality in human terms.
- To do so is aided methodically by a heuristic anticipation of what those expressions could possibly mean.
- If one has a sufficiently open self-appropriation, then one has a basis for such a heuristic.

Student proposal that in beginning with the universal viewpoint means selecting from within the entirety of possible meanings.

- Lonergan again uses the scissors metaphor in this context: universal viewpoint as upper blade.
- Universal viewpoint is heuristic, not a system — Lonergan distances himself from Hegel.

Every culture is a “viewpoint” — a retinue of shared experiences, insights, judgments, beliefs, values.

Universal viewpoint is the *ordered* totality of viewpoints — a heuristic ordering of all viewpoints to one another.

An explanatory interpretation uses that heuristic ordering to concretely and explicitly situate one’s interpretative expression in relation to other expressions.

But this means situating the achievement of self-appropriation within the heritage of historical developments that formed its own conditions, and then relating that achievement to historical contexts that have not achieved self-appropriation.

Just as philosophies can have profound insights that are formulated in terms of counter-positions, so also other kinds of valuable meanings can be expressed in ways that obscure those meanings.

“There is no such thing as a pure counter-position.”

The method of dialectic — rooted in the distinction between positions and counter-positions — enables an interpreter to make the best of another’s expression.

Lonergan’s **“hermeneutics of generosity.”**

Ultimately using the universal viewpoint in explanatory interpretation forces the interpreter to confront the limitations of his or her own horizon of meaning.

The best interpreter is self-appropriated; and the effort of explanatory interpretation will enhance recognition of one’s own biases and thereby promote self-appropriation.

Student question as to whether the universal viewpoint (and explanatory interpretation) is concretely possible if one has not already gone through that self-confrontation.

- Basically, yes, it would not be otherwise possible.
- Explanatory interpretation situates human meaning in the finality of proportionate being.

- But now have to add into the method the possibility that humans can distort finality, unlike all the other constituents of proportionate being.
- So have to add the dialectical as well as the genetic dimensions of proportionate being and the method.
- This presupposes a sophisticated level of self-appropriation.
- However, Lonergan's closing comment in *Insight* about being personally transformed [transformation] by his encounter with Aquinas (and other authors) reveals that he himself achieved his degree of self-appropriation of works of interpretation.
- He situates himself and his own philosophy historically in relation to other expressions.

What becomes of the Universal Viewpoint and Explanatory Interpretation in *Method in Theology*?

Everything in §17.3 in *Insight* becomes the eight functional specialties in *Method in Theology*.

Expressing is taken up in the eighth functional specialty: Communications.

There, between Interpretation and Communications there stands a much more complex intervening set of operations, distributed over several functional specialties.

Among the greatest changes has to do with Lonergan's conception of meaning:

In *Insight* the principal paradigm of meaning is an insight and its expressions; in *Method in Theology* this is broadened to incorporate a wider range of meanings.

End of Part One.

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Chapter 18: “The Possibility of Ethics”

With regard to interpretation, Lonergan’s focus is more on expression than on understanding.

In expressing, a person depends upon a large array of insights into resources for communicating an insight.

Four kinds of interpretation: commonsense, simple (historical), reflective, explanatory (scientific).

Okay. Thank you for your patience. So to pick up where we left off in our last class, we’re going to finish up the discussion of Truth of Interpretation at the end of chapter seventeen (“**Metaphysics as Dialectic**”, pp. 553- 617), section three (“The Truth of Interpretation” pp. 585- 617) of *Insight*, and then go on to talk about chapter eighteen, which Lonergan entitles “**The Possibility of Ethics**” (pp. 618-656). ... Maybe!

[Organizational issues disrupt continuity of recording for a moment]

Okay. We're going to do a tape two for the audience. So today we're going to finish up our discussion of The Truth of Interpretation at the end of chapter seventeen ("**Metaphysics as Dialectic**", pp. 553- 617), section three ("The Truth of Interpretation" pp. 585-617) in *Insight*, and then begin a discussion of chapter eighteen, on "**The Possibility of Ethics**" (pp. 618-656).

What is Interpretation?

"An interpretation is the expression of the meaning of another expression." (CWL 3, p. 608).

The **"second expression [is] addressed to a different audience."** (CWL 3, p. 585).

Not Understanding (*Verstehen*)

But Expression (*Ausdruck*)

Just to review what we talked about last time. *For Lonergan interpretation is primarily a matter of expression rather than a matter of understanding.* So his focus is on expression. We spoke last week about what Lonergan means by expression, and how a person engaging in expressing an idea has to have a multitude of insights, a multitude of insights about the means at his or her disposal in order to do the expressing, insights into the background that he or she understands the audience to have, insights into the deficiencies of the understanding that the audience — things that need to be made up. And then, as Lonergan says, the practical insights that the person needs to be able to use the means of language and other kinds of expression in order to communicate the insight.

Review of commonsense interpretation: includes both commonsense understanding and commonsense expression.

Types of Interpretation

Commonsense
Simple (Historical)
Reflective
Explanatory ('Scientific')

I mentioned that in *Insight* there are four distinguishable, but in some senses, overlapping notions of interpretation: **commonsense**, **simple**, **reflective** and **scientific**. We spoke mainly about the commonsense, and not too much about the other kinds last week, so we're going to finish up that discussion this week.

Commonsense Understanding and Commonsense Interpretation

"Common sense ... remains incomplete until there is added at least one further insight into the situation in hand." (CWL 3, p. 199).

"For common sense not merely says what it means; it says it to someone; It follows that the only interpreter of commonsense utterances is common sense." (CWL 3, p. 200).

But just to recall, the key to commonsense interpretation is that commonsense remains incomplete until there are added one or more additional insights to the background accumulation and inventory of insights that people of commonsense have. So knowing how to express your ideas to people of your own class, your own situation, your own culture, your own society, your own working group, and so on, is a matter of commonsense, a shared inventory, or a presumed shared inventory of background insights to which only a few more insights are needed; and expressing that to a commonsense audience is a matter of figuring out what are the additional clues, the additional phantasms, the additional verbal expressions, facial expressions, symbolic expressions, drawings, whatever it is you need to get the insight across. And you know that you've succeeded in your expression when you get that nod, when you get that wink in the eye, or when you get that "Aha!" expression in a person's face. When that happens, you don't have to go on!

When I was in Graduate School, I was editing proceedings of a Conference that took place at my University; and it was very difficult to edit the question and answer sessions, because the person who was doing the responding would be able to tell, from the responses of the people in the audience, when he had said enough. And so he broke his sentences off! Well, that's great if you're in that audience, but you can't publish responses like that. So I had to guess about what was going to be the continuation of that answer in the Question and Answer period. Then of course we had to send those off to the people who were doing the responses to the questions, and see if they agreed. And sometimes they had corrections and so on. But it's the difference between a written expression in which you don't have the advantage of knowing when people have gotten the point, as opposed to a face-to-face audience in which you can tell that, and you don't have to belabour the point, for fear of boring your audience.

One thing I wanted to emphasize on this, which I think I said last week, is that *here Lonergan is using the word 'interpretation' or "commonsense interpretation" to mean both things at once, both understanding and expression.* So that remark that he has that **"the only interpreter of commonsense utterances is common sense"** (CWL 3, p. 200): in any case, his meaning, among other things, is that *you have to be in the community of common sense, you have to have that commonsense background of inventory of insights in order to be able to interpret a commonsense utterance.* And there is no short way of interpreting a commonsense utterance — there is no algorithm, there's no logical structure! You actually have to have that commonsense background, so that you catch all the nuances and the significances and applauses, and so on. ...

So here he is also meaning that you have to have that commonsense background in order to be able to understand the commonsense expression, as well as you have to have that commonsense background to express to others in that group that commonsense meaning. So he's meaning it in both ways here.

**Approaching interpretation as expression also enables
Lonergan to develop methodological guidance for the
problem of understanding the expressions of another time
or culture.**

When he gets to chapter seventeen (“**Metaphysics as Dialectic**”, pp. 553- 617), he's going to be pretty rigorous about *the distinction that by interpretation I mean an expression* (see CWL 3, pp. 585-589). As we will see, however, Lonergan is going to use his emphasis on expression to provide a methodological structuring for how to understand expression of another place, another time, another culture.

So it's a complicated relationship: that *expression depends upon acts of meaning; and he's going to develop a general methodological approach to interpreting expressions of meaning that is going to allow for the possibility of an accurate understanding of meanings*. So even though he's going to make this distinction there that an interpretation is an expression, and go from the emphasis on interpretation as expression to develop his method, *the method in the end is going to depend upon the fact that expressions are expressions of acts of meaning, and therefore you can use the method derived from an analysis of expressions to guide you in understanding meanings*. Okay? Is that clear enough? ...

That's a complicated thing! He doesn't really spell it out that way. Once in a while, he will say: Of course, *expression and understanding interpenetrate!* And there are a couple of very rich paragraphs there, which one would prefer that he had spent perhaps a chapter elaborating on, if not a book!! But for Lonergan that seemed all pretty straightforward and obvious from anyone that is focused on the things that he thought were less obvious and more recondite. So ***a commonsense interpretation is spoken to the community in which one participates and shares in the shared inventory of the background insights.***

“Simple Interpretation” — a new expression to a different audience that does not share the same background as that of the of the original audience.

“Simple Interpretation” is not that simple — it is the kind of interpretation that historians do.

It is “simple” only in comparison with reflective and explanatory interpretations.

How is “simple interpretation” possible? What is required of the interpreter?

Discussion.

Cognitional structure and the unrestricted desire to know (notion of being) are the conditions for the possibility of simple interpretation — because they are the conditions of the possibility of transcending the limitations of one’s own historical and cultural situations.

But the problem of understanding an expression from another culture and time is structurally exactly the same as understanding the expression of another person from one’s own culture — both rest upon the unrestricted desire to know and the accumulation of an inventory of insights.

‘Simple’ Interpretation

“In the simple interpretation the principal insight A’ to be communicated purports to coincide with the principal insight A of the original expression.

Hence, differences between the practical insights F and F’ depend directly upon differences between the habitual insights B and B’, D and D’, and remotely upon differences between the habitual developments C and C’, and the deficiencies E and E’.” (CWL 3, p. 586).

A **simple interpretation** is different.

“In the simple interpretation the principal insight A’ to be communicated [works] to coincide with the principal insight A of the original expression. (CWL 3, p. 586).

So here is where we see *interpretation as expression*! So the original insight is expressed to an audience with a background, and a background of both an inventory of insights and a deficiency of understanding.

A Simple Interpretation *is an expression to a different audience that doesn’t share that background.* As I like to say, a simple interpretation is not all that simple! Think, for example, of a century, or several centuries, or a millennium, separating the two audiences, the prime and the unprimed audience. *Then the interpreter is engaged in the work of expressing a meaning whose context was significantly different to an audience that is his or her contemporary audience.* That is what he means by a Simple Interpretation; and it isn’t that simple. *It is the interpretation that is the work of a historian, or giving an historical interpretation.* So, in order to do that, you have

to take into account the practical insights of the contemporary interpreter and the original expresser: that's what the ups¹ are, and the differences and habitual insights that have to do both with the things that people have understood and the things they have failed to understand; and so the interpreter has to have some way of understanding the achievements, the development, the deficiencies of the original audience, as well as the achievements, the deficiencies, the accumulations of the contemporary audience. So it's not particularly simple!

Now, the problem is, how is that possible? How is that possible? *So Lonergan is talking about expression here, but he is using his account of what is involved in an expression, an interpretative expression, as a way of working out what is required of the interpreter, to be able to do this.* Now, understanding Lonergan's thought, as you have up to this point, and as you have from having read this chapter, how is it possible for an interpreter in the year two thousand and ten to achieve an understanding of all the unprimed insights, and deficiencies, and so on? How is that possible? What is the ground of the possibility of doing that? ... Tim?

Tim: Would it relate to his cognitional theory? And given that one experiences, comes to know, comes to understand, and then in the act of judgment comes to choose what is valuable, and then expresses that in a document, in something which is all grounded on this structure. And since we appropriate our own structures, in some sense we have an insight into the counter-positions, the positions where the biases are in play?

Pat: Okay! That — You've jumped considerably ahead. You've jumped to what he is going to call a *Scientific or Explanatory Interpretation*. But you're on the right — So you've given us more than he has in mind when he's talking about Simple Interpretation. *So there is a series of complexifications here, from Commonsense Interpretation, to Simple Interpretation, to Reflexive Interpretations, to Scientific or Explanatory.* You've moved all the way ahead and to that. But let's go back to the crucial thing you said. The answer to almost anything having to do with Lonergan is either the cognitional structure, which Tim said, or ?

Student: — Chapter Twenty!

[Loud laughter]

¹ The transcriber is uncertain as to the word or indeed the meaning Pat expresses at this point.

Pat: That's the third answer!

Student: Self-appropriation?

Pat: Well, Tim said that; self-appropriation of the cognitional structure. Or?

Student: Inquiry?

Pat: Inquiry! Unrestricted desire to know!! So the answer to almost everything, for those of you who are going to take the oral exam: you can say that Professor Byrne thinks that the answer to every question is cognitional structure or the unrestricted desire to know! So that was a short example of that! But you can count on the fact that that is going to be the answer to at least part of the questions.

So on the one hand, the cognitional structure. Now, for Simple Interpretation: this is why Lonergan calls it simple. And this is part of why he is going to distinguish it from Reflective: *self-appropriation is not invoked. Simple Interpretation does rely on cognitional structure, and does rely on the unrestricted desire to know! But it doesn't presuppose self-appropriation. Reflective does!* And especially the nuance of Reflective that he is going to call *Scientific*, does depend on self-appropriation! But Simple doesn't. *What Lonergan means by Simple Interpretation is what a good historian or a good interpreter of texts does. There is nothing particularly simple about that! It's just simple compared to what he is going to do about adding certain kinds of complications. So it relies upon the facticity of our cognitional structure and on the facticity that we all have an unrestricted capacity for questioning! Crucial in this of course is that by our capacity for unrestricted questioning, we are not limited to the horizon of insights that we grew up in. We are not limited to the commonsense knowing that we were enculturated into, because our inquiry can ask beyond that!*

**“Historical sense” is similar to common sense — an
accumulation of insights.**

**The acquisition of historical sense — the accumulation of
insights — is the condition of the possibility of arriving at
a virtually unconditioned correct judgment that one's own**

insights into foreign expressions are the same as the original insights expressed by those expressions.

**Common Sense
and
“Historical Sense”**

“Just as we by common sense can know how our contemporaries would or would not speak or act in any of a series of ordinary and typical situations, so the scholar by a long familiarity with the documents and monuments of another age and by an ever increasing accumulation of complementary insights can arrive at a participation of the common sense of another period, and by this historical sense can tell how the men and women of that time would or would not speak or act in certain types of situation.” (*CWL 3*, p. 587, emphases added).

So he makes this very interesting analogy between commonsense and what he calls historical sense. By the commonsense we can know how our contemporaries would or would not speak, or act, in any series of ordinary typical situations. **“We by common sense can know how our contemporaries would or would not speak or act in any of a series of ordinary and typical situations.”** (*CWL 3*, p. 587). We talked about that last week, we talked about that back in the first semester when we were studying chapter six (*CWL 3*, **“Common Sense and Its Subject”**, pp. 196-231). People tend to think that you can’t understand folks from a different culture, or a

different time period, because you are not there to experience — You're not there in time with them. You don't have their experiences, because you didn't live then.

But if you transpose that into having a conversation after this class with anybody in this class, you have exactly the same problem. You do not dwell in their consciousness; and *dwelling in their consciousness would be presupposed if knowing were a matter — Or if interpreting or understanding of it were a matter of experiencing what they experience. But on Lonergan's take, it's not!!* Understanding what another person means is exactly the same as understanding how the planets move and how algebra proves! *It's a matter of asking and answering questions that are posed by your experiences, by your experiences, not their experiences.*

You can presuppose, quite reasonably in fact, that other people have experiences. But their experiences are not within your realm, of your cognitional structure! *What's in the realm of your cognitional structure is your experiences of them;* that passage that I read to you last week about *their* facial expressions, and so on. *So interpreting or understanding what they have to say is possible because of your cognitional structure and your unrestricted capacity for inquiry.* Understanding them in fact and understanding correctly, and in fact, knowing when you've understood somebody correctly and knowing when you haven't successfully understood them yet. All that rests upon that same foundation that Tim was sketching out for us.

“Historical sense” is the same sort of thing.

“So the scholar by a long familiarity with the documents and monuments ...” (CWL 3, p. 587),

‘familiarity’ in the sense of his or her having some experiences,

“and by an ever increasing accumulation of complementary insights” (CWL 3, p. 587),

So, about the documents, which if one is attentive, one will notice that there are funny things about these documents that you won't see in documents today. And so I have some questions about those, and I try to understand those. And I get into a community of people who have been struggling with some of these kinds of questions; and I listen to their plausible or implausible ideas, their interpretations, their expressions of their insights about what's going on in these

documents; and *by engaging in the self-correcting cycle of learning I can expand from my horizon of understanding to accumulate something approximating to the accumulation of insights that characterize another time, another place, another class, another culture, another ethnicity, another religion.*

And that's what Lonergan means by **“historical sense.”** It is analogous, in every respect, to the way in which we accumulate our own common sense. *It's just that we have to spend a lot of time accumulating another set of insights that are not the ones of our own community. That is the condition for the possibility of coming to the judgment that my insight, A prime, coincides with the author's insight A. It's the acquisition of historical sense!*

‘Simple’ Interpretation

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Hence, differences between the practical insights F and F' depend directly upon differences between the habitual insights B and B', D and D', and remotely upon differences between the habitual developments C and C', and the deficiencies E and E'.” (CWL 3, p. 586).

Student question about the problem posed by the fact that the original historical audience is not any longer around to answer your questions — so one has to rely on one's own contemporaries to answer one's questions about the foreign expression.

- In fact only relying upon one's *experiences* of one's contemporaries' expressions.
- An expression is initially just marks on paper or stone.
- But meaning resides in being, not in marks as merely experienced.
- One does not have the advantage of the short cuts that a contemporary has to check one's understanding with other contemporaries.
- Instead, have to check against a self-correcting series of questions and answers that arise out of a collection of many other historical documents.
- But we have a similar difficulty even with one's own contemporaries.

Okay. Let me stop there and see if people have any questions about that much, Simple Interpretation? ... Ah, Matt?

Matt: Is a part of the problem when you're doing history that you can't know the audience because those folks aren't around anymore? That you only have other people trying to answer the same questions you have, so that you are still relying on people in your time and place as they are trying to understand a different time and place?

**Common
Sense
and
“Historical Sense”**

“Just as we by common sense can know how our contemporaries would or would not speak or act in any of a series of ordinary and typical situations, so the scholar by a long familiarity with the documents and monuments of another age and by an ever increasing accumulation of complementary insights can arrive at a participation of the common sense of another period, and by this historical sense can tell how the men and women of that time would or would not speak or act in certain types of situation.” (CWL 3, p. 587, emphases added).

Pat: Ahm, it's — If you like, the problem is even worse, because you're only relying on your *experiences* of your contemporaries' accounts of interpretations. That's why he is always placing his emphasis on *interpretation as an expression!* The bottom line — I think I had this up on a slide last week — *The bottom line, an expression is just marks on a piece of paper, or marks on a stone, or on a tablet, or something.* If you're in the same room or the same locale as the person whom you are trying to interpret, there will be some sounds, and facial expressions, and so on; otherwise you've just got marks on a piece of paper, or on a piece of stone. And whatever anybody says to you about those marks, those are just more marks; they might be auditory marks, they might be written marks; that's all you ever have. So this is why later on Lonergan is going

to use the language of “self-transcendence”. By our inquiry we transcend the limits of just what we see.

And now there is some discussion in there, which I think we talked about last week, of: *Where is the meaning?* The meaning is not in the paper documents, it’s not out there on the stone documents, it’s not in there in the author’s head! *The meaning is in being! The meaning resides in all, everything about everything, all that is! And meaning is part of being! Meaning is constitutive of some portion of being.* I think we mentioned this last week.

So you don’t have the advantage that a historical contemporary would have had of the short-cuts! If you pick up a letter that somebody wrote, and you see it doesn’t — That sounds strange! Let me go over, and let me ask Elizabeth what she really meant. Did you really mean this? Or were you being ironic? Or that sort of thing. So you don’t have that opportunity to check your understanding of those marks against a person who authored those marks and can give you a clarification of them. All you’ve got is whatever documents have come down to you! But also, as we’ll see, that Lonergan is going to argue, what you also have are documents of things that preceded that document; and documents that followed that document.

So you have a limitation; and there are going to be points where you can say, based on all the documents I’ve got, all the ingenuity that I’m capable of mustering, all the things that my contemporary scholars, or even the historical community of scholars have been able to make of this, I have to say that I don’t know. My best hypothesis is that the document means this, but *I don’t know because I’ve got some further pertinent questions. But that’s not always going to happen. There are going to be times when you can say “This is what the document means!”*

I was going to say something else. ... Oh, suppose you were in this sort of a context: you’ve got a letter and you go to Elizabeth and say “Is this what you really mean?” And Elizabeth says: “Yeah, that’s right!” You’re all set, right? **[Students murmur doubtfully]** ...

Why not? Because you bring the letter to Elizabeth and you say: “Elizabeth, were you being ironic?” And Elizabeth says “No!” Is she being ironic when she says ‘No’? So you have the same problem all over again. And it’s because of your familiarity with Elizabeth, and your

commonsense context, whether or not that you can figure out whether she's being ironic in the second place; and therefore know how to take what she says in the second instance in relationship to the first instance. That's what a historian does! A historian doesn't have a lot of the short-cuts that we have by being able to go and talk to our contemporaries. But the historian does that sort of thing! Okay?

So for Lonergan, *Verstehen* is not the big deal! Understanding the expression of another is just as difficult, or just as easy, whether there's a hundred years or a thousand years between the interpreter and the author, or if there is a millisecond between the interpreter and the author. It's the same kind of problem, from his point of view. Okay?

Student question about the difference between understanding and interpreting an author.

- Beyond understanding the original author there is the challenge of expressing that interpretation for a different audience.
- Knowing that one's own insight is identical with that of the original author is not a matter of getting inside the consciousness of that author.

Pat: Greg?

Greg: In a situation **such as** we're talking about, is there any difference between understanding the author and interpreting the author?

Pat: Yeah, sure! For him, there is! *Understanding* the author is figuring out if insight A prime is in fact identical to insight A. Insight A is the insight of the original author. Insight A prime is the insight of the interpreter. That's the problem of understanding! *More properly speaking, it's a problem of judgment: that A prime is the same as A. So that's the hard work of correctly understanding!! For Lonergan at least, interpreting is not just understanding, but putting that understanding into an expression for a contemporary audience, whether the*

audience is a popular audience or an audience of scholarly specialists. Nevertheless, you don't just repeat the identical marks that the original author put down, because the original author's marks were set forth on the basis of practical insight F, that took into account the contemporary audience; and the audience and its context has changed. Okay?

'Simple' Interpretation

"In the simple interpretation the principal insight A' to be communicated purports to coincide with the principal insight A of the original expression.

Hence, differences between the practical insights F and F' depend directly upon differences between the habitual insights B and B', D and D', and remotely upon differences between the habitual developments C and C', and the deficiencies E and E'." (CWL 3, p. 586).

So remember, interpretation for Lonergan is not the understanding. It's the expressing. And the key word in Simple Interpretation is 'purports'. That insight A prime, which is the interpreter's understanding of what the text means, purports to be identical with insight A, which is the insight of the original expresser. This would be impossible if the *criterion* were: being able to get inside the consciousness of author A. And if that is the only criterion for knowing the identity between A prime and A, then it's an impossibility; and all interpretation is just subjective in ways that we talked about last week!

But because *for Lonergan knowing the identity of an insight is a matter of asking and answering further pertinent questions, then we all know that when we've got an idea about what somebody means, that we often have a lot of further pertinent questions, and until those are satisfactorily answered, we are not in a position to say we know that they are the same.* Okay. All right!

“Reflective Interpretation.”

A reflective interpretation goes beyond a simple interpretation by adding the knowledge of the situatedness of the present expression in relation to the original expression.

Reflective understanding adds an understanding of the original and contemporary audiences’ self-awarenesses (self-understandings) of where they stand in intellectual development.

Where simple interpretation purports that its understanding is the same as the original understanding, in reflective interpretation there is an explicit understanding of that identity.

Reflective Interpretation

“A reflective interpretation, then, is guided by a practical insight F” that depends upon insights A”, B” and D”. But now the insight B” is a grasp of the audience’s habitual grasp C” of its own intellectual development C’ and of the difference between that development and the habitual accumulation of the insights C in the initial audience.” (CWL 3, p. 586).

Now what's a **Reflective Interpretation**? Why do we have that double primes there? ... Now the insight — and keep in mind that when he says *the* insight here, he almost always implicitly is meaning *the multiplicity of insights*. So — But now the multiplicity of insights A' grasps the audience's habitual grasp of its own intellectual development, and the difference between that development and the habitual accumulation of insights in the initial audience. Okay. What's the difference then between Reflective Interpretation and Simple Interpretation?

Let's see if we can unpack this rather dense sentence here. What makes for the difference between a Simple Interpretation, which is not simple! — Almost all really really good historians are doing what Lonergan calls Simple Interpretation. I won't say all, but most, are doing Simple Interpretation. And their Simple Interpretations can indeed be quite accurate. *Lonergan says, they can happen to hit it off!* That sounds a little bit glib, but given his respect for historians, it's really not meant to be glib! He's getting at something different! So what's a Reflective Interpretation adding that a Simple Interpretation is lacking? ... James?

James: It's an explicit awareness or recognition of the distance between my —

Pat: — Exactly! Exactly! That's right! That's right! *So a Reflective Interpretation is deliberately — or, excuse me — is knowingly situating the expression in relationship to, first of all, the self-understanding of the original audience, and the self-understanding of the contemporary audience.* That passage I read to you from Rudolf Bultmann a couple of weeks ago is doing something like that, although arguably there are problems with what Bultmann *says* rather than with *what he is trying to do*.

Do you remember that passage that I read you: Bultmann is saying that the state of development of the authors' of the book of Genesis was a state in which their world-view was one in which they thought the cosmos was constructed out of a big ocean, in which a void was put. And they didn't know what we know three thousand years later. They didn't know what we know about the physics and the astrophysics of space and time. *So we can't accept their expressions, because we are at a different point in the development of our understanding.* I think Bultmann is wrong in the way that he is characterizing — he is falling into the assumptions — as I said a couple of weeks ago — Comte's assumptions about what religious language and religious myths are doing. But he is trying to do something like Reflective Interpretation, by bringing into his

interpretation an account of the state of intellectual development of the audience of the original document, *and* the state of the intellectual development of his own contemporary audience.

So that's a Reflective Interpretation. It's bringing — You're not just communicating the insight, but *you're communicating the insight in a context where you are assessing a technique that says correctly the two audiences' own self-awareness of where they are in intellectual development.* One answer could be these people have no clue about where they are in intellectual development; and that would be part of Reflective Interpretations. It is not like that there are very many Reflective Interpretations that would be right in making that assumption, but that would be *a way of doing it, a way of putting it forward.* And so *Reflective Interpretation takes into account how much self-reflection there is, and likewise, their deficiencies in grasping where they are in their intellectual development.*

Reflective Interpretation

“Similarly, the insight D” is a grasp of the audience’s deficiencies E” in grasping the differences between the habitual developments C’ and C, and so in understanding the differences between the deficiencies E’ and E and between the practical insight F’ and F. Finally, the principal insight A” to be communicated will be a grasp of the identity of the insight A communicated in the original expression and of the insight A’ communicated in the simple interpretation.”

(CWL 3, p. 586).

And then “**Finally, the principal insight, A**” — Okay, A” [A double prime] now means the insight that the reflective interpreter is going to communicate to his or her contemporary audience —

“will be a grasp of the identity of the insight A communicated in the original expression and of the insight A’ communicated in the simple interpretation.” (CWL 3, p. 586).

Where the *Simple Interpretation* purports that its insight, its understanding, is the same as the one originally expressed, *in Reflective Interpretation*² *there is a grasp of the identity of the original insight and the simple interpreter’s interpretation. So Reflective Interpretation is something that comes as a second-order activity in relationship to ordinary historical scholarship, what Lonergan refers to as “Simple Interpretation”.*

Lonergan says: “Well, this is really an interesting thing! *Is it possible? Reflective Interpretation is a thing of beauty!*” I think he — I did a search: I think he uses the word ‘beauty’ three times in *Insight*. This is one of the places. *So Reflective Interpretation is a thing of beauty, but does it ever exist?*

“Explanatory (Scientific) Interpretation.”

A nuanced development of reflective interpretation.

Explanatory interpretation requires a method of anticipating (heuristically) the habitual background understandings of all possible audiences.

Explanatory interpretation would therefore escape the relativity to some particular audience.

This includes, but is not limited to, transcending relativity to the biases of audiences.

² Pat’s word here is ‘understanding’, but this may be a slip of the tongue.

And so what happens from here forward is his attempt to spell out what he means by “Reflective Interpretation”. And it gets a bit of a nuance — It actually turns into “Scientific Interpretation”, and, as I said, I prefer to use the word ‘Explanatory’.

Explanatory (or ‘Scientific’) Interpretation

“If interpretation is to be scientific, then it has to discover some method of conceiving and determining the habitual development of all audiences, and it has to invent some technique by which its expression escapes relativity to particular and incidental audiences.” (CWL 3, p. 587).

“Interpretation aims at differentiating the protean notion of being by a set of genetically and dialectically related determinations.” (CWL 3, p. 604).

So what makes “Explanatory” or “Scientific Interpretation” be *scientific*? It has to have

“some method of conceiving and determining the habitual development of *all* audiences, and it has to invent some technique by which its expression —” (CWL 3, p. 587, emphasis added).

So the scientific or, if you like, the reflective interpretation

“— escapes relativity to particular and incidental audiences.” (CWL 3, p. 587).

It escapes the relativity to which particular — *It escapes relativity to particular and incidental audiences*. So that's what's going to make it — So that's why I use the word 'explanatory'! Because *remember the movement from descriptive to explanatory is the movement from how something relates to me to how things are related to one another! And so he's looking for a method of interpretation that is not going to be limited to the particularities of the audience to which it is being expressed*.

That is to say, if I undertake to do an interpretation of — but I did! — of Aristotle's *Analytics*, the two books of the *Analytics*,³ and I write it for a contemporary audience: fifty years from now somebody's going to have to write it again; because the audience for which I wrote it will have changed into a new audience that won't share the background to the audience that I wrote it for.

So Lonergan's concern is that if an interpretation, which is to say, an expression, is not going to be dependent upon particularities of the audience to which that expression slash interpretation is addressed, then you have to do something different than in fact what I did. I didn't try to do what Lonergan is talking about when I wrote my book. I didn't try to do that; I don't think that there is an audience for that kind of interpretation yet.

It's not in this particular quote, but a little later on he's going to say that among the things that — about particular audiences — that you want to try to avoid being relative to, is their biases. So the statement is a very general one; it doesn't presuppose that the problem of relativity that a scientific interpretation wants to avoid is the problem of biases, but it does include the avoidance of the problem of biases. So if the audience has got certain kinds of biases, and the expression is related, even if the person understands the biases of his or her audience, it's still addressed to those biases. And without a "reflective interpretation", or if you like, without a "scientific interpretation", someone who comes along and reads that, might end up getting sucked into the biases, because those are some of the things that are presupposed by that form of expression. So that's part of the concern that Lonergan has here.

³ Patrick H. Byrne, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press) 1997.

Explanatory (or ‘Scientific’) Interpretation

“If interpretation is to be scientific, then it has to discover some method of conceiving and determining the habitual development of all audiences, and it has to invent some technique by which its expression escapes relativity to particular and incidental audiences.” (CWL 3, p. 587).

“Interpretation aims at differentiating the protean notion of being by a set of genetically and dialectically related determinations.” (CWL 3, p. 604).

Role of the “protean notion of being” in interpretation.

“Protean notion of being” means the changing, dynamic senses of being — the ever-shifting sense of reality.

Comes from the Greek myth about Proteus, the primordial, shape-shifting sea-god.

The shifting sense of reality affects what we will tend to regard as meaningful as well.

Methodological need to gain some perspective on the shifts in our senses of reality and meaning.

The shifting, protean notion of being results in dialectical sequences of expressions.

He follows this up with a suggestion that a scientific interpretation

aims at differentiating *the protean notion of being* by a set of genetically and dialectically related determinations.”

(CWL 3, p. 604, emphases added).

Now, we're going to try to unpack that a little bit more. But for the moment, what is your understanding of the phrase “**the protean notion of being**” (CWL 3, p. 604)? We spoke about this before, we didn't dwell on it. How do you understand that phrase? So if we are going — Being as differentiating the protean notion of being? We'll leave the second half of that sentence aside for the moment. ... Jeff?

Jeff: Ah, I was understanding the protean notion of being to mean like changing in the consigning of development in the dynamic sense of being.

Pat: Good. It comes from a myth of the god or demi-god Proteus, who in contemporary science-fiction always would be called the “Shape-Changer”. And Proteus keeps changing, so that every time somebody tries to grab hold of Proteus, Proteus changes shape so as to escape the attempted capture. That's crucial to the myth of Proteus! So now we've got the ‘Proteus’ notion of being that keeps shifting around. So give me some examples of what we mean by the protean notion of being that keeps shifting around? We talked about this, a bit. ... So

the ever-shifting sense of reality between the times when you are really convinced perhaps that being is what is to be known by correctly understanding, that it is what is to be known by affirming the non-visualizable and non-imaginable intelligibility that is the content of the understanding,

and

the times when that seems just too weird to believe, and you want to go back to the good old solid ground, the sense of reality!

That's the protean notion of being. So you and I, and all of us, from time to time have *that notion of being shape-shift!* And when that happens it affects what we are going to regard as real

and meaningful in the expression of knowing.⁴ So we want to differentiate that protean notion of being so that we notice when it is shifting, when it is shifting its shapes.

And so that we are really — we've got that shape-shifting under control — that we know the difference between the notion of being in its full sense as what's anticipated by the unrestricted desire to know, and when our sense of reality is dictated instead by now the biological pattern of experience, now the aesthetic pattern of experience, now the practical pattern of experience, and now the dramatic pattern of experience, in which honor and pride are the key realities, for example. So that's what he is getting at here. He wants to differentiate that absolutely, so that we are really clear about those 'shiftings'.

And then we are going to talk about how *stages of people's thinking and expressing are self-transforming in either developmental ways of progress, or dialectical ways of confusion in which the shifting keeps changing the meanings; and the changed meanings change expressions, and the changed expressions change meanings. But the notion of being keeps moving around!* That's what he means by “**dialectical sequences**”.

“Universal Viewpoint”: Interpretation and Extrapolation.

A text is initially only marks on paper.

Interpreters go beyond those marks, adding acts of consciousness to give the marks meaning.

The interpreter adds everything, beginning with her or his patterning of the experience of those marks.

“Universal Viewpoint” = heuristic envisioning all the possible ways human beings go beyond.

The interpreter begins with her or his own experiences, understandings, judgments, and extrapolates beyond them

⁴ The final word of this sentence not clearly audible, and 'knowing' is merely a conjecture by the transcriber.

by adding further patternings, understandings, judgments
in fashioning an interpretation.

Extrapolation begins with one's own experiences,
understandings, judgments, and works backwards by
adding further experiences, understandings, judgments.

This is aided by self-appropriating how this meaning and
its intervening interpretations and distortions may have
helped to shape one's own horizon.

Explanatory interpretation, therefore, is principally a
matter of situating oneself within a heritage — a genetic
and dialectical history of meanings, and thereby relate
oneself to the expression under investigation.

Universal viewpoint as heuristic anticipation of possible
alternatives of interpretations.

Tools for framing this heuristic have been fashioned in
the preceding chapters of *Insight*.

The basic idea here is to figure out some anticipation of the possible lines of thinking and expressing that human beings in general can be involved in; to get a heuristic structure for that.

To come at this from a slightly different fashion, the work of interpreting, as he says, has nothing more than a *material determinant* in the marks on a piece of paper. That's to say, it's just *the experiences that you start with*. If the interpreter assigns *meaning* to the marks, then at the very beginning of the interpretation, it's the interpreter's experience of those marks which is patterned; and *can be patterned in ways that are governed by this shifting protean notion of being*. *So it is the experiential component that comes from a person's own experience; it isn't the experience of the people at the time that the marks were produced. It's one's own experience!*

Interpretation and Extrapolation

“Nor has the work of interpreting anything more than a material determinant in the spatially ordered set of marks in documents and monuments.

If the interpreter assigns any meaning to the marks, then the experiential component in that meaning will be derived from his or her experience, the intellectual component will be derived from his or her intelligence, the rational component will be derived from his or her critical reflection on the critical reflection of another.”

(CWL 3, p. 590).

And the *intellectual component* will be derived from *one’s own intelligence*; and the *rational component* will be derived from *our own critical reflection* on the critical reflection of another! Such then, Lonergan says, are the underlying necessities, in the sense of the underlying inevitabilities about the way that human beings think, which is to say, the way that all interpreters think! And *from them springs the potential completeness that makes what he calls “the universal viewpoint”*.

So this goes back to something Tim said — maybe fifteen minutes ago — that what is the ground of the possibility of “Simple Interpretation”, now really is the ground of the possibility of “Reflective Interpretation” and/or “Scientific Interpretation”, namely, *an appropriation of the*

*inevitable*s of the way human beings think; and beginning in the first place with the way in which the interpreter, himself or herself, thinks; *and building from that inevitability out to what he is going to call the universal viewpoint.* (CWL 3, p. 590).

Explanatory (or ‘Scientific’) Interpretation.

“There are the external sources of historical interpretation, and in the main they consist in spatially ordered marks on paper or parchment, papyrus or stone.

“But there are also sources of interpretation immanent in the historiographer, [in the] ability of distinguish and recombine elements in his or her own experience, in [the] ability to work backwards from contemporary to earlier accumulations of insights in human development, in [the] ability to envisage the protean possibilities of the notion of being, the core of all meaning, which varies in content with the experience, the insights, the judgments, and the habitual orientation of each individual.” (CWL 3, p. 588).

We’re back to the marks on paper, and parchment, and papyrus, and so on. And the sources of interpretation in the historiographer enable [him or her](#) to distinguish and recombine in their own experiences, and [to draw upon](#) the ability to work backwards from contemporary to earlier accumulations of human development.

So “Reflective Interpretation” then starts with your own contemporary experience, and your own inventory of insights, and starts to work backwards, or if you like outwards, from those in the self-correcting cycle to try to puzzle out what this might have meant. And it’s helpful if you follow the trace from where you are, how you’ve got to your thinking, with an anticipation: these documents some time may have had some influence on how I am thinking now; and all intervening interpretations of that document leading up to me may have influenced how I am thinking now.

So this business about *the genetic and the dialectical sequence* is imposing upon the interpreter a responsibility for thinking about how his or her contemporary way of regarding a certain kind of document may have been shaped by *genetic and dialectical developments*; which may very well therefore have distorted or inhibited the capacity to understand the original document.

Interpretation and Extrapolation

“The possibility of connecting possible meanings with particular documents lies in the genetic sequence that extrapolates from present to past correlations between meaning and mode of expression.” (CWL 3, p. 601).

And notice what he is saying here, that **“the possibility of connecting possible meanings with particular documents”** (CWL 3, p. 601) relies not in being able to move from the document through a genetic and dialectical series for them,⁵ but in a possibility of being able to situate oneself in that historical progression, and to think of oneself as standing in an inheritance of background insights and background assumptions that will have come to one through this genetic and dialectical process.

⁵ The final two words here (“for them”) are merely surmised by the transcriber.

And that's what he means by **the Universal Viewpoint**. The Universal Viewpoint, as he conceives of it, **“is simply a heuristic structure that contains *virtually* (and we already met virtual space-time, by computers and so on) *virtually the various ranges of possible alternatives of interpretations.*”** (CWL 3, p. 588).

Universal Viewpoint

The universal viewpoint

“is simply a heuristic structure that contains *virtually the various ranges of possible alternatives of interpretations.*” (CWL 3, p. 588).

*So the Universal Viewpoint, very simply, is the notion:
of whatever is to be intelligently understood and
reasonably affirmed. That is the heuristic structure
that contains and arranges all possible alternatives and
interpretations.*

The difficulty of course that it is a relatively blunt instrument; so that contains virtually everything but concretely almost nothing. And so it needs to be differentiated; and the *differentiation*, as Lonergan conceives of it, is *the various ways in which meanings can be originated, improved upon, and screwed up!* So that all the work that has been done — actually for the most part in the first half of the book — to set the stage for the Universal Viewpoint, the basic tools that you need for that are established there.

The basic — what he calls the acts and sources of meaning, of experiencing, understanding and of judging, the various ways in which experiencing, understanding and judging can develop through the self-correcting cycle of learning, and the various ways in which that cycle can be distorted by the biases; that gives you, if you like, the basic parameters by means of which you

can figure out very specific ways in which meanings actually did develop, or actually did get distorted. Okay? All right!

Student question about how meaning is located within the universe of being.

- Meanings are real.
- Example: the problem of understanding of recent earthquakes around the world.
- Physicists, geologists and engineers understand some things about earthquakes.
- But there is still more to be understood about their reality that has to do with the meaning of these disasters to those who suffer losses (e.g. homes), especially insofar as those losses are of human patterns of interactions underpinned by their meanings.
- The only way to understand those meanings is from human expressions about them, and by interpreting them.
- This is to interpret the reality in human terms.
- To do so is aided methodically by a heuristic anticipation of what those expressions could possibly mean.

— If one has a sufficiently open self-appropriation, then one has a basis for such a heuristic.

Pat: Any questions about that? Greg — Greg’s eyes reveal that there are more questions that can be asked!

Greg: Ah, I’ll launch one!

[Class laughter]

Greg: So, am I totally wrong — what is the — I’m trying to think through the technical way that Lonergan means this statement: “*the ultimate meaning of a statement or an expression is located in the universe of being.*”

Pat: Well, that was Byrne’s! But I think that *is* what Lonergan means, yes!

Greg: I can’t even — I’m trying to think of, like, even spatial metaphors which obviously is the wrong way to go with Lonergan anyway. But could you unpack that a little bit?

Pat: Okay. *The first thing to unpack is that meanings are real.* If you wanted to understand the tragedy of one of the recent earthquakes, whether a couple of years ago in China or more recently in Haiti; and you want to try to understand everything there is to understand about them. Good seismologists and geophysicists will tell you lots of things about plate tectonics and about the solidity of the soil; they can tell you all kinds of things about that. And you can get an engineer in and they can tell you about why certain construction techniques are very vulnerable. And one of the things about earthquakes — We probably tend to think about earthquakes as being something like a big explosion. Seismologists understand it as waves, as what happens when an earthquake is raised. People that I know who have been present during earthquakes talk about how the ground was undulating under their feet. And if you’ve been there and if you are not too scared out of your wits while it’s going on, you can actually feel the shakiness of it; it’s waves!

And that’s the big problem for buildings. These buildings are meant to stand on stationary things; they might be able to withstand a little bit of movement up or a little bit of movement down, but what they can’t stand is this, because one side of a building is going up and the other side is going down! And it’s not going to be able to remain standing up. So an engineer can tell

you things about the interactions between the motion, the geological motion, and the motion of the building, and the girder strength, and the mortar and the grid strength and the method of construction; they can tell you why buildings in certain areas remain standing, and not quite in other areas. They can go through all of that; they can talk about the biochemical phenomena and the dust that gets generated by it.

Those are — *Everything that you are understanding is understanding something about being. All that is part of knowing something of the everything about everything! You know something about something, you know something about being.*

We haven't talked about what this means; we haven't talked about what it means for them to lose their homes; what it means for them to lose their shops, that they perhaps spent thirty years improving upon. We haven't talked about what it means for them to be going to have to lose their loved ones; what it means to lose their jobs; what kinds of options they have before them. *That's all part of being too.*

If you want to understand what has happened in an earthquake, among the things — their must be some people here to whom some of this happens! Among the things that you have to understand about the reality of it is the meanings: what it means to the people. And the only way to understand what it means to the people is from their expressions. And if you are a reporter and you are a good journalist, and not someone who is just doing it for a kind of glamorous career, if you are a good journalist, you want your account of what it means to the people, what the reality in human terms is, then you have to be engaged to be trying to interpret their expressions, and then report it to a different audience, that doesn't automatically share those meanings! ... Okay?!

So the differences between what it means to lose a home in one community, in one culture, and what it is to lose a home in another culture are not the same meanings! Presumably they are all pretty devastating meanings, but they aren't quite the same! You see, you have to understand what a home means to people, to know what it means to them to lose that, and to understand what they are saying about that. ... Does that help?

Greg: Uh, huh! Thanks.

Pat: So Lonergan thinks of his approach to hermeneutics, his approach to interpretation, as giving the broadest possible approach into the problem of what *could* this mean! And it could mean whatever human beings are capable of making it mean; which is to say, it could mean whatever can be generated by first of all, experience, inquiry, understanding, judgment; and *a thing he sneaks in here, without apology, is choosing!* Because human meanings, unlike the meanings that are proper to the fields of physics and chemistry and biology and geology and astronomy, *human meanings presuppose human acts of self-constitution, individual self-constitution and communal self-constitution!* He just sort of slips that in there, unannounced. We never talked about volition before, but there it is! Okay, we'll move on; we'll worry about that when we get to chapter eighteen (“**The Possibility of Ethics**”, *CWL* 3, pp. 618-656)!!

So okay, the world of the universe, or the realm of reality, the realm of being, includes human meanings, and *what kinds of meaning can there be?* There can be the kinds of meanings that come from those four kinds of human activities. But *likewise, human meaningfulness is not free from bias!* And *so in addition to human meanings, and the way in which human meanings develop, there is also the ways in which they get distorted, and confused!* So you need to have a *dialectical approach to the possibilities of meanings.* If you have got a sufficiently wide open self-appropriation, then you've got an openness to the full possible range of human meanings. That's his claim there. Okay?

Student proposal that in beginning with the universal
viewpoint, means selecting from within the entirety of
possible meanings.

- Lonergan again uses the scissors metaphor
in this context: universal viewpoint as
upper blade.
- Universal viewpoint is heuristic, not a
system — Lonergan distances himself
from Hegel.

Greg: So is there a sense in which, when we're starting from the universal viewpoint in understanding and expression, interpreting an expression becomes about not so much understanding; you're discovering the particular meaning as much as limiting from within the entire possibility of meanings —

Pat: — Yes. That's right!

Greg: — the few that are relevant.⁶

Pat: That's right! And he refers explicitly at one point to the scissors metaphor. So just as we saw back when we were talking about the classical and statistical methods that he uses the scissors metaphor, here he uses the same thing. The universal viewpoint is the upper blade. *It's a heuristic anticipation of a rich, vast range of potential human meanings; and then the lower blade is the documents.* And so by bringing this rich heuristic anticipation to bear upon the documents, you have the greatest assurance of not leaving out meanings that might otherwise be neglected, if your notion of reality, and if your notion of the reality of human meaningfulness and expression is much more limited than Lonergan's is. Lonergan thinks that his is the most comprehensive: that's why it is called *the universal viewpoint*.

Universal Viewpoint

The universal viewpoint

“is simply a heuristic structure that contains virtually the various ranges of possible alternatives of interpretations.” (CWL 3, p. 588).

I do want to emphasize that. I think I mentioned this last week, that to talk about a universal viewpoint is asking for trouble. One reason that I have this slide here is to emphasize that *what Lonergan means by universal is heuristic!* And he explicitly distances himself from Hegel in the

⁶ Greg's final word not clearly audible, so 'relevant' is merely the transcriber's conjecture.

very place where he mentions this. It's not a complete system, it's meant to be a complete anticipation in which all the content needs to be built up. Okay?

Every culture is a “viewpoint” — a retinue of shared experiences, insights, judgments, beliefs, values.

Universal viewpoint is the *ordered* totality of viewpoints — a heuristic ordering of all viewpoints to one another.

An explanatory interpretation uses that heuristic ordering to concretely and explicitly situate one's interpretative expression in relation to other expressions.

But this means situating the achievement of self-appropriation within the heritage of historical developments that formed its own conditions, and then relating that achievement to historical contexts that have not achieved self-appropriation.

Universal Viewpoint

“The universal viewpoint is an ordered totality of viewpoints.

It has its base in an adequate self-knowledge and in the consequent metaphysics.

It has a retrospective expansion in the various genetic series of discoveries through which [humanity] could advance to [its] present knowledge.” (CWL 3, pp. 588-589).

So “**The universal viewpoint is an ordered totality of viewpoints.**” (CWL 3, p. 588). And I wanted to focus on this for a moment. Every culture is, so to speak, a viewpoint in this way of talking. Every commonsense community has its viewpoint: its background association or background retinue of shared insights, judgments, beliefs, values, and so on; although I’ve thrown some things in there that are not in chapter seventeen (CWL 3, “**Metaphysics as Dialectic**”, pp. 553- 617). *The universal viewpoint is interested in doing the explanatory work of relating viewpoints to one another.* That is what ultimately is going to make the performance *explanatory* or if you like, *reflective interpretation* in Lonergan’s perspective.

That the viewpoint of the interpretation being offered is — *Remember the interpretation is an expression, and the expression is situated in human history, and the viewpoint of other audiences is situated in human history in relationship to one another by what he calls the **dialectical sequences*** (see perhaps CWL 3, p. 614): *understanding how human meanings can develop and can be distorted allows you to situate yourself as giving the interpretation, and the expression that you are interpreting, in an explanatory relationship with one another.* What makes it *reflective* is that if you are doing it from the universal viewpoint, you are understanding where *you stand* in the development of human history, that is, having achieved a certain degree of self-understanding; and then understanding how to think about expressions in the viewpoints that haven’t achieved that degree of self-understanding.

Universal Viewpoint

“It has a dialectical expansion in the many formulations of discoveries due to the polymorphic consciousness of [human beings], in the invitation issued by positions to further development, and in the implication in counterpositions of their own reversal.” (CWL 3, p. 589).

Just as philosophies can have profound insights that are formulated in terms of counter-positions, so also other kinds of valuable meanings can be expressed in ways that obscure those meanings.

“There is no such thing as a pure counter-position.”

The universal viewpoint

has a dialectical expansion in the many formulations of discoveries due to the polymorphic consciousness of [human beings].” (CWL 3, pp. 588-589).

The “polymorphic consciousness of human beings” refers to the various patterns of experience when you move in and out of shifting the model. Again, the focus is on expression; it’s on formulations.

Back in chapter fourteen [“**The Method of Metaphysics**” (CWL 3, pp. 410-455)], Lonergan talks about *the ways in which philosophies can have profound insights that are formulated in counterpositions!* He doesn’t actually say it in *Insight*, but he used to say it in person: **“There is no such thing as a pure counterposition!”**

The method of dialectic — rooted in the distinction between positions and counter-positions — enables an interpreter to make the best of another’s expression.

Lonergan’s **“hermeneutics of generosity.”**

His understanding of the use of dialectic is to use his distinction between position and counterposition, between position on what *knowing* means, what *objectivity* means, what *reality* means, and the counterpositions on those three issues, to use those to help us to make the best of another person’s formulation. I mentioned earlier this — or I gave earlier this phrase **“a hermeneutics of generosity!”** *That Lonergan’s is a hermeneutics of generosity! There is*

something to be learned from everyone! There is something to be brought forward in or of every expression, despite if its formulation, partly or largely, is enmeshed in counterpositions.

Ultimately using the universal viewpoint in explanatory interpretation forces the interpreter to confront the limitations of his or her own horizon of meaning. The best interpreter is self-appropriated; and the effort of explanatory interpretation will enhance recognition of one's own biases and thereby promote self-appropriation.

That the work of the universal viewpoint now becomes the work of finding, by situating expressions in their dialectical context to make it possible to bring forward their normative achievements, and to distinguish them clearly and distinctly from the distorting counter-positional elements. And I think that we referred to this already. *So it's a matter of situating expressions in relationship to the kinds of distortions that can come in from the shifting nature of the polymorphic consciousness.*

Universal Viewpoint

Finally, it can reach a concrete presentation of any formulation of any discovery through the identification in personal experience of the elements that, as confused or as distinguished and related, as related under this or that orientation of polymorphic consciousness, could combine to make the position or counterposition humanly convincing.” (CWL 3, p. 589).

Universal Viewpoint

“The totality is of viewpoints. Hence it is concerned with the principal acts of meaning that lie in insights and judgments, and it reaches these principal acts by directing attention to the experience, the understanding, and the critical reflection of the interpreter.” (CWL 3, p. 588).

“To approach the same issue from another angle ...” (CWL 3, p. 590).

Self-Appropriation and Method of Interpretation

“For that upper blade forces out into the open the fact that the proximate sources of meaning lie in the interpreter’s own experience, understanding, and judgment. It involves an explicit acknowledgment of the dangers of merely relative interpretation and a systematic procedure for circumventing such relativity by ascending to the universal viewpoint.” (CWL 3, p. 603).

And his emphasis on the universal viewpoint is that *ultimately it brings the interpreter into a confrontation with his or her own limitations. So the best interpreter is an interpreter that is self-appropriated.* And interestingly, what Lonergan is saying here is that by engaging in the work of trying to interpret the text or texts by authors from a time other than your own, if you take seriously the challenges of doing that interpretation in a reflective/explanatory fashion, drawing upon the universal viewpoint, *eventually what you will do is discover your own biases; and one of the primary objectives or the primary benefits of the universal viewpoint is to bring the interpreter into a confrontation with himself or herself.* And the condition for the possibility of objective interpretation is self-confrontation! And by using the universal viewpoint in the way that Lonergan suggests, that self-confrontation, that self-encounter, is going to be stimulated and enhanced and intensified.

Explanatory (or ‘Scientific’) Interpretation

- According to the heuristic “universal viewpoint”
- any given expression is the result of some complex historical sequence of genetic and dialectical interplay,
- among earlier acts of meaning and earlier expressions.
- Therefore, in order to be comprehended in its full concreteness, every expression has to be thought of as standing in some such complex historical sequence.

Student question as to whether the universal viewpoint (and explanatory interpretation) is concretely possible if one has not already gone through that self-confrontation.

- Basically, yes, it would not be otherwise possible.
- Explanatory interpretation situates human meaning in the finality of proportionate being.
- But now have to add into the method the possibility that humans can distort finality, unlike all the other constituents of proportionate being.
- So have to add the dialectical as well as the genetic dimensions of proportionate being and the method.
- This presupposes a sophisticated level of self-appropriation.
- However, Lonergan's closing comment in *Insight* about being personally transformed [transformation] by his encounter with Aquinas (and other authors) reveals that he himself achieved his degree of self-appropriation of works of interpretation.

— He situates himself and his own philosophy historically in relation to other expressions.

Jonathan: Is the universal viewpoint concretely possible if you haven't already done that, that work of self-understanding?

Pat: Could you say that one more time, so I can —

Jonathan: Is the universal viewpoint concretely possible if one has not already had that self-confrontation?

Pat: Ahm, ... *Basically the answer is: you're right! It wouldn't be possible!* But remember what he's — Let me see if I can find the right slide for this.

[Pat returns to an earlier slide:]

Universal Viewpoint

“The universal viewpoint is an ordered totality of viewpoints.

It has its base in an adequate self-knowledge and in the consequent metaphysics.

It has a retrospective expansion in the various genetic series of discoveries through which [humanity] could advance to [its] present knowledge.” (CWL 3, pp. 588-589).

Okay. The universal viewpoint **“has its base in adequate self-knowledge, and”**, [part two] **“in the consequent metaphysics.”** (CWL 3, p. 588). Remember that the consequent metaphysics is *generalized emergent probability*. It's about finality in all its nuances. And now

what we are going to do is to situate human being in the context of the emergence of being that is the phenomenon of finality of proportionate being. But now we have to add in the complication that human beings, unlike everything else in the universe, human beings can screw finality up!

Jonathan: Right!

Pat: So we need to also think about — we have to add into the metaphysics for interpretation — we have to add in the genetic and the dialectical distortions! So the basis of the universal viewpoint is adequate self-knowledge, and its expansion into the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being, finality, and add the special features that are constitutive of human being and its — the part it plays in finality.

Jonathan: Uhm!

Pat: So the basic question is: Is self-appropriation possible without having done some of the serious work of encountering our [\[knowing processes and our biases\]](#)⁷ And Lonergan's concrete answer is: No!

He himself — One of the last things he says in *Insight* is that he has come to where he is by spending years reaching up to the mind of Thomas Aquinas; and discovering that the most important thing that he gained from that interpretation was that it changed him utterly. It was the change that produced in him that was the most important thing that happened! So he himself was saying that he couldn't have done that without Aquinas.

What we know from the biographical work that has been done since Lonergan's death is that *Aquinas was the last in a series of very important encounters with thinkers: Plato, Newman, his training in mathematics, his training in languages, that he himself came to his own self-appropriation only after a long period of this interpretation.* He says at the very beginning of *Insight*, that there is something unique about being in the twentieth century and *the development of modern science that has forced upon us the confrontation between choosing to think that science has nothing to do with reality, or thinking that reality is not an imaginable kind of reality.* So he

⁷ Being unable to make out Pat's final word at this point, the five words in square brackets are mere suppositions by the transcriber.

definitely sees the achievement of self-appropriation as the base for the universal viewpoint as something that can only take place after historical preparation.

And so he is situating himself — He's doing in — What he is doing here is doing what he is saying he is doing. *He is situating himself and his own philosophy in an explanatory interpretation in relationship to other forms of expression.* So, [addressing Jonathan] very well put!!

Eight Functional Specialties

Method in Theology

Conversions

4 Dialectics	5 Foundations
3 History	6 Doctrines
2 Interpretation	7 Systematics
1 Research	8 Communications

What becomes of the Universal Viewpoint and Explanatory Interpretation in *Method in Theology*?

Everything in §17.3 in *Insight* becomes the eight functional specialties in *Method in Theology*.

Expressing is taken up in the eighth functional specialty: Communications.

There, between Interpretation and Communications there stands a much more complex intervening set of operations, distributed over several functional specialties.

Among the greatest changes has to do with Lonergan's
conception of meaning:

In *Insight* the principal paradigm of meaning is an insight
and its expressions; in *Method in Theology* this is
broadened to incorporate a wider range of meanings.

Right! Let me just jump to this, and then we will take a break. What happens to **The Universal Viewpoint** and **Explanatory/Scientific Interpretation** after *Insight*? Neither of them are mentioned in *Method in Theology*. In effect — I believe — everything that Lonergan does in section three of chapter seventeen [CWL 3, “**Metaphysics as Dialectic**”, § 3: “The Truth of Interpretation”, pp. 585-617] gets turned into, arguably, seven of what he calls the “**Eight Functional Specialties**”. You got a little bit of a glimpse of some of this in the discussions last week and this week: interpretation now becomes focused both on understanding and expressing, but it's a different kind of expressing than the expressing he's talking about in *Insight*.

The kind of expressing that he is talking about in *Insight* is in communications. So Lonergan's focus on expression, or interpretation as an expression, the audience being expressed to, is for the viewer hearing contemporary audience. But the possibility of giving an objective expression of somebody else's expression at a different time to a contemporary audience has to be mediated by the methods of scientific interpretation guided by the universal viewpoint in *Insight*. When he gets to *Method in Theology* it's a good deal more nuanced and differentiated! So the interpretation is to be then situated in the history of — as he says — “what was going forward” or “what was going backwards” at the time of the original expression.

Dialectics has to do with the encounter of the limitations of the interpreter with the challenges posed by the text. And **Foundations** has to do with self-appropriation! **Doctrines** is a little complicated because of its — the specifically theological meaning — that he's got a more general meaning of it that has to do with just what ought to be done in response to one's encounter with the past. And **Systematics** is where you get something roughly comparable to an explanatory situating of meanings in relationship to one another.

That's very crude and very superficial as an account of what Lonergan does with his “Functional Specialties” in *Method in Theology*. But I wanted to give you a little bit of a sense of

where some of the points of contact are between what he was doing in his discussion of interpretation in *Insight* and where he ended up in his work *Method in Theology* fourteen years later. *One of the big changes had to do with meaning.* In *Insight* meaning is largely specified in terms of insight. So all that discussion that we saw, remember, is an expression of an insight, expression of an insight, expression of an insight.

[Pat repeats the phrase, emphasizing recurrence]

And for a thinker who sees the great difficulty with the oversight of insight, the emphasis on insight and its expression and interpretation of expressions of insight has a certain amount of sense.

But it is, nevertheless, limited! One can read an awful lot back into chapter seventeen (“**Metaphysics as Dialectic**”, pp. 553- 617), but when he moved beyond the writing of *Insight*, *his account of meaning became very expanded. And therefore the demands for doing the kind of project that he envisioned in chapter seventeen of Insight had to undergo considerable modification to accommodate his expanded account of meaning.* He never took back anything that he said about *sources* and *acts* of meaning in *Insight*, but he found the necessity of *expanding and opening up and looking in much more detail at other forms of meaning.* That remark I had about the paragraph or two where he talks about the richness of meanings and the inter-penetration of understanding and expression, that gets largely expanded in *Method in Theology*.

“Insight and Beyond”, this course, was meant to get more into some of these details. We’re probably not going to get anywhere near going into the details as I originally anticipated that we would. But if I can put in a plug: Professor Charles Hefling is going to be offering a course on *Method in Theology* next fall. There are only — There are very few people that I would say are comparable to Professor Hefling in terms of his understanding of *Method in Theology*. So if this [course](#) has intrigued you, or puzzled you, or maddened you, I do encourage you to think about taking that course. You would be well prepared, or the ground would be well-tilled, for the words of wisdom that Professor Hefling would have to say about *Method in Theology*.

So with that, let’s take a break!