

Introduction to Systematic Theology

Class 2, 14 September 2009

1 Review of Chapter 1

We saw most of the items that I listed under ‘preliminary notions,’ and a good deal of the key notions of Chapter 1 of *Method in Theology*. Today I want to make sure that all of the key notions of that chapter are clear, and then cover as much of chapter 2 as possible.

An examination of the procedures of natural science would seem to indicate something that perhaps can be generalized to the procedures of the human mind in general, namely, a basic pattern of operations employed in every cognitional enterprise. And if that can be done, then perhaps that pattern can be specified in such a way as to be pertinent to theology. The point is to begin with that generalized set of procedures and then to specify what its relevance might be to the doing of theology.

The result will in fact be what I am calling the first meaning of ‘system,’ namely, the view of how all the various things that theologians do are related to one another: textual criticism, exegesis, historical scholarship, doctrines, systematics, pastoral communication.

That set of procedures will be called various names: basic method, transcendental method, generalized empirical method. (On ‘transcendental’ I should have added something to what I said in the last class. I said that the Kantian meaning is partly operative in Lonergan’s use of the term, namely, the conditions of the possibility of valid knowing, and I think I said that Lonergan takes a more radical step than Kant by beginning with a cognitional analysis: What am I actually doing when I am knowing? I also said that the medieval meaning of the ‘transcendentals’ is part of his meaning: intelligibility, truth and being, the good (and beauty), which are distinguished from determinate categories. But I failed to mention that these are called ‘transcendentals’ in medieval thought because they refer or apply to absolutely everything. They are ‘comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change.’ (I also mentioned the Husserlian meaning, where ‘operation’ and ‘object’ are considered together: There is a footnote on p. 145 of *A Third Collection* which reads: ‘Distinguish three meanings of the term, transcendental: the most general and all-pervasive concepts, namely, *ens, unum, verum, bonum*, of the Scholastics; the Kantian conditions of the possibility of knowing an object *a priori*; Husserl’s intentionality analysis in which *noēsis* and *noēma*, act and object, are correlative.’) Perhaps, too, a brief note on *a priori* would be helpful.

What I want to make sure we have from the first chapter are: the meaning of ‘method,’ the basic pattern of operations; the meaning of ‘intentional,’ the meaning of ‘conscious,’ and the meaning of the expression ‘transcendental notions,’ including the distinction of these from ‘transcendental concepts,’ and the meaning of objectifying intentional consciousness.

The Meaning of ‘Method’: a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. Distinct operations are related, and as they continue to be exercised we see cumulative and progressive results.

The Basic Pattern of Operations, the meaning of ‘intentional, and the meaning of ‘conscious’: The basic pattern of operations involved in any human cognitional enterprise has the fourfold constitution of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision. These are commonly referred to as ‘levels.’ 9: ‘There is the *empirical* level on which we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak, move [qualify this: in human studies the data are informed by meaning; in theology some of the data are informed by a meaning that is accepted in faith to be true; we will see more of this in *What Is Systematic Theology?*]. There is an *intellectual* level on which we inquire, come to understand, express what we have understood, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression. There is the *rational* level on which we reflect, marshal the evidence, pass judgment on the truth or falsity, certainty or probability, of a statement. There is the *responsible* level on which we are concerned with ourselves, our own operations, our goals, and so deliberate about possible courses of action, evaluate them, decide, and carry out our decisions.’

There is a distinct **mode of self-presence** (self-taste) characteristic of these levels, and a distinct kind of object intended, where ‘intended’ simply means the operations have objects, and where ‘self-presence’ is the basic meaning of ‘consciousness.’ There are qualitatively different modes of being conscious subjects, and qualitatively different modes of intending, and qualitatively different objects.

The meaning of ‘transcendental notions’: The meaning of the word ‘notion’ in Lonergan, for the most part, is distinct from the meaning of ‘concept’ or of ‘idea.’ ‘Idea’ for Lonergan means ‘the content of an act of understanding.’ ‘Concept’ means the elaborated product of the act of understanding, the inner word that our outer words mean. ‘Notion’ means the very dynamism of our conscious intending. Why do we move from mere experiencing to understanding? Because we have an anticipation of an intelligibility to be discovered through questioning. Why do we move from understanding to judgment? Because we somehow know that there is a further question about our understanding, namely, Is it true? Why do we move from factual knowledge reached in judgments of fact to responsible action? Because the dynamism of our conscious intending is not satisfied with merely knowing what is. We seek to evaluate it and at times to do something about it. Each of these ‘promotions’ or ‘sublations’ is a fruit of a transcendental notion: of intelligibility, truth and being, the good. There will be more to say about this structure later, as it can be complicated and nuanced.

But it will not be radically revised. 19: ‘... for it to be possible for a revision to take place certain conditions must be fulfilled. For, in the first place, any possible revision will appeal to data which the opinion under review either overlooked or misapprehended, and so any possible revision must presuppose at least an empirical level of operations. Secondly, any possible revision will offer a better explanation of the data, and so any possible revision must presuppose an intellectual level of operations. Thirdly, any possible revision will claim that the better explanation is more probable, and so any possible revision must presuppose a rational level of