

On Explanation vs. Description

1. I see difficulties (on both sides) with the contrast between "explanation in a truly radical sense" and "the description as opposed to the explanation of events" (McKinnon: 21, n. 10).

2. Science properly understood is explanatory as well as descriptive, while metaphysics properly understood is descriptive as well as explanatory. Otherwise put: science is not only a matter of "empirical generalizations" or "low-level hypotheses," but also of "universal law statements" (expressed as "counterfactual conditionals") and complex theoretical structures; whereas metaphysical principles are not a matter either of direct rational intuition of what is beyond experience or of an intellectual *a priori* imposed on experience, but rather are derived from experience itself, albeit in another aspect or dimension from that from which scientific principles are derived.

3. Is there no good reason, then, to contrast, or, at least, distinguish between explanation and description? This need not be the conclusion, although it is certainly preferable to distinguish instead between two types of description/explanation—one of which, namely, the metaphysical, is indeed "explanation (as well as description) in a truly radical sense." If one asks wherein this radicality consists, I reply with Hartshorne: in the fact that metaphysics seeks principles of explanation so general and so fundamental that "they are no longer special cases to be explained by more general principles, but are themselves the most general of ideas, true not only of the actual world but of any conceivable one" (*RSP*: 29). Otherwise put: metaphysics is the description/explanation, not of *fact*, but of *factuality*, of what it means to be a fact at all. Thus, as Lonergan says, "metaphysics is the department of human knowledge that underlies, penetrates, transforms, and unifies all other departments." It is "the whole in knowledge but not the whole of knowledge" (*Insight*: 390, 391). Because this is so, however, the experience of which metaphysics is the description/explanation must itself be conceived radically—as the whole *in* experience but not the whole *of* experience—in short: "the ultimate integral experience," whose

"elucidation," or "rationalization," is the business of philosophy and, more exactly, metaphysics.

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