

Insight & Beyond II, Lecture 9, Part I: Chapter 17: “Metaphysics, Mystery & Myth”

[0:00]

- Review and Elaboration of Image. Symbol, Sign, and Mystery.
- Images always situated within a flow of acts and contents (some pattern of experiencing)
- The Known Unknown: we ‘know’ (but not in Lonergan’s strict, technical sense of knowing) of something ‘unknown’ through our unanswered questions.

[5:47]

- Relationship between Lonergan’s account of human development and religious symbolism:
- Need for a harmonious correspondence between the different levels for sustained human development
- The Intellectual and Psychic Operators: the levels of higher integrations are dynamic; there is a correspondence between their respective operators (= what is doing the transforming of the lower level)
- The operator on the intellectual level is the unrestricted desire to know, oriented towards the unknown
- It can operate fully only if there is something at the psychic level that makes it possible for the intellectual level to pursue all further questions – something that enables the flow of images to keep up with the unrestricted orientation of the intellect.

[11:36]

- Lonergan proposes that what fills the role of this psychic operator is something in human feelings
- Discussion of the nature of the latter psychic operator:
- The intimation of ‘unplumbed depths’ accrued to feelings, emotions, etc. (555).
- Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*
- How images come to embody religious sentiments: human feelings are integrated with ‘affect laden images’ which oriented towards the ‘second sphere’ of the ultimate unknown, strange, mysterious and mythical.
- Not so obvious that this element of feeling *must* be that which fulfills the role of the psychic operator that collaborates with the intellectual operator of the unrestricted desire to know

[20:22]

- Student question about the ‘affect-laden images’ and their relation to art vs. religion.
 - Discussion of human thought evolving over time. i.e., the shifting boundaries between religion/art, philosophy/myth and the emergence of the intellectual tools for metaphysics. The ‘affective’ images serve to keeping our psyche ready for the work of intellectual development.

[24:06]

- Student question about the relation of Lonergan to Bultman with regard to demythologization.
 - Lonergan is like Bultmann in acknowledging that there are associations with religious symbols that are misleading and distorting, and so are in need of some kind of interpretation done with the tools made available by the evolution of human thought (i.e., on the basis of self-appropriation).

[26:00]

- Student question about the ‘ulterior unknown’ and its relation to the ‘known unknown’.
 - The former stresses the affective dimension, whereas the latter pertains to the intellectual one.

[27:29]

- Lonergan has thus staked out the parameters for an interpretation of the religious symbol.
- The image as symbol bears a link to the 'known unknown'.

[28:33]

- Image as sign:
- The image as sign is linked to some interpretation of the image's import.
- Signs not limited to religious images
- Example of a sign and its interpretation (insights, conversations, judgments, memories, etc.) that constitute the sign as meaningful.

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- Why Lonergan thinks symbols and their mystery are a general, permanent feature of human culture.
- Unlike Comte and Bultman, who saw demythologization as elimination of images-as-symbols and images-as-mysteries, Lonergan holds some such images are essential to human existence.
- Lonergan sought rather to eliminate only the distorted symbolic images and the distorted myths that interpret the symbols only insofar as they are the products of counterpositions.

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- The Cosmic Tree – an image-as-symbol to which other images are added as interpretation.
- Eliade's words as additional interpretation and constitution of it as sign.
- The symbol of the Cosmic Tree is also situated within and interpreted by rituals (bodily movements).
- Symbolic artifacts (e.g., totem poles) of Cosmic Trees are imperfect replicas of "the" archetypal Cosmic Tree – how they are interpreted.
- Cosmic Tree understood as bringing order to chaos.

[44:13]

- Image as Mystery:
- Mystery is a dynamic image that are partly symbol and partly sign, where the interpretation acts to preserve, clarify, elaborate the ulterior strangeness of known unknown, not to eliminate it.
- Connection of religious symbols to finality: where is finality headed?
- Symbols do not prove that there is an end toward which finality tends. Those are further questions beyond the images as mysteries or symbols.
- Symbols simply keep alive the orientation of finality in human consciousness; they generate further questions which are to be answered not by symbolic modes, but by theology and philosophy.

[48:30]

- Student question about the tension between the permanence of mystery and the heuristic anticipation of the future date when all explanations would be known. What is left of mystery once answers to all explanatory questions have been reached?
 - Lonergan says there will still be further questions even if all explanatory answers about proportionate being have been reached.
 - He later argues there is more to being than proportionate being (i.e. transcendent being).

[52:04]

- Religious symbols are interpreted in various ways: e.g., as naturalistic, psychoanalytic, Darwinian, etc.
- Lonergan will claim that many of the reductionistic interpretations of religious symbols are rooted in counterpositions.

[54:08]

- Some part of the background Lonergan brought to his interest in religious symbolism comes from his participation in Catholic sacraments.
- Mystery and Sacrament: *sacramentum* is the Latin term used to translate the Greek *mysterion*
- The Catholic sacraments as images and signs (interpreted rituals), full of mystery.
- How Lonergan's view relates to the Catholic tradition.

[57:30]

- "Mythic Consciousness"
- The image, symbol, sign as mystery is to be distinguished from the mythic.
- Because an image with the known unknown is open to so many interpretations, it is also open to interpretations distorted by the counterpositions of polymorphic consciousness.
- What happens when stories that interpret the known-unknownness of religious symbols are taken as literally, already-out-there-now, real.
- Mythic consciousness misconstrues images and symbols in all their mystery, it fails to recognize fantastic element in myth as fantastic, as a result of the polymorphic modes of consciousness.
- Mythic consciousness is distorted consciousness of the known unknown, which does not even know that it is distorted.
- Mythic consciousness lacks critical self-awareness of the ways in which other patterns of experience can interfere with serious intellectual inquiry.

[1:03:37]

- The self-understanding of metaphysics has to take into account how it arose, and this includes the role that religious symbolism and its distortions in mythic consciousness played in the emergence of explicit metaphysics.
- Mythic Consciousness and Dialectics: metaphysics is concerned with its own genesis and thus cannot "prescind entirely from the historical phenomena of mysteries and myths" (p 560).

[1:05:33]

- Student question about bias in the mythic consciousness.
 - There is bias in mythic consciousness; the bias is not in the images laden with the sense of the known unknown; the bias is in the interpretations.

[1:07:03]

- Lonergan's regard for the term, "myth" revisited.
- At the time of *Insight* Lonergan used the term 'myth' only for the anti-intellectual distortions.
- Later he acknowledged that what most scholars now refer to as "myth" are not just the distortions, but also to what he referred to as mysteries.

End of Part I.