

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 10, Part II: Chapter 17 §3: “Truth of Interpretation”

[0:00]

- On the counter-position, an objective interpretation would have been a cinematic reenactment of what was originally said and done and felt “already out there then.”
- The intellectual pattern, by contrast, is unrestrictedly interested in the meaning of things.
- Counter-positions can also influence what is meant by the phrase “the meaning is in the text” as if the meaning is already out there in the marks on the paper.

[5:00]

- Counter-position in interpretation of “plain meaning” as it is in the text, can lead to anachronism or archaism.
- Both ignore the historical dimensions of meaning. Both interpret the text merely “descriptively” – “as it appears to me,” “as it is meaningful to me” – without criticizing “me” and situating “me” in explanatory relations to other historical persons and events
- Need for a heuristic account of how meanings are related to one another through developments and dialectics.
- Connection of such counter-positions with Huxley’s horrific vision in *The Brave New World*.
- Once one recognizes the difficulties and the impossibilities of interpretation as conceived along the lines of counter-positions, one is tempted to conclude there can be no objective interpretation.

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- So we ask once again, what *is* interpretation.
- Lonergan emphasizes that an interpretation is an *expression*
- His emphasis is on expression (*Ausdruck*) rather than on understanding (*Verstehen*)
- Different kinds of interpretation: commonsense, simple (historical), reflective, explanatory (scientific).
- Difference between what Lonergan means by the phrase “scientific interpretation” in contrast to the misleading connotations likely to come to mind in connection with that phrase
- Explanatory (scientific) interpretation is concerned to understand expressions in their relations to one another.
- This is Lonergan’s way of addressing the problem of relativism.
- It includes understanding biased expressions in their relations to other expressions.

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- Commonsense understanding and commonsense interpretation
- The richness of human communication requires human beings rather than computers
- Understanding the commonsense expressions of others requires continual self-transcendence – adding the one or two further insights to the previously accumulated inventory of insights and judgments
- The vast accumulation of insights required to understand ordinary, yet complex commonsense expressions
- “The only interpreter of commonsense expressions is common sense.”
- No shortcut, formula or algorithm can substitute for a person of developed common sense

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- Since interpretation is an expression of an expression, must first consider what expression is.
- Formalized account of expression – the numerous sets of insights that go into framing an expression
- Lonergan’s account of what an expression is, is grounded in self-appropriation
- Expression has many levels of complexity of meaning, but first appears just as marks on paper
- The reality of meaning is not to be found in the sensible marks or sounds; meaning is to be found in correct understanding, and transcends the sensible.

End of Part II.