

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 11, Part I: Chapter 17 §3: “Truth of Interpretation” The “Universal Viewpoint”; Interpretation as One of 8 Functional Specialties

[0:00]

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

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

[6:15]

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

[8:21]

- “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 condition 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

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- “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 a foreign expressions are the same as the original insights expressed by those expressions

[21:03]

- Student question about the problem posed by the fact that the original historical audience is not 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

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- “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, reflective interpretation there is an explicit understanding of that identity

[37:02]

- “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

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- 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

[45:32]

- “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 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*

[53:16]

- 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

[1:00:43]

- 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

[1:02:55]

- 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

[1:05:44]

- 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”

[1:07:51]

- 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

[1:09:16]

- 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 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

[1:13:31]

- What becomes of the Universal Viewpoint and Explanatory Interpretation in *Method in Theology*?
- Everything in §17.3 in *Insight* becomes the 8 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 I.