

## 2961ADTE070

Transcription of 2961AA0E070, M4A 1979 Sept 27 Q&A. Questions and L's notes are found at 29610DTE070. Move to M4B at p. 11, switch to 2961BA0E070 (audio) and 2961BDTE070 (transcript).

**Question:** How do we know the human good? Is it available to man himself, or must it be revealed by God? If the former is the case, does *Method* contradict Bonhoeffer's assertion that 'the first task of Christian ethics' is to invalidate the common human knowledge of good and evil, since this is based in the fall? (Ethics p. 17).

**Lonergan:** Well, how do we know the human good? We know it in two ways, according to Catholic doctrine, by nature and by grace. And insofar as it is by grace, it goes beyond what can be known by nature, and consequently it *is* revealed by God. In the former case, does *Method* contradict Bonhoeffer's assertion? Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is in harmony with doctrine ascribed to Luther that human nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam and Eve. In other words, that was a dispute at the time of the Reformation. Thomist teaching, which I investigated in my dissertation, published in article form in 1941-42 in *Theological Studies* and then in a book form with later editions that weren't available at the time I worked, *Grace and Freedom* in Aquinas, handled by Seabury Press, is that in the present order man without grace cannot long avoid mortal sin. So man in the present order without grace cannot long avoid mortal sin. And note that is a hypothetical statement. It doesn't say that man is ever without grace, or that that's a regular occurrence. It's that if he hadn't got grace then he cannot long avoid mortal sin. And it does not particularly contradict the affirmation that God gives everyone sufficient grace for salvation. So that is the Thomist tradition, and it is a nuanced position, and it is a position on which Thomas changed his mind. He has one doctrine in the *Sentences*, and he shifts in the *De veritate*. In the *Sentences* he says that if you say he can't avoid grave sin for a long time, well, he can avoid it for a short time, and if he avoids it for a short time his will gains in strength, and consequently he'll be able to avoid it for another short time, and so on ad infinitum. He had several arguments like that, that it contradicts human liberty. He has several arguments that to say man can't avoid mortal sin without grace is a mistake. In the *De veritate*, it's a perfect example of the technique of the *quaestio*. The technique of the *quaestio* comes out of Abelard's *Sic et non*, in which he gave reasons from scripture, tradition, and reason both for and against 158 propositions. The technique of the *quaestio* is to repeat that device. It starts off, *Videtur quod non*, It doesn't seem to be so, and gives all the reasons against, and then it does on,

On the other hand, *Sed contra est*, and then he gives the reasons on the other side. But that's the sort of thing that Abelard did. It becomes a *quaestio*. There exists a question [Gilbert de la Porrée – L couldn't remember his name] when reasons can be given for both sides of a contradiction. You have to prove the question exists by giving reasons for both sides. And the response sets down the general principles of a solution. And then there follow 'ad primum, 'ad secundum,' and so on, and in some cases, the first 'on the other hand' and the second and third and fourth. This article in the *De veritate*, q. 24, a. 12, begins with about 21 arguments against, and that's followed up by 11 arguments for. It runs through several columns in the response, and then the answers, using the solution to handle all the objections and say what's right and wrong in all the texts quoted. And Thomas never takes the question seriously again, it's set once for all. He keeps on repeating, but he doesn't go through it all again. His solution there is in terms of what could be called a dynamic of events. If a man has charity, spontaneously he will avoid sin. He won't commit mortal sin because he loves God with all his heart and all his soul, by the grace of God. But if he hasn't and stops and reflects and thinks of other motives that are not charity for avoiding sin, such as fear of punishment, disgrace, and so on, then he can avoid sin on that occasion. But he can't be reflecting all the time. This reflecting requires an effort. It requires concentration. And it has to be a rather serious concentration to be efficacious. You have to take it seriously, and to take it seriously involves a big effort. And you can put in a big effort for a certain length of time, and then you cave in. And if you cave in, it could be a physical impossibility, and people don't commit a mortal sin on that occasion, but people don't wait for the physically impossible and ... Anyway, that's the Thomist solution.

**Question:** In class (9/20/79) something like a proof for God's existence was offered: the existence of God as the condition for the universe to be intelligible, moral, and a field for personal relations. Expressed syllogistically, this would take the form: If the universe is intelligible, moral, and a field for personal relations, then God exists. The universe is intelligible, moral and a field for personal relations. Therefore, God exists. (a) What demands the granting of the minor premise? That is, isn't this argument more of a highly compelling hypothetical than a proof?

**Lonergan:** What demands the granting of the minor premise? Self-appropriation. *You* demand it. It's not what Lonergan says, or what anybody else says. It's what *you* say. That's the whole point of the pedagogy of what we're doing. Discover yourself. Learn to be on your own. If the universe is not intelligible, then there's no use in asking why and what for and so? There just isn't any why. It's all like

bedlam. Again, if man is the first instance of morality in the universe, then man is the only possible moral being in the universe. And the universe becomes absurd for him, as it did for Camus and that type of defeatist existentialism. So if you don't want to be in a morally absurd universe, you have an argument for the existence of God. And you can't live without morality, because that's part of you. Everybody commits sin. But everyone is much more given to blaming this and blaming that, praising what he does and blaming the other fellow. And that's all morality. Morality is one of the deepest things in the human being ... Finally, human community is through mature persons, and mature persons in human community have interpersonal relations. There's honor even among thieves. Even gangsters, though they shoot other people on sight, don't shoot one another on sight. They have a certain code. There's a certain amount of personal relation there. Being a member of a gang is not an ideal human community, but it's part of the necessity of a human being to – as someone said, only a beast or an angel can live without others.

**Question:** Does this argument run in the same path as that of the Reformed apologist Cornelius Van Til, who asserts that 'the existence of God is the condition for intelligible human predication' (e.g. *The Defense of the Faith*, p.180)?

**Lonergan:** Well, intelligible human predication is based on propositional knowledge. It's a condition for possible propositional knowledge. And that's important. But it's not the path along which we're running. We're running on the conditions of the possibility of being an authentic human being. The conditions are fulfilled. When you ask why, you not only want an answer, but you know the criterion of the answer. It has to satisfy your intelligence. And if it doesn't satisfy your intelligence, you'll say, Well, that doesn't explain anything. And when you ask, Is it so? Is that true? you're asking for sufficient evidence. And if you're given evidence that isn't sufficient, you'll say, That doesn't satisfy me; I don't know how you can possibly say that; a person with an ounce of common sense wouldn't say that. And so on and so forth. People are that way spontaneously, without anyone training them to. And similarly with regard to personal relations, schoolboys especially have all sorts of words of opprobrium that they use freely about the others, and it keeps on. Politics is full of it.

**Question:** Take the first part of what you just said, not talking about predication in the sense of propositional knowledge so much as the condition of the possibility of being an authentic human being. Take the authentically intelligent human asking, Why is it so? and knowing in a sense what the criteria are, does it or doesn't it mean already having some notion of God?

**Lonergan:** Well, it is true that you already have knowledge of God insofar as you're in the state of grace. And that possibly is the meaning to be attributed to Thomas's 'and that's what everyone means by God.' There's some knowledge of God that everyone has. But there's also tacit knowledge. The Indian knows the shortest way back to camp, but he can't tell you why. And if you ask him why, you're bothering him on something he has no doubts about. And it's that tacit knowledge, incidentally, that I think is very important from the viewpoint of the development of dogma. There's a bit of it in Schillebeeckx's recent book on Jesus. If you want documentary evidence, you're presupposing that knowledge is already ... But people can have convictions ... 'I like that.' 'I can't stand that.' ... When you're writing a book, you have a definite idea of what you're aiming at. But you have to discover the evidence for it, and you have to rewrite it time and again to get the thing straight. And sometimes you can't write the first chapter until after you've written the last one. And so on. There's an unfolding from that initial hunch, or whatever you want to call it, that you develop by finding, chancing upon, evidence, chancing upon helpful books, and so on. It gradually comes out.

Now, predication: why am I talking about the importance of it? It remains that propositional truth is essential for a community. Otherwise each person is locked up in himself. Heidegger has some notion of that internal development: *Ek-sistenz*. But when it came to saying something, he had to take refuge in poetry, or he went more ... He certainly didn't re-establish philosophically the essence of propositional truth. He communicated it, but he wasn't a reincarnation of the Aristotelian style.

OK for [questions] 1 and 2? Number 3:

**Question:** Is the mediated immediacy you mention on pp. 29 and 77 also mediated in the beatific vision? That is, do you agree with Karl Rahner that *ratio* is the faculty of mystery ('The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,' IV p. 42) and that it mediates immediacy to God who remains incomprehensible mystery even in the beatific vision, in which our knowledge is sublated by our loving surrender to mystery? (Ibid. p. 41: Rahner's lecture on 'Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God' delivered at the University of Chicago, November 1974).

**Lonergan:** It's also in the 'Supplement of the Journal of Religion,' 1978, where a number of the talks given at the symposium in 1974 were published again, or some of them for the first time. So there's a supplement in 1978 of the Journal of Religion, *Commemorating the Medieval Heritage*, edited by David Tracy.

Now, on Rahner and the beatific vision: Professor McCool, Gerald McCool, *A Rahner Reader*, pp. 108 ff., a selection of basic texts in Rahner on the beatific vision; and in the index, under the title 'beatific vision,' you'll find several other references in the Rahner reader. First of all, on the incomprehensibility of God, in *The Way to Nicea* p. 85 you will find mention of a man by the name of Eunomius [RD: CWL 11, p. 139]. He was among the Anomeans, that is, those who not only denied that the Son was similar but held that he was dissimilar to the Father. He held that if you understand what's meant by 'unbegotten,' *ingenitus*, *agennētos*, if you understand the meaning of that word, you will know God just as well as God knows himself ... John Chrysostom countered with eight sermons on the incomprehensibility of God. The Eastern and Western church maintained the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility. The medieval writers in the Western church, besides acknowledging the incomprehensibility of God, even in the beatific vision, nonetheless held that there was a vision of God, of the divine essence. Now, if one shifts from faculty psychology, in which intellect moves the will and intellect is prior to the will, to intentionality analysis, in which sense is material for understanding, and sense and understanding are material for judgments of fact and probability and plausibility, and all three are material for judgments of value and decision, then you have the intellect moving the will as a stratum provides the materials but you don't talk about intellect or will or anything else. They are metaphysical entities. They are not given in consciousness. If your cognitional analysis is based upon the data of consciousness, you don't talk about things that are not given in consciousness. So you have no problems about the priority of intellect or will, because you talk about neither of them. You talk about different levels of consciousness, in which the higher sublates the lower. They preserve them in their entirety, in all their natural fullness. They add to them. They perfect them. They go way beyond them. The scientist can see all sorts of things that the person who has not studied science can't see. If there were a bug walking along the table here, I'd say it was a bug. But an entomologist will tell you a hundred things about it, and you won't know what any of them means because you haven't developed a technical vocabulary, which refers to all these different things he can see. Scientific observation means learning a language as much as anything else.

So, it goes beyond, it perfects. And it directs to a higher end. As long as you're simply on the sensitive level, and never get beyond it, there's no clear evidence that you're more than a nice animal. When you go beyond that, when you move on to higher levels, then you're not so insistent upon the intellectual character of the beatific vision. You say that the blessed in heaven know God as he is. But God as he is is incomprehensible. And in that way you arrive at something like Rahner's

position. And you can do so without holding all he has to say about *ratio*, and so on. I don't think his cognitional theory is very well developed. God is within the human horizon. Why? Because your power of asking questions is unrestricted. If you try to restrict it, and the questions are intelligible, you're an obscurantist. You're not playing the game.

So, while one can disagree with Rahner on certain points, one can say that the incomprehensibility of God is the fact that he *does* love me. For anyone to be loved, if he knows he's being loved, he can look upon it as a bit of a miracle. Why would anyone be in love with *me*? And if *God* loves me, that can be incomprehensible.

Now, my 'mediated immediacy' comes out of Ricoeur, and less immediately and less completely out of Piaget. The Scholastic writers say that the beatific vision is immediate, non-mediated, and what they mean by that is that there's no medium between the act and the object, no medium that is an object mediating between the act and the object. There's no *species* impressed upon the intellect, because for a *species* impressed upon the intellect to give you knowledge of God, it would have to be an infinite *species*, and there's only one infinite *species*, and that's the divine essence. And if there are premises mediating between you and your knowledge of God, your knowledge of God is just a conclusion, such as we have in this life. And the contrast you get in 1 Corinthians 13 between knowing now in a glass darkly and knowing then when there's no ... vanishes. So their assertion of immediacy is not contradictory to the mediated immediacy that I speak of. Mediated immediacy does not posit any object between the act and what becomes immediate. It posits a process of reflection in which you understand the character of the act. Because that love is unrestricted, it is a love for something that is unrestricted in goodness.

**Question from floor:** Even in this life, is there a mediated immediacy of our approach to God, when we're in love with God in an unrestricted fashion.

**Lonergan:** Well, being in love with God in an unrestricted fashion is God's gift. God's love has flooded our hearts with the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5.5). We love God, not because we love him and he likes that and gives us his grace. But it's the other way about. We love him because he gives us the grace, and by the grace that he gives us: the whole Pelagian question.

**Question:** The aspect of self-appropriation with which I have had the most difficulty involves constitutive meaning. I have a notional but not a (very) real apprehension thereof. For example (a) In a full act of meaning, a judgment, I settle the

cognitive status of *A* (*Method* pp. 74-75). It seems that a constitutive act of meaning sublates a full act, as full acts sublate formal acts, etc. (p.75, 1.1) So far so good?

**Lonergan:** That's correct: the fourth level with respect to the third, the third with respect to the second.

**Question:** (b) Is the term of an act of constitutive meaning just a judgment of value, one's attitude to *A*? How then is constitutive meaning related to changes of idea or concept, which seem also to enter into the determination of constitutive meaning? (p.78)

**Lonergan:** Well, your meaning – you never have a judgment that has meaning all by itself. Constitutive meaning is going beyond knowledge to orientation in life. It presupposes experience and understanding and knowledge of fact, probability, possibility, and goes beyond them all, to a commitment or a refusal of commitment, your will power and won't power.

**Question (continued):** (c) Is there a clear example of constitutive meaning linguistically expressed - i.e. of performative meaning? (cf. p.75, n.19)

**Lonergan:** 'James Henry, do you take Mary Jane as your lawful wife?' 'I do.' It's constitutive meaning, and it's insofar as the 'I do' is something you really mean. And the same is true, for example, at an ordination, a public or private vow, at the installation of a president, the Hippocratic oath of the doctor, and so on. All these things are meanings that constitute you in a certain role. The Lloyds insurance in London is not a company. It is a group of people who take one another's ? a responsibility. People who insure, reinsure. The custom in the States is a long pause till you get other people to reinsure them, and then they'll take on the insurance. Lloyds has a terrific amount of business they've done; they get reinsurance (snaps fingers) just like that. And that is constitutive meaning. That's the way they pay off their debts if they bet on the wrong horse. So that you can be sure that it won't be a rainy day, or that the tennis player won't break a leg, and all the rest of it. They'll insure anything in which there is a risk, and charge accordingly.

**Question (continued):** (d) Meaning enters into the fabric of human living (p.81) and so human sciences differ from natural sciences.

**Lonergan:** And that is the meaning of *Geisteswissenschaft* as distinct from *Naturwissenschaft*. Meaning is what makes the difference between human living as it is lived and the life of an animal. Just as language without meaning is gibberish, so a human life without meaning is less than moronic. A young mother was very

offended when her brother said ... It wasn't much meaning yet. My brother ... couldn't see any sense ... It's getting hold of that significance of meaning. It's ... human language, the importance of reading, of meditating, and so on, is increasing. Your command of meaning, and meanings' command over you and your range of choices and the seriousness with which you make them.

**Question (continued):** Later in *Method* this is amplified. The constitutive role (function) of meaning grounds the peculiarity of human science and history (p.178).

**Lonergan:** Yes, it grounds the distinction between human process and natural process, because the human process is guided by meaning. When you teach a class, you're not thinking of what you're going to say next. You just say it. And in conversation, you just say it. You're expressing yourself. Freud's first patient ... spoke of her cure as the talking cure. You can have meaning going astray from the neural demand function. So meaning is constitutive of human life, and history is about meanings and values. A parody on schoolboy history was written by two schoolmasters, *1066 and All That*. 1066 was the only thing that was memorable. No other dates. And there were 108 good things mentioned in the book. They didn't say how many bad things there were, but there were a number of bad things too. Their pupils' judgment didn't go beyond saying a thing was good or bad, depending on what side they were on. Santayana said, 'Either you learn history or you repeat it.'

**Question continued:** What does constitutive meaning constitute?

**Lonergan:** It is constitutive of the subject, of the kind of man or woman he or she is. It's constitutive of communication; what you communicate as meaning will express values and so will influence the self-constitution of others. And these constitutive and communicative functions of meaning combine to constitute community. You have community not because you have a frontier closing in a certain number of people. You have community insofar as you have common experience, otherwise they're out of touch; common understanding, otherwise it would be like the people building the tower of Babel, the confusion of tongues; common judgments, or they're living in different worlds; and common values; and insofar as they haven't got common values, they're working at cross-purposes.

**Question:** Several participants in the seminar (people who meet before class) have asked about the pedagogical principles that grow out of your work and which inform our present format. Two principles come to mind. First, there is the



importance of questions raised and the authentic and responsible pursuit of reasonable answers.

**Lonergan:** The first thing is the foundation, and the foundation is each one of you discovering yourself and all that implies: self-appropriation. And through self-appropriation, appropriating from others, from what you read; and the more serious the stuff you read, the more you have to reach to get it. As in weight-lifting, it's the exertion that makes the difference. The exertion draws the blood into the muscles, and the muscles get bigger and bigger. So there's that self-appropriation and the appropriation of one's tradition. A genius adds to what he knows by his own discoveries, his own observations and discoveries and conclusions and reasonings a small fraction of 1% of what he knows. Einstein, when he discovered special relativity, said, 'What would you see if you were traveling at the speed of light? Well, it would have to be traveling at the speed of light in the same direction and radiating a bit towards you for you to see it. Otherwise it would be just a blur. And this gives a fundamental idea, namely, that the speed of light is independent of reference frames. It's a law of nature. What is absolute is not the image of a three-dimensional manifold or the straight line along which the finger of time writes but it's what you know as a law. The speed of the light is a law of nature. That's the absolute. And you postulate it, that that speed remains the same no matter what the frame of reference. So if you have two frames of reference, with one moving with a velocity  $v$  with respect to the other, then light from the other frame comes to you not at the speed of  $c$  minus  $b$  but at the speed  $c$ . That's how you get into four-dimensional measurements of the intervals ...

**Question** continued: Second, there is the fact that your position is a critical realist position. In your writing you attempt to speak about 'the things themselves.' Thus, the reader of your work is challenged to self-appropriation. Would you address some remarks on the difference between education in a conceptualist or idealist mode and education from the standpoint of critical realism?

**Lonergan:** Education from a conceptualist standpoint: the ultimate argument always is, 'You've got the wrong definition.' They take Socrates too seriously! Defining is fine provided you have a network, a nest of interlocking definitions, in which the relations fix the terms and the terms fix the relations, and verification fixes the lot. Conceptualism consists in placing the occurrence of the act of understanding after conception. One understands after one has formed concepts, compares them, finds some of them compatible, some probably connected, some certainly connected. It's people thinking about the human mind after they've read a book on logic and building the mind out of what's down in the book on logic. And

it's very easily understood. And it leads into a bog. Witness the fourteenth and subsequent centuries. Kant's distinction between analytic propositions and synthetic a priori propositions blew a hole in the conceptualist construction. There are concepts that you compare, and they obviously belong together: whole and part, if you mean spatial whole and part, and the same number of dimensions in the part as in the whole; and there he calls them analytic. But there are also synthetic a priori propositions. They're the ones that presuppose an insight. And you accept that distinction and Kant moves merrily along and leaves you with a merely phenomenal world. Our knowledge is all right; we have to rely on it; but that's all we've got. But you don't really know. You have the a priori categories, twelve categories deduced from the different types of propositions.

Critical realism differs from conceptualism. It places the act of understanding prior to the formation of concepts, whether nominal or explanatory or statistical ... those concepts when you satisfy the criteria. The act of understanding is prior to knowing how to use the word appropriately. That's when you understand how to use the words. And it's explanatory when you understand something about the thing. Why is a circle round? Why is a straight line straight? Euclid gives an explanatory definition of the circle: a locus of coplanar points equidistant from a center. And a straight line is a line whose points lie evenly between the extremes, like when you sight along the barrel of a gun. However he does introduce – he proves all sorts of theorems by the equality of the radii in a circle, but when he moves to the properties of the straight line, he has 'All right angles are equal' and therefore two right angles besides one another are equal and so all straight angles are equal. If all straight angles are equal the straight line has to ... So he has the explanatory element in the form of a postulate. The understanding comes first, and that's where the insight comes in. Beyond experience and understanding it requires also judgment before human knowing occurs. Judgment is not simply a matter of observing. The predicate is understood to pertain to the very meaning of the subject. Such a relationship is present in every hypothesis. Hypotheses have to be verified, not because the meaning of the predicates are not contained in the meaning of the subject; if the hypothesis is any good this will be the case, but it doesn't follow they're true yet. You have to verify. And when you do verify, all that follows is that up to now we don't know the contrary, because further experiments ... So critical realism insists on experience, understanding, and judgment.

Education from an idealist standpoint: well, there are several idealisms. There's Platonic idealism; there's acosmic idealism (Berkeley – *esse est percipi*, the being of things is their being perceived); the critical idealism of Kant; the absolute

idealisms of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel; I'll presume you know all about these, and take the case of the British idealists Bradley and Bosanquet. They hold that in an intelligible universe knowledge properly so-called includes necessary relations of every term to every other term, direct or indirect. And if we're not going to attain the knowledge of all those necessary relations, we're never going to have knowledge. We can have an awful lot of intellectual pleasure and know a number of these relations. But we do not attain comprehensive knowledge. Therefore we have to be content with less than knowledge, with as much comprehension as we can and de facto do attain. Now there is the fallacy of necessity. Euclid wrote his *Elements* about twenty years after the death of Aristotle, but geometry had been developing some time prior to Euclid. Euclid put it together into order. And in the *Posterior Analytics*, which is one of the six works in the 'Organon,' the instrument that guides the Aristotelian methodology, verbal methodology, operating on ...  
**(tape ends)**