Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 8, Part II: Chapter 16, “Metaphysics as Science” continued
Chapter 17: “Metaphysics, Mystery & Myth”;

[0:00]
• Series of Student Questions:
  • What if the structure of our knowing were to change? How would that affect the structure of proportionate being? E.g., what if humans developed pheromonal responses?
    – Various technological and biological modifications of human beings would not change what knowing is – i.e., knowing remains understanding the given data correctly.

[5:13]
• Question about the precise meanings of ‘matter’ and ‘material’; does Lonergan have an Aristotelian or modern notion of matter?
  – Review of the distinction between the spiritual and the material:
    – First approximation: the former is intelligibility that is intelligent, the latter is intelligibility that is not intelligent.
    – Second, and full meaning: Lonergan defines the spiritual as not intrinsically conditioned by space and time, while the material is so conditioned.
    – By “material” Lonergan means something different from what a materialist means.
    – Discussion of the key implications that follow: space and time are in being, not vice versa.
    – Neither space nor time, but intelligibility is the criteria for the meaning of being.

[10:48]
• The Intellectual Context of Chapter 17§1: The “demythologization debate”
• Certain questions about mystery and myth versus rationality informed this chapter.
• The 20th century scholarly attempts to come to terms with the meaning of religious expressions which, to people in a modern scientific age, seem fantastic and unbelievable.
• Are mystery and myth cognate to the earlier stages of metaphysics, vanishing thereafter?
  – Rudolf Bultmann demythologized the New Testament by getting rid of the mythological elements and giving it an existentialist reading: *Kerygma and Myth*.
• The question is whether the mythological elements of religious expressions would also vanish in light of Lonergan’s *explanatory* metaphysics.

[19:00]
• Further in the background is August Comte’s “Introduction to Positivist Philosophy.”
• Comte proposed three successive ages: the mythical, metaphysical, and positive ages.
• The earlier ages and forms of explanation have been eclipsed by the “positive,” i.e., scientific age.
• The age when explanations are restricted to those based on “positive” evidence of sensation.
• Lonergan aims to restore the meaning of religious expressions despite the positivist critique, and to do so in a way that is in keeping with his explanatory metaphysics.

[24:42]
• Lonergan will argue that there is some permanent meaningfulness to human religious expressions that will survive in a fully explanatory context.
• Thus in Chapter 17 Lonergan is concerned with the problem of interpretation in general, and with the interpretation of religious expressions in particular.
• The problem of interpretation for Lonergan arises from the different kinds (“polymorphism”) of patterns of experience.
• What is real for one pattern is different from what is real for another pattern.
• Certain patterns of experience are incompatible with others; e.g., the aesthetic and the pragmatic.

[30:30]
• Basic to Lonergan’s approach to interpretation of religious expressions arises from his distinction among: Image as Image, Image as Symbol and Image as Sign.
  • As image: sensible content operating on the sensory level,
  • As symbol: linked with the paradoxical ‘known unknown’,
  • As sign, the images is linked with some interpretation of the import of the image.
• The ‘known unknown’: all of our knowing occurs with awareness of a great horizon of still unanswered questions; the unknown is not just absolutely unknown, but we have an awareness (“known”) of the unknown by means of our remaining questions.
• The “known unknown” is Lonergan’s guiding heuristic principle in Insight for the interpretation of religious expressions.
• The symbol parallels the unrestricted desire to know, and thus opens up a way to discuss religious experience – one that is appropriate to the modern era.
• How the image as symbol relates to the image as sign – the latter is the already interpreted symbol.
• Symbols get situated in myths; and myths themselves are already ‘signs’ in Lonergan’s sense, because they give interpretations of the image-symbol.

[37:52]
• Mircea Eliade identified the heart of religious symbolism as a ‘center within chaos’; i.e., an inhabited microcosm surrounded by the “unknown,” the formless, mysterious domain occupied by demons, ghosts, the Other, chaos, etc.

[41:29]
• The Image and Symbol of the Tree.
• Exercise in recognizing our different modes of perception of the tree (image as image, image as symbol).
• The Image as Constructed: the Cosmic Tree.
• The Tree as foundation of the cosmos.
• Since the ‘known-unknown’ never vanishes, and so there’s always a permanent human need for images as symbols.