

Insight and Beyond

Class 25, Part Two: April 7th 2010

“The Possibility of Ethics”

“The Notion of Freedom”

(Insight, Chapter 18)

Summary of Material

Continuing from the previous discussion, student question: since being is to be known by the totality of true judgments, and since people make incorrect judgments, is the realm of meaning therefore greater than the realm of being?

Correction — being is what is *to be known in* the totality of correct judgments.

Lonergan’s approach would be to say that when one makes and expresses an incorrect judgment, that *expression* is therefore an act of meaning within being, and the task of the interpreter is to understand and re-express that expression.

In explanatory interpretation, that involves situating the incorrect judgment in relation to other acts of expression (to understand and express how it is situated in being) using a dialectical method.

Such an interpretation will be an expression of the disparities between what was expressed, what was meant, and what is (regarding the purported objective referent of the expression).

(So this implies that the realm of meaning is not greater than the realm of being after all.)

Difficulty of comprehending Chapter 18 of *Insight* “The Possibility of Ethics”.

Central claim of the chapter is the existence “an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing”.

Overview of the table of contents of the chapter, which seems to indicate that *freedom* is the central preoccupation of the chapter.

Important distinction between essential and effective freedom.

Kant’s central preoccupation is with the problem of essential freedom.

While Lonergan has his own approach to the problem of essential freedom, his own central concern is with effective freedom.

Because of Lonergan's divergent accounts of human knowing and science, the scientific determinism that threatened freedom in Kant's view has been met with the account of the nonsystematic character of the scientific knowledge of the universe.

For Lonergan, the question of the possibility of ethics is not primarily the problem of essential freedom; rather, the principal problem is posed by the fact of moral impotence — is ethics possible, given its threat to *effective* freedom?

Moral impotence is the facticity of human inconsistency between knowing and doing.

The degree of human willingness to act in conformity to knowing is formed by cultures, which *de facto* include biases.

Cosmopolis does not have the resources to deal with moral impotence.

Chapter 18 is therefore about freedom.

Lonergan affirms essential freedom, but argues that our effective freedom is impaired.

Therefore, this poses a serious obstacle to the possibility of ethics.

On the other hand, the central point is about the exigence for consistency between knowing and doing.

But the discussion of doing is located oddly in the chapter — he does not clearly differentiate choosing and doing.

The gap we think we sometimes experience between making a decision and acting on it, is really a matter of not yet having fully made the decision, and this may account for his undifferentiated treatment of choosing and doing.

With what *kind of knowing* does our doing have to be consistent?

Up to this point, Lonergan's treatment has been with knowledge of facts.

Most pertinent to the problem of ethics, is the factual knowledge of our miniscule but nevertheless real role in the emergence of the universe of emergent probability.

So our doing is the doing of affecting the course of emergent probability, and knowledge of this as a fact affects our doing.

Yet alludes to another kind of knowing: knowledge of what is “morally obligatory”.

Judgments about moral obligation are not equitable to judgments of fact.

The classic “Is/Ought” problem — Hume; knowledge of ‘ought’ cannot be derived from knowledge of ‘is’.

Yet Lonergan claims that we can arrive at the judgment that a proposed course of action is obligatory.

But Lonergan's account of knowing in no way prepares us to comprehend how reflection can arrive at knowledge of obligation.

A hint of how to think about knowledge of obligation — that *practical* reflection has *a different dynamic* from the dynamic of knowing being — it is always already about “What am I to *do*?”

One does not reach the proper term of practical reflection merely in ‘internal’ knowing that stops short of doing.

Yet there is a kind of ‘internal’ term to practical reflection in the grasp of virtually conditioned judgments regarding a practical course of action, including judgments about ‘obligatoriness’.

But what is the nature of practical reflection that leads to such judgments?

The terse treatment of practical reflection in comparison to reflection leading to judgments about what is, is disappointing.

End of Part II.

Insight and Beyond

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“The Possibility of Ethics”

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(Insight, Chapter 18)

Continuing from the previous discussion, student question: since being is to be known by the totality of true judgments, and since people make incorrect judgments, is the realm of meaning therefore greater than the realm of being?

Correction — being is what is *to be known in* the totality of correct judgments.

Lonergan’s approach would be to say that when one makes and expresses an incorrect judgment, that *expression* is therefore an act of meaning within being, and the task of the interpreter is to understand and re-express that expression.

In explanatory interpretation, that involves situating the incorrect judgment in relation to other acts of expression (to understand and express how it is

situated in being) using a dialectical method.

Such an interpretation will be an expression of the disparities between what was expressed, what was meant, and what is (regarding the purported objective referent of the expression).

(So this implies that the realm of meaning is not greater than the realm of being after all.)

Chapter 18

The Possibility of Ethics

“[A human being] is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing.” (CWL 3, p. 622).

Before we transition to chapter eighteen on “**The Possibility of Ethics**” (CWL 3, pp. 618-656), Tim asked a question on the break that I think would be beneficial for everyone to hear and to hear a response to it, and perhaps follow up questions that people might have. I know this is all terribly abstract in some ways, but I think the question that Greg asked and the question that Tim

asked on the break, I think that hopefully are starting for people to be a little more concrete and sense more about what Lonergan is getting at here. So Tim?

Tim: I was just curious that being is what is to be known by — or being is the totality of true judgments, and if I make a judgment on meaning of my life, I make a judgment that is not a correct judgment, is the realm of meaning somehow vaster than the realm of being?

Pat: Okay. And that is a very good question. And as I said when we were talking before — *First of all, it is important to remember that being is not the totality of correct judgments. Being is what is to be known in the totality of correct judgments.*

And again, I think this brings to the fore the significance and the brilliance of Lonergan focusing on interpretation and expression. Remember an interpretation is an expression; the original expression is an expression. And his ambition to have something deeper and more significant than “Simple Expression”, what he calls a ‘Reflective’ or an “Explanatory Expression” is to talk about how expressions are related to one another. They are not just how they are related to me or not just how they are related to a contemporary audience with all of its pluses and minuses. And by focusing on expression — So Tim is saying, if I make a judgment — okay, and I took him to mean perhaps more than he said, which is: when I make a judgment and I express the judgment in a statement, and it’s an incorrect judgment, does that say then that there is more to meaning than there is to being?

Well, Lonergan’s approach is to say: the judgment that was incorrect and expressed, then it’s in being. It’s an expression. And an interpreter wants to understand that expression. And wants to understand it, among other things, in relationship to the acts of meaning that preceded the verbal expression. And the acts of meaning, those are in being too. And because human beings, unlike non-human beings, are capable of bias, we need a dialectical method to relate the expression to the acts of meaning and to the preceding acts of meaning, and to the community in which that meaning is expressed. So among the things that we are doing when we are interpreting a person’s expression of an incorrect judgment is situating that expression where it is in the genetic, dialectically, finality development of proportionate being, which includes human history. And among the judgments that we will make about the way in which we situate that, is that *there is a disparity, that there is a difference between what was said, what was meant, and what is; and that is a relation and the set of distinctions within being.* So we are situating all statements within the

growth of being, just as much as we would situate true statements. So it is not the immediate relationship of what a person says in relationship to what looks like the immediate object, but rather situating that within the totality of the network of relationships within being, dialectically and genetically. Okay? Does that help?

Tim: Yeah, thank you.

Pat: All right!

Difficulty of comprehending Chapter 18 of *Insight* “The Possibility of Ethics”.

Central claim of the chapter is the existence “an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing”.

I have to admit that of all the chapters in *Insight*, chapter eighteen, “**The Possibility of Ethics**” (CWL 3, pp. 618-656), is the one that puzzles me the most. It has puzzled me the most! I’ll try to explain a little bit about why it puzzles me! But perhaps to get a focus on this chapter, it would be helpful to look at what I take to be the crucial claim in chapter eighteen: and it is this one!

“[A human being] is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing.” (CWL 3, p. 622).

Now that comes up several times; and I think in and of itself it’s intriguing, but not especially problematic. You may think it is problematic. *But it is I think the central claim of the chapter!* And it is therefore the central feature around which Lonergan is going to build what he has to say about that as he centrally does in this chapter.

Overview of the table of contents of the chapter, which seems to indicate that *freedom* is the central preoccupation of the chapter.

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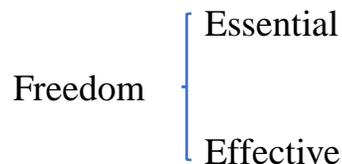
INSIGHT: A STUDY OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

CHAPTER 18: “The Possibility of Ethics.”

Now having said that, let’s look at the layout of the chapter. It is divided into three sections, each divided into several subsections. Looking at just the numbering, or the number of pages devoted to each of these sections: what would you say seems to be the primary concern of this chapter, entitled “The Possibility of Ethics”? ... Stephanie?

Stephanie: Freedom.

Pat: Freedom! First of all, freedom is the centerpiece — The notion of freedom is the centre! But notice also that the last section has to do with liberation, which is about freedom! We get this very important distinction in Lonergan between essential and effective freedom.



Some people here, including Stephanie, were in a class that I taught last spring semester comparing Kant and Lonergan. And my suggestion was that *Kant’s concern, in his moral writings, his writings on moral philosophy, deals with essential freedom*. Is freedom possible? In the *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, as reading through, he periodically says, “*if* a categorical imperative is possible”. I think he is sneaking in — the first couple of times through this very difficult text, him saying, well *he’s going to prove to us that the categorical imperative is the key to morality. In some sense that is indeed true!* But he keeps throwing in this hypothetical: *if* the categorical imperative is possible! *If* it’s possible! And then at the very end of *The Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he explains that *the condition for the possibility of the categorical imperative is freedom. And he gives a little bit of a sketch as to what might be meant by freedom.*

He works that out in some greater detail in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: he gives a *stronger series of arguments for the facticity of human freedom*. It’s clearly a thing that was on Kant’s mind, because at the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason* he tells us that *he is engaging in this critique of pure theoretical reason for the sake of making room for faith and*

morals. And that lurking in the background is the concern that the rise as of the new Natural Science, particularly Newton's Natural Science, has threatened the very possibility of freedom. And his ambition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to reveal the limitations of pure theoretical reason, which includes Newtonian science, in ways that shield questions having to do with morality and freedom from what seemed to be its deterministic impositions, its imperialistic encroachments.

So Kant's concern is a concern with what Lonergan calls "essential freedom"; and Kant is asking about the possibility of morality, a possibility of the categorical imperative as the possibility of freedom. That is something that Lonergan deals with at the very beginning of section two, on "The Notion of Freedom" (CWL 3, chapter eighteen, pp. 631-642). He has his own answer to the Kant problem.

This book is, as I've said before, a series of running skirmishes with Kant, and this is a big one! Chapter nineteen, "General Transcendent Knowledge" (CWL 3, pp. 657-708) will be another big one! And he's going to say that Kant was wrong about this, because he was wrong all the way back about what human knowing is. So Lonergan is dealing with the Kant problem on the possibility of Ethics, for Kant the possibility of the categorical imperative.

But Lonergan is coming to it in a different way altogether; because notice what he's done: *He's given a different account of human knowing, and a different account of natural science, and a different account of the implications of natural science. Lonergan's account is that natural science does not automatically imply a deterministic universe. And this has enormous implications for Ethics and for freedom.*

So on — This is on the bottom page 631 going over to the top of page 632 in the Toronto editions; it's at the very end of sub-section 2.1 entitled "The Significance of Statistical Residues":

"Accordingly, the significance of the canon of statistical residues — (CWL 3, p. 631).

Remember when you had to wade through that? ... Can you imagine writing this book and knowing back on page one hundred that five hundred pages later you are getting to make this use to it?

“Accordingly, the significance of the canon of statistical residues is not that it implies the freedom of our choices.”
(CWL 3, p. 631).

Okay. That’s important! Because freedom in the full sense that Lonergan going to call “essential freedom” is what he is going to deal with in his section on decision. *So he’s not saying that the significance is that it proves human freedom.*

“Its significance lies in the fact that it makes possible an account of the autonomy of the successive departments of science, that this autonomy excludes a determinism of the higher by the lower, and that the canon of statistical residues itself excludes a deductive determinism in either the lower or the higher. Undoubtedly, these exclusions make it far easier to dispose of arguments against the possibility of freedom, and they narrow down the field in which impediments to freedom can be found.” (CWL 3, pp. 631-632).

So the possibility of ethics for Lonergan, like for Kant, is the possibility of freedom, *except that everything is changed in Lonergan’s approach to this.* But he is in agreement with Kant that *ethics is possible if human freedom is a reality!* And he’s had his own way of answering the very set of problems that Kant was confronted with and came up with his Transcendental Idealism in an attempt to save human freedom from the encroachments of determinism.

But notice that last thing about where the real impediments to human freedom are! And the real impediments to human freedom, as Lonergan envisions them in chapter eighteen have to do with “moral impotence”: the way in which the human condition so sets us up for being unable to be consistent in our knowing and doing. It’s a funny kind of almost universal law. He said that it’s not a classical law, but it’s a statistical law. And what he means by that is kind of complicated. And what he means by that is that we are able to act only in accordance with our willing-ness. But

that our willingness is formed in a society and a culture by the history into which we are born. *And the biases that fuel the dialectic of the culture into which we are born, inevitably but not necessarily, so they statistically but not classically predispose us in ways that eventually our willingness is not able to keep up with the demands of our knowing. And that's what he means by the problem of moral impotence!*

*And it's the problem for which the cosmopolis hasn't got an answer! So remember back in chapter seven ("Common Sense as Object", pp. 232-269), cosmopolis is the condition for the possibility of off-setting the longer cycle of decline by making effective the kind of knowledge that the general bias operates against. And his section on moral impotence is that, left to the human condition alone, the cosmopolis can neither emerge nor be effective in a world, as Machiavelli put it, where the few who try to be good will come to ruin!*⁸

Chapter 18 is therefore about freedom.

Loneragan affirms essential freedom, but argues that our effective freedom is impaired.

Therefore, this poses a serious obstacle to the possibility of ethics.

So that's what the chapter is about: *the chapter is about freedom! And he affirms essential freedom, first of all by removing the problem of scientific determinism, and secondly by doing a phenomenology of decision, or, if you like, an intentionality analysis of decision, that situates human decision as radically undetermined by anything else. That our practical insights and our reflections give us things to decide about, but they don't determine the decision! The decision is something that stands outside of and is radically autonomous with regard to all of our experiencing, understanding and judging that precedes it.*

⁸ The transcriber is unable to discern Pat's words at the end of this sentence. The following passage from chapter 14 of Machiavelli's *The Prince* may, or may not, be what he has in mind: "Many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that *he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather bring about his own ruin than his preservation.*" (Transcriber's italics).

So we've got an *essential freedom*, but sorry folks, we *don't have effective freedom!* And so although we've got the possibility of ethics in a basic sense, the inhibitions to our effective freedom are serious inhibitions to the possibility of us acting ethically. And thank God we didn't have to end up there. It's a real downer!!

[Some amusement among students]

On the other hand, the central point is about the exigence for consistency between knowing and doing.

But the discussion of doing is located oddly in the chapter — he does not clearly differentiate choosing and doing.

The gap we think we sometimes experience between making a decision and acting on it, is really a matter of not yet having fully made the decision, and this may account for his undifferentiated treatment of choosing and doing.

Chapter 18

The Possibility of Ethics

“[A human being] is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing.” (CWL 3, p. 622).

So that's what the chapter is about! *The chapter is page after page after page is dedicated to the problematic of freedom, both the possible and essential freedom, and the dark and ugly truth about effective freedom. And yet this is the central point, the centre point, or the focal point of the chapter!* So the central point of the chapter is this new '**exigence**', as he calls it, for consistency between knowing and doing, 'Doing' he treats in two separate sections. Now, oddly enough, if this is really what the chapter is about, if the chapter is about *this exigence, this impulsion, or this need, that we have to be consistent in our knowing and doing*, doing is kind of scattered around a little bit. We get a discussion of it in section one point two [**§1.2 "The Notion of Will"**, pp. 621-624] having to do with the will, and we get a discussion of it in section two point five [**§2.5 "The Decision"**, pp. 636-639] having to do with decision.

Doing

§1.2 The Notion of the Will

§2.5 The Decision

The section on will is where it is, for a reason that actually doesn't have an awful lot to do with *doing*. The section on will is where it is because he wants to talk about *value*, which he hasn't discussed earlier. So he has to stick this section on will in so that he can talk about value. And so the doing, in and of itself, is placed kind of oddly; although this remark about the consistency between knowing and doing comes early on (*CWL* 3, p. 622). But at least in section 2.5 where he talks about Decision [*CWL* 3, pp. 636-639], we have a pretty clear articulation from Lonergan as to what he means by doing; in this case, deciding and choosing.

But there's a funny way in which we are aware of the fact that we make decisions, and then we carry them out. Sometimes the making the decision and carrying it out are pretty much simultaneous. But quite frequently we make decisions and it takes us some time to carry them out. *So the distinction between deciding and acting get kind of mushed together under the term 'doing' here.* Probably — and once in a while you find him referring to this — but deciding and doing are kind of pushed together into one category of doing.

Let me make a little parenthetical departure on this. Sometimes when we make a decision, it takes us a while to act, because we really need to persuade ourselves: saying, yeah I know that is the right thing to do, but gee I don't know; if I do that, so and so will get mad at me, you know; it'll cost me a hundred bucks; I'll miss my vacation, and I don't know about that. Well, *from Lonergan's point of view, you really haven't decided yet. You are still in the process of deciding.* You may have sort of a half-hearted decision, but you really didn't decide that! *If you really decided you'd carry it out!* All those things that we call 'deciding' when we are still having the debate with ourselves, all those things when we say "okay, I'm going to do it", and then we go have dinner and think "I'm not so sure." One might say you really didn't decide then. You still had, you know, this labour with a set of balances. *It's not yet a decision, because when you decide, you actually act!* Now that may not be — What I just said may be disputed! *It may very well be that people really decide and don't act.* I'm not convinced about that! But there is some distinction between *making a decision*⁹ and *carrying it out*, using your body, your vocal chords, your arms, your text-messaging, to carry it out! Okay. *So there is some distinction between deciding and carrying it out. But Lonergan has kind of put them together here, under the category of 'doing'.* Because I think from his perspective, *until you've actually made the decision which is the point at which the act begins, you haven't really made the decision.* So I think that's why he puts it there. Okay. So he talks about doing, consistency between knowing and doing; you get a somewhat clearer picture of doing, although it emerges in a funny place in the chapter if this is really what the centerpiece is.

With what *kind of knowing* does our doing have to be consistent?

Up to this point, Lonergan's treatment has been with knowledge of facts.

⁹ Pat uses the word 'distinction' again at this point, but that seems a *lapsus linguae*.

Most pertinent to the problem of ethics, is the factual knowledge of our miniscule but nevertheless real role in the emergence of the universe of emergent probability.

So our doing is the doing of affecting the course of emergent probability, and knowledge of this as a fact affects our doing.

Yet alludes to another kind of knowing: knowledge of what is “morally obligatory”.

Judgments about moral obligation are not equitable to judgments of fact.

The classic “Is/Ought” problem — Hume; knowledge of ‘ought’ cannot be derived from knowledge of ‘is’.

**Consistency between
Knowing and Doing**

With what sort of knowing must
doing be consistent?

So we want to talk about the consistency between knowing and doing! *Well, what kind of knowing does our doing have to be consistent with?* The kind of knowing with which we have become familiar so far is the knowing that issues in judgments having to do with what is! So we are prepared at this point in the text to be thinking: okay, so there is this, as he refers to it, *this expansion of consciousness* where you start from being empirically conscious, and we add to that being intelligently conscious, and we add to that being rationally and reasonably conscious; *now there is a further kind of expansion that has to do with being consistent in our knowing and our*

doing. Okay; well, what kind of knowing do we have to be consistent with? What judgments of fact, what judgments about what is, are we to be consistent with?

**On the One Hand —
Knowing so far in *Insight***

“By this shift from subjective acts to objective contents, it is headed towards the systematization, not of the particular animal that I am, but of the whole universe of being.” (CWL 3, p. 539).

“Intellectual development invites man to become intelligent and reasonable not only in his knowing but also in his living, to guide his actions by referring them, not as an animal to a habitat, but as an intelligent being to the intelligible context of some universal order that is or is to be.” (CWL 3, p. 498).

So far in *Insight* we have got *some things that might count*. And this is one of the comments from the section on *human unity* in chapter sixteen¹⁰ (CWL 3, chapter sixteen, “**Metaphysics as Science**”, pp. 512-552):

¹⁰ Pat cites chapter fifteen at this point, but as he himself noticed a few minutes later, the first text on this slide seems in fact to come from chapter sixteen (p. 539), as noted in the transcription above; the second text in the slide does however come from chapter fifteen, from p. 498, and that *is* in the section on human development. The transcription has been altered to embody these corrections.

“By this shift from subjective acts to objective contents, it”
[‘it’ meaning: our unrestricted desire to know, finality become
conscious in us] **“is headed towards the systematization, not
of the particular animal that I am, but of the whole
universe of being.”** (CWL 3, p. 539).

*So possibly one of the factual judgments we come to —
this is it! This is a factual judgment as Lonergan
presents it: that we come to the discovery that we are
involved not just in self-constitution but in the
constitution of emergent probability, in the constitution
of proportionate being, in the constitution of the
universe.*

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago.

That has some pretty serious implications for our doing! So maybe that’s what he means.¹¹ We saw a parallel remark back in chapter fifteen in the section on human development (CWL 3, chapter fifteen, **“Elements of Metaphysics”**, pp. 456-511, at p. 498):

**“Intellectual development invites us to become intelligent
and reasonable not only in our knowing but also in our
living, to guide our actions by referring them, not as an
animal to a habitat, but as an intelligent being to the
intelligible context of some universal order that is or is to
be.”** (CWL 3, p. 498).

*So that the judgment of fact is that our doing puts us in as contributors and participants to
the emergence of the order of the universe.* That’s a pretty heavy responsibility to be carrying
around. *So maybe that’s the kind of knowing that he is talking about.*

¹¹ At this point Pat noticed the slip already indicated in the previous footnote and corrected in the transcription above. He courteously acknowledges the slip, saying: “I’m sorry; the first remark was from chapter sixteen.”

On the One Hand —
Knowing so far in *Insight*

“So it is that the detached and disinterested desire extends its sphere of influence from the field of cognitional activities through the field of knowledge into the field of deliberate human acts. So it is that the empirically, intelligently, rationally conscious subject of self-affirmation becomes a morally self-conscious subject.

[A human being] is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an *exigence* for self-consistency in knowing and doing.” (CWL 3, p. 622).

So we become morally self-conscious as our detached and disinterested desire extends its influence. A human being

“is not only a knower but also a doer; the same intelligent and rational consciousness grounds the doing as well as the knowing; and from that identity of consciousness there springs inevitably an exigence for self-consistency in knowing and doing.” (CWL 3, p. 622, emphases added).

And so, *the consistency maybe has to do with where we are in the universe; our knowing that we are in the universe effects how we think about what we are to do!*

**On the Other Hand —
A New Kind of Knowing**

“Secondly, though the reflection heads beyond knowing to doing, still it consists simply in knowing. Thus, it may reveal that the proposed action is concretely possible, clearly effective, highly agreeable, quite useful, morally obligatory, etc.” (CWL 3, p. 634).

But there is something else that Lonergan says, and this is in section 2 of chapter eighteen (CWL 3, “*The Notion of Freedom*”, pp. 631-642):

“Though the reflection heads beyond knowing to doing, still it [reflection] consists simply in knowing. Thus, it may reveal that the proposed action is concretely possible, clearly effective, highly agreeable, quite useful, morally obligatory, etc.” (CWL 3, p. 634).

Is there anything puzzling to you about that statement? ... Where so far have we talked about reflection leading to judgments about what is obligatory? ... Judgments about what is morally obligatory are not judgments about fact! ...

Ah, some of you are familiar with the “is-ought” problem, given its classic — it found its first expression in David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* of 1739.

**On the Other Hand —
A New Kind of Knowing**

“Though the reflection heads beyond knowing to doing, still it consists simply in knowing. Thus, it may reveal that the proposed action is concretely possible, clearly effective, highly agreeable, quite useful, **morally obligatory, etc.” (CWL 3, p. 634).**

So Hume writes that

“In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, — [that means he has always been puzzled] — that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is and is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible [which means they are sneaking it by you, as Lonergan just did]; but is, however, of the last consequence. For this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from

others, which are entirely different from it.” (David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature).

Is-Ought Problem

“In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.”*

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature.*

So in other words, [Hume](#) is saying: how, if you’ve got a set of propositions that are statements of fact, how can you, without violating the laws of logic, deduce statements about ought from that. This is Ethics One-O-One! *You cannot derive ought from is!*

Yet Lonergan claims that we can arrive at the judgment
that a proposed course of action is obligatory.

But Lonergan's account of knowing in no way prepares
us to comprehend how reflection can arrive at knowledge
of obligation.

**On the Other Hand —
A New Kind of Knowing**

“Secondly, though the reflection heads beyond knowing to doing, still it consists simply in knowing. Thus, it may reveal that the proposed action is concretely possible, clearly effective, highly agreeable, quite useful, morally obligatory, etc.” (CWL 3, p. 634).

But there we have it! So, under ‘reflection’, which has dealt exclusively, up to this point in *Insight*, with the process of arriving at knowledge of something about something, knowing something about being, *everything that we’ve talked about up until now has to do with knowing what is, knowing being*; and *all of a sudden we get reflection having to do with knowing what’s morally obligatory!* The word ‘useful’ is also sticking out a little bit; it’s got a value laden content, but we can overlook that for the moment. The more central one is this *obligatory!*

Okay. This passage is on page 637:

“Secondly, the same enlarging transformation of consciousness illuminates both the meaning and the frequent inefficacy of obligation. *It is possible for practical reflection to reach with certitude the conclusion that a proposed course of action is obligatory, that either I decide*

in favor of the proposal or else I surrender consistency between my knowing and my doing.” (CWL 3, p. 637, emphases added).

So that’s the meaning of ‘obligatory’: *‘Obligatory’ is: it is possible for us to arrive at a judgment about the necessity of consistency between my knowing and my carrying out something that I know. So ‘obligatory’ is caught up in this exigence for the consistency!*

And yet what we have got when we have reflection here, up until now, completely does not prepare us for how reflection can bring us the knowledge of what? Obligation!

A hint of how to think about knowledge of obligation — that *practical* reflection has *a different dynamic* from the dynamic of knowing being — it is always already about “What am I to *do*?”

One does not reach the proper term of practical reflection merely in ‘internal’ knowing that stops short of doing.

Yet there is a kind of ‘internal’ term to practical reflection in the grasp of virtually conditioned judgments regarding a practical course of action, including judgments about ‘obligatoriness’.

But what is the nature of practical reflection that leads to such judgments?

The terse treatment of practical reflection in comparison to reflection leading to judgments about what is, is disappointing.

**On the Other Hand —
A New Kind of Knowing**

“Thirdly, the reflection has no internal term, no capacity of its own to come to an end. For it is a knowing that leads to doing.

Insofar as it is a knowing, it can reach an internal term, for one can grasp the virtually unconditioned and thereby attain certitude on the possibility of a proposed course of action, on its agreeableness, on its utility, on its obligatoriness.

But insofar as this knowing is practical, insofar as its concern is with something to be done and with the reasons for doing it, the reflection has not an internal but an external term; for the reflection is just knowing, but the term in an ulterior deciding and doing.” (*CWL 3*, pp. 634-635).

There is a little bit of a suggestion about this in his discussion of reflection:

“The reflection has no internal term, no capacity of its own to come to an end. *For it is a knowing that leads to doing.*”
(*CWL 3*, p. 634, emphasis added).

So in other words — Remember that the section here is entitled “Practical Reflection” (*CWL 3*, pp. 633-635). So you’ve got what you would call “factual reflection”, reflection about what is!

But practical reflection is reflection about — that leads to doing. And there is no internal term to practical reflection, because from the get-go, it always already has been about: what am I going to do? And you don't answer what am I going to do — although Lonergan never poses that question in these sections. You don't get to the answer to what am I going to do by just thinking about what you are going to do, by just reaching some judgment about what you are going to do, by reaching some judgment, as he says, about whether there would be positives in this, or whether it would have nasty side-effects, or whether it fits into some intelligible order. You don't reach an act of doing by all those judgments! So practical reflection doesn't have an internal term because as practical reflection it's always already oriented towards doing. Until you do something, you haven't really resolved the tension that's involved in the dynamic of practical reflection.

“Insofar as it is a knowing, it can reach an internal term, for one can grasp the virtually unconditioned and thereby attain certitude on the possibility of a proposed course of action, on its agreeableness, on its utility, on its obligatoriness.” (CWL 3, pp. 634-635).

So this is puzzling language, and it has puzzled quite a number of people. So to be clear: insofar as practical reflection is practical because it is about doing, it can't reach an internal term, which is to say, *reaching a judgment about what you want to do is not the end of practical reflection.*

But insofar as you sort of shrink it down a little bit, and you say, not practical reflection fully, but practical reflection in the sense of knowing what you want to do, it is very clear that you can reach a virtually unconditioned. So you can reach a virtually unconditioned about what you ought to do, what's obligatory for you to do, but practical reflection really needs its external term in the act of doing; and that is not achieved until decision takes place.

*Well what makes this chapter a puzzling and difficult one for me is: what exactly does it mean, or how do we go about reflecting that leads to judgments about obligation, about what we ought to do? Given the brilliance and the subtlety and the thoroughness with which Lonergan explores *factual reflection* in chapter ten of *Insight* (“**Reflective Understanding**”, pp. 304-340), when we get to this, and given especially, I think, in the late twentieth and the early twenty first century, the great ambivalence that we all have about whether we know what the right thing to do is, I, myself, would have liked more guidance on exactly what is involved in moral reflection or*

practical reflection. *How do we come to a virtually unconditioned about what is morally obligatory? Or in general about what's valuable?* And Lonergan doesn't give us an awful lot of help here. So that's one of the reasons that I found this to be a difficult chapter!

**On the Other Hand —
A New Kind of Knowing**

“Thirdly, the reflection has no internal term, no capacity of its own to come to an end. For it is a knowing that leads to doing.

Insofar as it is a knowing, it can reach an internal term, for one can grasp the virtually unconditioned and thereby attain certitude on the possibility of a proposed course of action, on its agreeableness, on its utility, on its obligatoriness.

But insofar as this knowing is practical, insofar as its concern is with something to be done and with the reasons for doing it, the reflection has not an internal but an external term; for the reflection is just knowing, but the term is in an ulterior deciding and doing.” (CWL 3, pp. 634-635).

Well, we've reached the end of our time for today. So I'm going to pick up and finish up with some reflections on this. Now, this is a session that I really would like to have us have some more discussion. So let's say for next week we're going to spend the first half of the class looking in a little more detail at what he does do in the chapter, with this set of worries that are at least my

worries, if not yours, about this particular problem in the chapter, and then we'll have a discussion about that.

And then I would ask you to begin to read chapter nineteen, on “**General Transcendent Knowledge**” (*CWL* 3, pp. 657-708). So, I'd ask you to read — certainly it will have to be covered thoroughly — I'll ask to read it up to — let's say up through section seven, which is called “The Secondary Component in the Idea of Being”. If you're — Please feel free to read ahead, the rest of the chapter as well, up to section nine, “The Notion of God”. It's a very long section, and it's going to deserve an awful lot of discussion. So I'm going to think about preserving that until the following week.

Ah, what was originally supposed to be for next week's class was a discussion of Lonergan's reflections on value and ethics, the post-*Insight* material; but what I'd like to do is to shift that back to perhaps our last class of this semester. It's a little bit discontinuous because it would follow with where you're going to end our discussion of chapter eighteen; but I'm afraid that if we do that we're going to be really tight to finish the last two chapters of *Insight* which are, in my feeling, very important, as Greg knows.

[Class amusement]

Every question that you [Greg] asked all semester I'd said is answered in chapter twenty (“**Special Transcendent Knowledge**”, pp. 709-751); so I want to make sure that we get there. And then we'll come back and look at how Lonergan dealt with some of the difficulties that arise in chapter eighteen after *Insight* for our last class of the semester.

All right! Thank you!!

End of Part Two.