TEACHING FOR COSMOPOLIS: BERNARD LONERGAN’S HOPEFUL VISION FOR EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Abstract

Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan offers a vision for education that promotes what he terms “cosmopolis.” For Lonergan, authentic cosmopolitanism does not seek to impose a universal totalizing metanarrative. Rather, it embraces the particularity and historicity of one’s own cultural, religious, and intellectual traditions, while remaining radically open to dialogue with the other. By doing so, education for cosmopolis fosters both authentic appropriation and reflective critique of one’s own traditions, as well as an appreciation for the authenticity of others. Teaching for cosmopolis is an invitation to dialogue which promotes mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual interdependence in a globalized world.

Introduction

It has become almost cliché to describe the contemporary world as “globalized.” Yet, as political philosopher Fred Dallmayr argues the term often “conceals more that it reveals” insofar as it raises fundamental questions about identity, sense of place, and selfhood.1 What does it mean to live in globalized world? Is the global “world” a habitat or a horizon? And, is it possible to become members of a global community without sacrificing one’s particular identity? Paradoxically, these questions reveal some of the underlying tensions of globalization as countervailing forces of xenophobia, ethnic violence, and global terrorism threaten a sense of global cohesion. While education offers the hope of promoting a global consciousness, educating for cosmopolitan citizenship can seem problematic at best, if not naively quixotic in the context of an increasingly multivalent, yet globalized world. As Dallmayr points out, “cosmopolitanism in our time cannot assume a homogeneous global community, but has to proceed through cross-cultural dialogue.”2 Teaching for cosmopolis, then, requires an invitation to substantive conversation that fosters a deeper awareness of, a deeper respect for, and a deeper commitment to both self and other as authentic subjects acting in the world.

Here, Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan presents a vision for education that promotes a cosmopolitanism that invites authentic dialogue among multiple traditions, multiple perspectives, and multiple ways of being in the world. For Lonergan, cosmopolis is not the imposition of a universal ideal. Rather, cosmopolis involves authentic

1 Fred Dallmayr, Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 1
2 Ibid., 4.
engagement in dialogue with the other. It is a commitment to be attentive to our own and others’ human experiences, to be intelligent in the questions we ask about the meaning of those experiences, to be reasonable in our judgements about those experiences, and ultimately, to be responsible as to how we act toward the other on the basis of our experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.

Methodology

This study employs a philosophical methodology that examines Lonergan’s thought on education through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics. It seeks to create a “fusion of horizons” which brings Lonergan’s philosophy of education into dialogue with contemporary philosophical concerns of teaching and learning in a globalized world. And, it explores the potential of Lonergan’s notion of cosmopolis for the future of teaching in schools to be an agent of hope and change. At the same time, it examines the potential of Lonergan’s cosmopolitan claims for education as an agent of transformation in our globalized world by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. It unpacks Lonergan’s philosophy of education as a basis for promoting cosmopolitan citizenship. And, it explores the possibility of Lonergan’s vision for education as a way of fostering hope in today’s globalized context.

Education as a “Re-Horizoning” of the Subject

In his philosophy of education, Bernard Lonergan contends that the good of the human person is developing his or her human potentialities fully as a subject, that is, developing the human person as a free, intelligent, and responsible self-in-the-world. At the same time, he recognizes that such development is not automatic, but requires engaging persons at ever increasing levels of critical awareness of themselves as knowing and valuing subjects. For Lonergan, such awareness involves coming to appropriate oneself as a subject through the manifold operations of human consciousness: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. Through increasing critical awareness of oneself as a knower and chooser of values, one comes to know oneself more fully as a knowing and valuing subject, meaningfully engaged in the world. As such, the subject becomes increasingly aware of his or her own world horizon and is thus constituted as a self-in-relation to the world. The development of selfhood is as a self in relation to a “world mediated by meaning and motivated by value,” a world of ever expanding horizons, of ever more complex distinctions, and of ever increasing wonder. In other words, education is an ongoing process of the “re-horizoning” of the subject in relation to the world of

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meaning and value.\textsuperscript{7} Authentic subjectivity, then, moves not simply from point to point, but from horizon to horizon as the subject’s world is continually reconstituted though ever expanding horizons of meaning.

According to Lonergan, knowing and valuing subjects are also self-appropriating subjects insofar as they take possession of themselves as knowers and choosers of values precisely by attending to experience, intelligently inquiring for deeper understanding, reflecting to make more reasonable judgments, and deliberating over which courses of action are most valuable, most meaningful, and most worthy of a life worth living. Hence, as Lonergan notes “By his [sic] own acts the human subject makes himself what he is to be, and he does so freely and responsibly.”\textsuperscript{8} Therefore, knowing and valuing subjects do not simply know and value; rather, they also \textit{act} on the basis of their knowing and valuing, and as such, they are also “existential” subjects, free and responsible selves-in-relation to the world.\textsuperscript{9}

Human subjects, then, are both self-transcended and self-transcending as active participants in the world of meaning and value.\textsuperscript{10} This world exists prior to, yet is open to transformation by, the subject. It is a world in which the subject is self-transcended insofar as he or she is born into a given socio-cultural ethos that forms, shapes, and conditions the subject as a knower and chooser of values. Yet, it is also a world in which the subject is self-transcending insofar as he or she develops as a knowing and valuing subject: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding for him or herself. Hence, the world of meaning and value remains radically open to the subject’s new experiences, fresh insights, revised affirmations, and revitalized appropriations of values and beliefs.

Here, Lonergan makes a distinction between two, mutually dependent processes of human development “from above downward” and “from below upward.”\textsuperscript{11} Frederick Crowe points out that development “from above downward” is the “way of heritage;” it is the handing on of tradition in community.\textsuperscript{12} Conversely, development “from below upward” is the “way of achievement;” it is the individual’s growing in his or her capacity to make sense of the self-in-relation to the world and the world-in-relation to the self.\textsuperscript{13} In effect, these two vectors of human development operate together in a dynamic interplay that allows the individual to organize mentally his or her world as a world of meaning and value. As Brian Braman observes, Lonergan shows how the human person is “both a constituting and constituted subject. The way down describes the lived and already given cultural and linguistic matrix that structures the person’s


\textsuperscript{8} Bernard Lonergan, \textit{The Subject} (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), 19.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{10} Bernard Lonergan, \textit{Method}, 110.

\textsuperscript{11} Bernard Lonergan, \textit{A Third Collection}, 196-197.


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 27.
sense of identity. The way up explains the constituting activity of the human subject: the intentional activity of the person as she constitutes herself to be a knower, chooser, and lover.”

For Lonergan, then, development “downward” represents the human person as self-transcended. In other words, the human person is embedded in a larger world of meaning and value which constitutes the given horizon of the knowing and valuing subject. It is the way of “heritage” and it is the way of tradition. The human subject is thus “constituted” by his or her own particular socio-cultural location, which, in turn, shapes, conditions, and forms the subject as an historical subject-in-relation to the world. Through development “upward,” the human person is self-transcending, insofar as he or she develops the capacity to experience, understand, judge, and decide for him or herself. The knowing and valuing subject, then, is not held captive to knowledge, beliefs, and values that are inherited; but rather, the knowing and valuing subject is free to appropriate, adopt, accept, reject, critique, or adapt inherited knowledge, beliefs, and values from tradition in order to make them alive, vibrant, and life-giving in the present. Such development requires cultivating both the human person’s potential as inherited “from above” by way of tradition and “from below” by way of personal achievement. It is this creative tension between the subject as self-transcended and self-transcending that invites the growth and development of human persons toward authentic subjectivity.

In essence, the process of self-transcendence reshapes one’s world. It is a broadening of one’s horizon. And, it is a re-constituting of the subject him or herself. As Lonergan observes, “The broadening, deepening, developing of the horizon…is also a broadening, deepening, developing of the subject, the self, the ego. The development that is the constitution of one’s world is also the constitution of oneself.” Through the process of self-transcendence one becomes more authentically him or herself as a self-in-relation, as an intelligent, free, and responsible subject acting in the world.

**Teaching for Cosmopolis as Educating for Authentic Inter-Subjectivity**

The term “cosmopolis” originated in the 4th century BCE with the Greek cynic Diogenes, for whom it meant being a citizen of everywhere and nowhere at the same. It literally means to be a citizen of the *cosmos* and thus part of no particular *polis* or state. In effect, it originally implied a cynical “hostility to place, tradition, and community” that eschewed all traditional bonds of affiliation. In contrast, later Enlightenment conceptions envisioned cosmopolis as a “universal moral community” that regulated relations between states. It represented the promise

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of a “good” world order, wherein peace and harmony reign supreme.\textsuperscript{18} Both conceptions prove problematic in the contemporary globalized context of a multiplatform world. While a cynical cosmopolitanism undermines the very possibility of community, the Enlightenment legacy of cosmopolitanism represents a “hidden agenda of modernity” that seeks to regulate a global society along the lines of a rationally ordered Newtonian universe through subtle forms of domination, power, and control.\textsuperscript{19} Political, cultural, and economic hegemonies that promote globalism whether in the form of a new political world order or a ubiquitous McWorld seem to threaten a mutually responsible sense of cosmopolis in a post-modern, post-colonial, and post-holocaust world. As Dallmayr points out, what is needed to sustain a contemporary cosmopolitan outlook is a “dialogic cosmopolitanism” that invites “multiple forms of border-crossing” as authentic subjects encounter each other in dialogue, trying to make sense of self and other in a polysemous world.\textsuperscript{20}

It is precisely this form of “dialogic cosmopolitanism” that Lonergan proposes as the basis for education. For Lonergan, authentic subjectivity develops through engagement with the world of meaning and value. Such engagement invites dialogue within and among a multiplicity of intellectual, cultural, and religious traditions. This requires forming an “intersubjective community” of persons willing to enter into that dialogue. Community, then, is at the heart of an “authentic cosmopolitanism.”\textsuperscript{21} It is a community that invites not only intellectual engagement, but authentic encounter. As Lonergan notes, “cosmopolis” is not “an unrealized political ideal;” rather, it is “a cultural fact,” expressed through the “influence of artists, scientists, and philosophers.”\textsuperscript{22} It is both a community and a conversation that extends throughout history. In effect, it is “a heightened grasp” of humanity’s past and, at the same time, “a discovery of historical responsibilities” in the present.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, cosmopolis incorporates the two vectors of education as the “way of heritage” and the “way of achievement” as concrete historical subjects meet “through interpersonal encounter” and “through dialogue with inherited tradition.”\textsuperscript{24} Michael Himes suggests that such encounters embody the essence of good teaching metaphorically as a “host or hostess” at a “four-thousand year old cocktail party” would introduce his or her guests to interesting people “into an enormously immense conversation with people of different places and extraordinarily different times.”\textsuperscript{25} It is a conversation that invites

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{20} Dallmayr, 5.
\textsuperscript{21} See Snell and Cone, 151
\textsuperscript{24} McPartland, 130.
everyone, that excludes no one, and that encourages each one to become his or her own authentic self in relation to the other.

A central locus for forming such a dialogic “intersubjective community” is the school, in general, and the classroom, in particular. As Gabriel Moran notes, the school “is a zone of intellectual freedom” that invites dialogue, questioning, and critical reflection.\textsuperscript{26} Central to the purpose of the school is school teaching itself, and central to that purpose is the classroom as a place of inquiry, discovery, and ongoing critical dialogue.\textsuperscript{27} As Lonergan suggests, teaching in schools is directed toward opening students out toward new worlds of meaning and value. It is an invitation to explore new horizons. And, ultimately, its purpose is to hand students over to themselves as authentic knowing and valuing subjects.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, teachers can initiate students into the language of academic discourse, empowering them to become authentic conversation partners in a dialogue of mutual questioning, mutual engagement, and mutual self-discovery.

Such conversation is never one-dimensional as students themselves are invited to become active participants in that multifaceted discourse, bringing their own sets of experiences, their own prior understandings, their own preconceived judgments, and their own previously made decisions. If they are willing to enter into real conversation, to engage in genuine discourse with multiple voices, and to be truly open to further experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, then, paradoxically, they can begin to appropriate themselves as knowing and valuing subjects in the encounter with the other as their world of meaning and value is, at once, affirmed, challenged, and expanded. They can begin to enter the discourse as authentic subjects-in-relation. And, they can begin to take possession of their own knowing, believing, and valuing. As Lonergan notes, it is then that one can “move beyond dialectic to dialogue, to transpose issues from a conflict of statements to an encounter of persons.”\textsuperscript{29} Michele Saracino points out that “dialectical encounter encompasses the process by which the subject is challenged by another’s position,” where “dialogue is an event in which the subject and the other can move from conflict to friendship.” Saracino insists, “an encounter with alterity can challenge and reposition the subject to an alternative posture, to a higher viewpoint.”\textsuperscript{30} Inviting students to engage in ongoing critical discourse opens them up not only to new horizons of meaning and value; but also, it opens them out to new ways of relating and being in the world. In effect, it invites them to claim their role as citizens of cosmopolis as authentic knowing and valuing subjects acting in the world.

\textsuperscript{26} Gabriel Moran, \textit{Religious Education as a Second Language} (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 239.
\textsuperscript{29} Lonergan, \textit{A Third Collection}, 182.
Conclusion

Lonergan’s claims that authentic cosmopolitan education can promote hope and transformation are grounded in his conceptualization of the human person as a knowing and valuing subject acting in the world. This conceptualization is not so much a product as a process of ongoing engagement of self and other through openness, encounter, and dialogue. Such a process leads to the transformation of the person as a transcendent being, inviting ongoing questioning, conversation, and a re-thinking of one’s own questions, beliefs, and values in relation to the wider world of meaning and value. In effect, for Lonergan, the human person is a work in progress who continues to shape and reshape his or her own sense of self as a knowing and valuing subject acting in the world. In other words, the human person is always a being in the process of becoming. Thus, the purpose of education, especially education in schools, is to facilitate that process by helping human beings critically appropriate knowledge and values for themselves, thus inviting them to become authentic subjects of their own education. Such a process is the basis for hope insofar as education is always based on the hope of becoming one’s own authentic self. Yet, in an increasingly globalized world promoting authenticity is only possible in the context of an authentic cosmopolitan vision. Given such a world, authentic subjectivity is only fostered in dialogue with the other who challenges, affirms, or disturbs one’s own experience, understanding, judgements, and decisions. Authentic subjectivity is only realized through an “intersubjective community” that allows ongoing conversation with the other. And, authentic subjectivity is only achieved through a willingness to engage the other in the dialectics of identity, place, and selfhood.

Bibliography


