Review Article

EDUCATING FOR SALVATION HISTORY

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.


This book is an admirably edited presentation of Lonergan’s lectures given at Xavier University in Cincinnati in 1959 on the philosophy of education.¹

In these lectures, Lonergan proposes a framework that is linked to a human cognitional process where reflection on the pure desire to know reveals a movement towards the “human good.” This human good is the focus for the discussions contained in the first four densely packed chapters.² The six succeeding chapters are about the pedagogical role of the principal subjects commonly taught in high school and college.

In the last seven pages of the last chapter entitled “Problems of General History,” Lonergan discusses a serious problem that goes far beyond any secularist philosophy of history: general history is necessarily “pre-systematic.” The seriousness of this problem may be one reason why Lonergan, on p. xi, expresses the hope that his audience, all school teachers, will make an effort

¹. The book comes in two editions — a small cloth edition directed mainly to the library market, and a handsome quality paperback which differs from the cloth only in the soft binding.
². A measure of this density can be seen in the 173 pages that it took to unpack implications in these and other chapters in the book by co-editor F. E. Crowe, Old Things and New: A Strategy for Education (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).
at "integrating and challenging" his stand. This review article does not challenge Lonergan’s stand. But it is written in the hope of finding a way of integrating chapters 6, 9 and 10 into a core meaning around which the other seven chapters may be viewed and on which to base reflections on the problem of the pre-systematic character of general history.

Unlike the history of specialized subjects, general history deals broadly with human living. But human living is differentiated into regional cultures that can be communicated only at levels that can not yet be conceptualized systematically. Why not? Because each of the many different regional cultures involves a complex succession of free human choices from which there may yet emerge something outside the range of human choices. At any selected moment or century or millennium, that “something outside,” although in process of emerging, has not yet become clear and distinct, not yet conceptualized, not yet systematized, and therefore commonly ignored. A positivist methodology can be reinforced by bias to ignore any emergent meaning, thus making it hard to communicate history conceptually. The only alternative is to communicate it artistically. But what is art?

According to Susanne Langer, “art is the creation of forms symbolic of human meanings.” Translated into the context of intentionality analysis, Lonergan equates this to the “objectification of a purely experiential pattern.”

The patterns of general history are experiential, for we perceive them with our senses, we become conscious of them, we can attend to the internal relations within them. They are purely experiential in that we can exclude alien patterns that instrumentalize history or reshape it to fit some theory or doctrine. Still they remain open to associated feelings of awe, fascination, mystery, adventure, greatness, goodness, majesty.

The patterns of history can be objectified. What does Lonergan mean by “objectification”? Does he mean it in the sense in which physicist Eddington sees an object like a table as mostly empty space thinly occupied by tiny quanta that are conceptualized as wave centers of probability? Or does he rather mean it in the

3. The two formulations are based on the findings of the editors as noted in note 9 on p. 211.
sense in which Chopin, the “poet of the piano,” expresses a pattern of musical notes, chords, cadences and arpeggios into a Première Ballade, Opus 23? I do not believe that Lonergan sees history as an objectification in Eddington’s sense, for this is systematic, whereas general history is pre-systematic. History is closer to art than to science.

Chopin’s Ballade moves in a meaningful succession of tensions and releases whereby he seeks to transform the listeners’ world, open up their horizon, present to them something other, different, novel, strange, remote, intimate, moving them to over exuberance, ecstasy and freedom to explore possibilities of enrichment. Can these be said of historical movement? Partly. One important exception is the finale of the Ballade. History’s finale is not yet.

Despite this difference, the movements both of art and of history involve an “inevitability of form.” By this Lonergan means: “If you sing a single note, there are no implications as to what the next note must be; but if you sing four or five, the inevitability of form is taking over; there is only a limited number of notes you can go on to” (p. 215). Analogously, some human choices in history have in the past been quite predictable, like declarations of war or peace.

Historical predictability resembles scientific probability. “The ideal of modern science is to know states and their probabilities, where probabilities determine states” (p. 157). If the history of human events involves choices that are basically free, still it fits exactly within Lonergan’s description of properties of world process that “account in generic fashion for numbers and time intervals, for distributions and concentrations, for blind alleys and breakdowns, for enormous differentiation, for increasing systematization, for stability without necessity, for assurance without determinism, for development without chance.”4 Although history is pre-systematic, it is open to systematization through emergent probability.

A probability is a proper fraction. Lonergan’s account of emergent probability involves “leaps from a product of fractions to a sum of fractions.”5 The application of this to history can

5. Ibid. 144.
be illustrated by the graph below. The human good is graphed as the ordinate representing the sum of fractions conceived as a rising monotonic function of two parameters: (1) the abscissa representing the heuristic events integrated in a converted subject's consciousness; and (2) the particular locus representing the converted subject's level of conversion, whether low as in a, or medium as in b, or high as in c, or higher, etc. Locus c is seen to transcend the human limitations of the subject and to begin an asymptotic approach to infinity.

![Graph of human good](image)

This means that a subject who has experienced a large (though finite) number of heuristic events, and has reached a high (though limited) level of conversion, becomes capable of something outside the finite range of human choices and capabilities. He can transcend the limitations of his immanent knowledge.

Readers may now ask if this potential meaning of general history can be integrated with the last two chapters of *Insight* about transcendent knowledge, both general and special. Their answers may raise the further question whether general history is identical with salvation history. If so, the educational apostolate may be described as an asymptotic approach to infinity.

6. Ibid. 657-751.