

## LONERGAN'S METAPHYSICAL EPISTEMOLOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*The article studies Lonergan's metaphysical epistemology which is founded on his transcendental method, technically described as GEM- Generalized Empirical Method. The study identifies some similarities between Lonergan's philosophy of education and those of the progressivists. Nevertheless, it spots critical aspects of Lonergan's epistemology that could improve upon the progressivist approach to education and learning. Most notably, it finds Lonergan's third stage of knowing- level of judgment or rationality invaluable to the progressive outlook on education. Among other things, it recommends that learners and teachers at all levels be exposed to Lonergan's theory of knowledge because it would help create in them the right disposition to education and learning- education is not merely a necessity for skill acquisition to earn a quality living; it is essentially a necessity for self awareness and integral self development.*

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Transcendence, Method, Pedagogue, Progressivism, Traditionalism, Education, Learning.

### **Introduction**

Scholars are unanimous in their stand on the inevitability of education to both societal and individual development. There are, however, discordant tunes among them on the right methods by which formal education and learning should be imparted on the learner. The question on the right pedagogy for education and learning is therefore age-long, and it has led to the rise of two broad schools of thought.

First, are those who are described as the traditionalists. They claim that the pedagogue is the ultimate factor in learning. Education or learning is teacher-centered; hence, all that concerns pedagogy depends on the preference of the teacher whose onus it is to interpret the lessons and communicate his understanding and experience of the subject to the learner. In this case, the experience of the learner and how it affects the development of the lesson is immaterial. On the other side of the divide are those described as the progressivists. Their viewpoint on the right pedagogue is almost the opposite of the traditionalist viewpoint. Progressivists insist that true learning and education must be communicated with a pedagogy that is pragmatic, experiential or experimental. Such a method must encourage hands-on activities. Here, the emphasis is on the experience of the learner. Thus, while traditional pedagogy is teacher-centered, progressive pedagogy is child-centered.

Lonergan postulated a transcendental method or pedagogy for education which he called the Generalized Empirical Method, GEM. This method is founded on both pragmatism and empiricism. It is, therefore, more progressivist in approach than traditionalist. There are, nonetheless, areas where the Lonerganian pedagogy differs from the progressivist pedagogy. What is transcendental method (GEM)? In what ways is Lonergan's transcendental method similar to the progressivist method? What are the probable implications of Lonergan's Metaphysical Epistemology to progressive education? This article, set to study Lonerganian Metaphysical Epistemology, is structured to deal with the problems exemplified in the above questions.

### **Life and Intellectual Background of Bernard Lonergan**

Bernard Lonergan was a prominent Canadian Jesuit philosopher, theologian and economist. He lived from 1904 to 1984. He is fondly remembered for his emphasis on the ideal epistemological method. He became the principal architect of what he described as a "generalized empirical method" (par. 2). He was deeply influenced by the theological viewpoints of Karl Rahner and Joseph Marechal, and the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant. Otto Muck affirms that "He is often associated with his fellow Jesuits Karl Rahner and Joseph Marechal- with "transcendental Thomism," i.e., a philosophy which attempts to combine Thomism with certain views or methods commonly associated with Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism" (5). Lonergan etched his philosophical enquiry on epistemology and developed a firm interest on cognitional theory and philosophy

of history. He also had interest in history, culture and human sciences such as sociology, politics and economics. Christopher Dawson's *The Ages of the Gods* and J. A. Stewart's *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* were noted by Lonergan as some writings that shaped the course of his life. Iregebu observes that "While the former introduced him into anthropological notion of culture correcting his hitherto normative or classicist notion, the latter greatly influenced him in bringing his nominalism to an end" (33).

Lonergan was specifically concerned with the methods and modes of knowledge acquisition, not minding the discipline involved. Tad Dunne confirms that:

Lonergan aimed to clarify what occurs in any discipline—science, math, historiography, art, literature, philosophy, theology, or ethics... To account for the disciplines that deal with humans as makers of meaning and values, Lonergan generalized the notion of data to include the data of consciousness as well as the data of sense. From that compound data, one may ascend through hypothesis to verification of the operations by which humans deal with what is meaningful and what is valuable. Hence, a "generalized empirical method" (GEM) (par. 3).

Lonergan does not consider method as mere technique; he views it as a concrete pattern of operations (Farrell and Soukup 325-7). He described 'generalized empirical method,' (G.E.M) as a *critical realism*. With this critical realism, he set out to do for his epoch what Thomas Aquinas did for his own epoch. Aquinas successfully transformed Aristotle's pagan thought on the universe into a Christian understanding of the universe. Lonergan's primary concern with philosophy was to come to terms with modern scientific, historical and hermeneutic thinking in a comparable way using what he described as G. E. M, critical realism. Tad Dunne buttresses, thus: "By realism, in line with the Aristotelian and Thomist philosophies, he affirmed that we make true judgments of fact and of value, and by critical, he aimed to ground knowing and valuing in a critique of the mind similar to that proposed by Kant" (par. 3). This is why Lonergan described his philosophical program as a generalization of empirical method (GEM) to investigate not only data given through exterior sensation, but also the internal data of consciousness (Lonergan, *Insights* 769). Put simply, "Lonergan's method suggests that objects are known while considering the

corresponding operations of the subject and vice versa, experiencing and the subsequent operations of the intellect being components of both knowing and reality” (Henman 3).

### **Lonergan’s Metaphysical Epistemology**

In his metaphysical epistemology, “Lonergan, without being concerned mainly on what is known, considered the process by which what is known is obtained. This he did because he was convinced that through the conscious awareness of the knowing process in operation, one comes to appropriate oneself as a knower” (Iregbenu 58). This is the thrust of his G.M.E- Generalized Empirical Method. The metaphysical approach to knowledge suggested by Lonergan is unique. Tad Dunne underlines this uniqueness, thus:

Among philosophers, metaphysics is the science that identifies the basic concepts about the structures of reality. GEM [Generalized Empirical Method] not only identifies basic concepts about the structures of reality, but also traces them to their sources in the subject. Thus concepts issue from insights, and insights issue from questions, and questions have birthdates, parented by answers to previous generation of questions (par. 4).

Lonergan’s approach reaffirms the primacy of questioning to cognition and knowledge acquisition. This capacity, of course, is attributable to man alone; hence Heidegger’s submission that *Dasein* is that *Being* that has the capacity to raise questions about himself and the world around him. Tad Dunne observes that, to Lonergan, “the so-called raw data are already shaped by the questions that occur to an inquirer. These questions, in turn, contain clues to their answers insofar as the insight we expect is related to the kind of judgment we expect” (par. 4).

Lonergan’s metaphysical approach covers the entirety of the relationship between the processes that guide man’s wonder and the realities he wonders about. His basic assumption is that when these two sets (the processes that guides man’s wonder, and the realities man wonders about) operate successfully, the processes of wonder forms an integrated set isomorphic to the integral dimensions of reality. Tad Dunne illustrates Lonergan’s assumption with the following instance: “For example, the scientific movement from data to hypothesis to verification corresponds to Lonergan’s view that knowing moves from experience to

understanding to judgment, as well as to Aristotle's view that reality consists of potency, form, and act" (Par. 5). Lonergan's metaphysical approach to epistemology, thus, posits metaphysics as comprising of both the mechanism of knowing and the corroborating features of that which is knowable.

### **Knowledge Acquisition via Transcendence**

Lonergan identifies transcendence as the truest path to cognition contrary to the ordinary use of the term as 'the act of rising above something to a superior state.' Lonergan describes his application of the term, thus:

Insight and formulation do not merely reproduce the content of sensible experience but go beyond it. So reflection, the grasp of the unconditioned, and judgment are not content with mere objects of supposing, defining, considering but go beyond them to the universe of facts, of being, of what truly is affirmed and really is. Moreover, one can rest content with knowing things related to us or one can go beyond that and join scientists in searching for knowledge of things as related to one another. One can go beyond both common sense and present science, to grasp the dynamic structure of our rational knowing and doing, then formulate a metaphysics and ethics. Finally one can go beyond and ask whether human knowledge is contained in the universe of proportionate being or goes beyond it to the realm of transcendent being (Lonergan, *Insights* 635).

Tyrell, highlighting on Lonergan's application of the term, notes that, "In a technical philosophical sense, transcendental method may be described as the process through which one heightens awareness of one's cognitional operations and objectifies the process in conceptual accounts" (74). The pattern of operation itself may be seen as a 'radical' transcendental method since it is the ground of all attempts at thematisation ("Lonergan's Philosophy and the Implications for Education," 35). Lonergan, thus, claims that in a way everyone knows and observes transcendental method, as far as one is attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible ("Lonergan's Philosophy and...", 35).

But what is Lonergan's primary concern with transcendence and how does it aid learning and cognition differentiated from other methods? Lonergan replies, thus:

It is a transcendental method, for the results envisaged are not confined categorically to some particular field or subject, but regard any result that could be intended by the completely open transcendental notions. Where other methods aim at meeting the exigences and exploiting the opportunities proper to particular fields, transcendental method is concerned with meeting the exigences and exploiting the opportunities presented by the human mind itself. It is a concern that is both foundational and universally significant and relevant (*Method in Theology*, 14).

Transcendental method, therefore, aims at transforming some unknown into a known. Implicit in the transcendental method is the human pure desire to know, which is the unfolding of a single thrust, the Eros of the human spirit (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” 35). It is in this regard that Lonergan affirms that transcendental method fulfils a heuristic function (*Method in Theology*, 14). That is, “It uses explicit knowledge as a guide to arrive at a fuller knowledge. Transcendental method also aims at fuller authentic living because it is a methodological procedure that actualizes values that we subscribe to” (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” 36). Tyrell avers that “This notion of transcendence can be observed fully in man as a subject of cognitional activities, who is capable not only of spontaneous functioning according to the exigencies of cognition, but also understands and evaluates the nature of these exigencies, and objectifies and thematises them in conceptual accounts” (74).

### **Insight and Learning**

Ordinarily, insight is viewed as the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something. Tekippe underlines that Lonergan uses the term in reference to that mental activity by which the mind grasps the intelligible connections between things that previously had appeared merely disparate. In this case insight may happen quickly or slowly, and memory can play an important role in many insights. Sometimes the present insight is sparked by the memory of a past insight (13). Trial and error, may figure in most instantiations of insights. Tekippe explains that this is because “learning is not a process that leads purely and directly to the truth, but a self- correcting process that bumbles along many a path and dead end until it finds the way out of the maze” (50). Abstraction is also considered as a quality of insight. This means that insight

catches the parallels between two different situations while ignoring all else that is irrelevant (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” (22). Tekippe illustrates this viewpoint with Galileo Galilei’s classic example:

Galileo Galilei, famous among his insights is one which took place in the cathedral of Pisa in 1581, while he was studying there as a young man. A sacristan drew a hanging lamp to himself, worked on it, and then released it. Like a pendulum, its motion described a series of arcs. Galileo noticed something no one else had: though the height of the swings decreased, the time for each complete cycle (period) was the same. Galileo had, of course no wrist watch or stopwatch to time the swings; he measured them by his pulse. His insight, then, was to grasp a connection between the regularity of his pulse and the regularity of the swing (35).

Considering the above instantiation of insight based on Galileo’s experience, insight is abstractive because many extraneous factors were sidelined. In this case, the time of the incident, the age of the sacristan, the colour of the lamp, the weight of the lamp are all abstracted from, in order to concentrate on the interrelation of just two factors: the length of the pendulum, and the time required to traverse one cycle (Tekippe 35).

Lonergan also discussed what he described as ‘inverse insight’. According to him, “while direct insight grasps the point, or sees the solution, or comes to know the reason, inverse insight apprehends that in some fashion the point is that there is no point or the solution is to deny a solution” (*Insight* 19). In other words:

Inverse insight grasps that there is nothing to be understood in a particular situation or in a question. It is not a simple failure to understand but a positive grasp. The understanding is to the effect that the situation or question is unintelligible. An inverse insight then grasps, not the right answer to the question but what is wrong with the question (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” 24).

Insight and inverse insight apart, Lonergan also emphasized the import of oversight to cognition and learning. He describes oversight as “flight from understanding which blocks the insight” (*Insight* xii, xv). More so, “When

oversights are confused with insights the result is decline rather than progress and the blocking of genuine insights. In this case the remedy will be an insight into the oversight, in other words a clear understanding of the flight from understanding” (Lonergan, *Insight*, xii, xv). The following instance is given as a practical case of oversight:

An example of an oversight can be of someone planning for a gathering. Such a person takes into accounts everything which is needed for the people to get from their places and arrive at the place of gathering. After the gathering, there is a problem and confusion because the arrangement of how people would leave the venue and go back to their places was not taken into consideration by the organizer. It was an oversight on the part of the planner not to take into consideration how people would leave the gathering in an ordered manner (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” 24).

### **Human Person as a Knowing Subject**

Lonergan considers the human person as a subject who is both a knower and a doer. That is, the human subject is a being that is both capable of acquiring knowledge and putting the knowledge acquired into practice. This gives credence to the Socratic stance which argued that ‘to know is to do’; hence, knowledge is virtue. The human person, for Lonergan, is therefore a subject capable of awareness and also capable of affirming himself as a knower. This suggests that:

The subject then, is an intelligible, concrete unity- identity-whole characterized by the acts of sensing, perceiving, imagining, enquiring, understanding, formulating, reflecting, judging, deliberating and acting. In addition to this, the subject is conscious or aware of these immanent operations of knowing and acting. The subject also knows that he knows, that is by reduplicating the structure of knowing as observed previously (“Lonergan’s Philosophy and...,” 45)

Lonergan describes this human person who is a subject as an “I”. The “I” is the center of unity of a person’s diverse cognitional act. Without the “I,” the subject that makes meaning of diverse, random human experiences, there would be no cognition and knowledge because such experiences will remain individual



scattered encounters. Tyrell affirms, "The only way that contents on different levels can be combined into a single known is that there is a single knower or subject" (91). Lonergan himself captures the same sentiment in an interrogative raised in his book *Insight*. He asks, "but if there is no 'I' how could there be a 'my experience' with respect to which 'my inquiry occurred'" (325). Knowing, cognition and learning take place through the "I" who makes sense of the random human experience. That the "I" is a knowing subject is a premise that is indubitable; hence, the Cartesian *cogito*. Consequently, "it is paramount to note that the process of knowing which accounts for a single knower is an immanent law which we know in a certain concrete way. Any effort to deny this has to use the same process, thus ending in self contradiction" ("Lonergan's Philosophy and..." 45).

### **Levels of Knowing**

Lonergan avers that knowing is a dynamic structure of conscious operations consisting of three levels, namely; experiencing, understanding, and judging (reflection) (*Insight*, 277). Simply put, "it is gazing, intuiting, contemplating" (Lonergan, *Insight*, 320). He posits that the levels of knowing, though distinct are interrelated dynamically. Therefore, it is only when these levels are completed that we can come to the knowledge of being in the truest sense of knowing.

### **Empirical Level**

This is the first level of knowing or knowledge acquisition. Lonergan suggests that man shares the capacity for knowledge acquisition on this level with animals. Unlike animals, though, the elements of knowing (empirical consciousness) gathered by man in this level serve as springboard for further activities and learning (*Insight* 277). He posits, therefore, that it is in this empirical level that "we sense, perceive, imagine, feel, speak, move" (*Method in Theology* 9). What defines this level in the enterprise of knowledge acquisition "is the fact that it is presupposed and complemented by the level of intelligence, that it supplies, as it were, the raw materials on which intelligence operates, that in a word, given indeed but merely given, open to understanding and formulation but by itself not understood and in itself ineffable" (Lonergan, *Insight* 273). What is implied here is that, at this level, the senses provide human intelligence with the raw materials needed for cognition but raw materials do not constitute knowledge in themselves; hence knowledge acquired at the empirical level is incomplete.

### **Intellectual Level**

This is the second level of knowledge acquisition or knowing. Lonergan avers that at this level, “we inquire, come to understand, work out the presuppositions and implications of our expression” (*Method in Theology* 10). That is, at the intelligence level, “we inquire about our experience, investigate, grow in understanding, express our inventions and discoveries” (Lonergan in Ryan 80). Here, “Understanding grasps in given and imagined presentations an intelligible form emergent in presentations. Conception formulates the grasped idea along with what is essential to the idea in presentations” (Lonergan, *Insight* 275). What is being emphasized here is that “This intellectual level presupposes something to be understood, and that is given by the empirical level. It is that which is given that understanding acts on” (Iregbenu 45). Rusembuka thus affirms that, “Without the data supplied in the empirical level there is neither understanding nor conception and formulation” (62).

At this level, the human subject seeks to understand the sense data. “Intelligence looks for intelligible patterns in presentations and representations” (Lonergan, *Insights* 323). The result is insight by which the subject grasps the unity-identity-whole given in the data (Iregbenu, 46). Lonergan notes that, “what is grasped in insight, is neither an actually given datum of sense nor a creation of the imagination but an intelligible organization that may or may not be relevant to data (*Method in Theology* 10). Tad Dunne elaborates on Lonergan’s second level of knowing, thus: “Our understanding does more than simply distinguish experiences and *name* them. It also *correlates* one set of experiences with another, so that we associate smoke with fire and red sky at night with sailors’ delight” (*Lonergan and Spirituality* 14). Besides distinguishing, naming and correlating experiences, our understanding, as Dunne further noted, can grasp precise relations between different sets of experience, and through this arrive at the idea of cause (*Lonergan and Spirituality* 14). However, even at this second stage of knowing, knowledge is incomplete because, “...what we experience is subject to understanding. But our experience is also subject to misunderstanding. Or we can come up with two different explanations of the same data. So there is a further process of thinking which we call *judgment*” (Dunne, *Lonergan and Spirituality* 15).

### **Rational Level**

This is the third level of knowing or knowledge acquisition according to Lonergan. A primary function of this level is a rational consciousness that emerges with

grasping of the unconditioned and judgment. Lonergan posits that at this level, “we doubt, reflect, marshal and weigh the evidence, and finally judge with certitude or probability that this or that is or is not so” (Lonergan in Tyan and Tyrell 152). Simply put, “At the rational level we subject our insight to judgment. This will demand reflection or reflective understanding” (Iregbenu 49). Here too, we “question our own understanding, check our formulations and expressions, ask whether we have got things right, marshal the evidence *pro* and *con*, judge this to be so and that not to be so” (Lonergan in Tyan and Tyrell 80). Tad Dunne expatiates on the mechanism and import of the third level of knowing, thus:

We do not reach the truth of reality through experience alone. Nor do we accomplish it even through the most brilliant insight into that experience. We reach reality only when we pass judgment on the correctness of our insight. It is only when we check the data again to see whether our understanding leaves no relevant data unexplained that we can say whether or not we understand the reality in question correctly (*Lonergan and Spirituality* 6).

The rational level, thus, helps one to competently affirm or deny, assent or dissent, agree or disagree (Lonergan, *Insight* 273) with a particular object of human experience that results to knowledge. Lonergan suggests that judgment which occurs at this level can be reached or determined in three ways. Iregbenu outlines these ways, thus:

First, it is reached by relating it to propositions. “A proposition, then, may be simply an object of thought, the content of an act of conceiving, defining, thinking, supposing, considering. But a proposition also may be the content of an act of judging; and then it is the content of an affirming or denying, an agreeing or disagreeing, an assenting or dissenting.” Secondly, it is reached by relating it to questions. Questions can be classified into two: questions for reflection that may be met by answering ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ and questions for intelligence that may not be met by answering ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ Put differently, judging is a kind of answering ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to a question for reflection. Thirdly, it is reached by involving a personal commitment. When faced with question for reflection, one can proffer answer assertorically or modally, with certitude or only probability, or,

still, the question can be dismissed, rephrased or substituted. "The variety of possible answers makes full allowance for the misfortunes and shortcomings of the person answering, and by the same stroke it closes the door on possible excuses for mistakes." It therefore means for one to make judgment one has to be personally committed (Iregbenu 50-1).

Consequently, it is necessary to emphasize here that, for Lonergan, knowing goes beyond mere seeing; it entails the conscious operations of experiencing, understanding and judging, which mutually presupposes and complements one another (Iregbenu 51). He affirms strongly that "the third level is alone decisive: until I judge, I am merely thinking; once I judge, I know; as insight draws the definite object of thought from the hazy object of experience, so judgment selects the objects of thought that are objects of knowledge" (Lonergan, *Insight* 340). Marc Smith adds that "the achievement of insight, by itself, is not knowledge; only with the judgment that my insight is adequate, and that there are no further relevant questions, does the subject become a knowing subject" (par. 5).

### **Core Principles of Progressive Education**

Progressive education is a philosophy of education that arose in the 19th century as a reaction against the traditional system of education which was considered inefficacious. The essence of this philosophy of education is captured in the slogan "learn by doing." It is based on the belief that students learn best in real life activities with other people. A progressivist teacher, thus, does not only provide classroom theoretical lessons and drills to the student; he, more importantly, exposes the learner to the practical side of the lesson through real life activities that would capture and improve the experience of the learner. The hands-on approach to teaching and learning is, therefore, essential for progressive education.

According to Washburne, progressive education is not easy to define, simply because it is always changing (8). John Pecore affirms that "Progressive education is continuously progressing; it is alive and growing with no fixed creed, no unchanging body of knowledge, and no specific method to be applied. Just as science and society are constantly changing, progressive education adapts to the progress of science and humanity" (55). Nevertheless, progressive education is viewed today as "a pedagogical movement that emphasizes student-centered learning experiences and that incorporates aspects such as learning by doing,

valuing diversity, integrated curriculum, problem-solving, critical thinking, collaborative learning, social responsibility, democracy, and lifelong learning” (Pecore and Bruce 10). Pecore and Bruce observe that as in the early 1900s, progressive education today means different things to different people. For example, while some progressive education schools focus on learning by projects and others focus on social justice, the important common feature is the situation of learning within a social, community, or political context that some progressive educators may more broadly use to actively promote critical pedagogy and democratic education (10).

John Pecore (56) captures the following as the core principles of progressive education:

- ***Freedom of Development:*** this suggests that students should manage their conduct according to the social needs of the community rather than by arbitrary rules and be provided with opportunities for initiative and self-expression in an environment rich with interesting and freely available materials.
- ***Interest, the Motive of all Work:*** this requires that student interest should be satisfied and developed through direct and indirect experiences with the world and its activities; application of knowledge and integration of subjects; and consciousness of achievement.
- ***The Teacher as Guide, not a Taskmaster:*** progressive education requires that teachers be facilitators of small classes by encouraging student use of their senses; training students to observe and make judgments; mostly guiding students to use various sources of information, including lived experiences and books; providing support for student reasoning about acquired information; and expressing forceful conclusions reached logically.
- ***Scientific Study of Student Development:*** assessment of student should not be limited to grades but should include both objective and subjective reports on the physical, mental, moral, and social attention on the all-important work of student development rather than simply teaching subject matter.
- ***Greater Attention to all that affect the Student’s Physical Development:*** this emphasizes the importance of good health to learning and cognition. Health of the student should be the first priority of schools by providing adequate space for movement, good light and air, clean and well-ventilated buildings, and easy access to and frequent use of adequate playgrounds and the outdoors.

- ***Cooperation between School and Home to Meet the Needs of the Student:*** progressivists view parents as critical stakeholders in the education enterprise. Parents and teachers should intelligently cooperate to provide as much of the natural interest and activities for practical experience, to include homemaking and healthful recreation for both boys and girls. All, if not most, student studying should be done at school, and extracurricular studies should be at school or home to dissipate unnecessary energy. Parents should know what the school is doing and why and ways to effectively cooperate; teachers should help parents develop a broad outlook on education and provide help by making school resources available.
- ***The Progressive School a Leader in Educational Movements:*** The school should be a laboratory of new ideas – which, if warranted, are encouraged- and lead movements in education, combined with the best of the past, and added to the sum of educational knowledge, rather than schools being ruled by tradition alone.

### **Metaphysical Epistemology and Progressive Education: Implications**

Lonergan's transcendental approach to education founded on his generalized empirical method (GEM) shares some crucial elements with the progressivist approach to education. This suggests that like progressivism, metaphysical epistemology rejects the traditional pedagogy which lays greater emphasis on the teacher than the learner. Therefore, Lonergan joins other advocates of progressive education like John Dewey and Paulo Freire to emphasize the need for a learner-friendly pedagogy that is founded on pragmatism, learner-experience, dialogue and experimentation. In this regard, Lonergan's approach to education and learning, like the progressivist approach, also emphasizes the need for the curriculum to be learner-centered.

There are, however, critical elements of Lonergan's transcendental method to learning that could be adapted to the progressivist method in order to improve upon the learning output of learners. Let us reflect on these elements.

### **The Human Subject, Global Education and Curriculum Development**

Lonergan describes the human subject as the knowing subject. This subject has consciousness as one of his greatest attributes. The human subject, as captured by Lonergan, is devoid of cultural, racial or ethnic diversity. This suggests that every human person, all things been equal, has similar capacity for education and

learning. Lonergan's viewpoint that the human subject is fundamentally a knowing subject with consciousness, therefore, projects education and learning as universal concepts. Accordingly, Smith observes that given our modern awareness of the diversity of cultures, and in an age where there is a possibility of shared perspectives in the face of increasing evidence of divergent and even conflicting views, the issue raised is whether there is, or can there be any common, universal and normative basis which could provide grounding or a starting point for collaboration and cooperation in education, the humanities, and the sciences (Smith, par. 9). That is, does cultural diversity preclude the possibility of a unified learner-centered curriculum for the education of students in all parts of the globe? If the human subject and the human consciousness of the European, Asian, American, African, and Christian or Arabian person is the same, isn't it implied that persons from different cultures are yet capable of similar learning capacities when exposed to similar learning conditions?

In this contemporary era when the scourge of racism appears to be on the upsurge, the metaphysical epistemology of Bernard Lonergan whose reference point is the human person as a 'knowing' and 'conscious' subject, plays the role of mediator among cultures and worldviews, especially in education. Lonergan's thought is important because it is fundamentally grounded in and methodically sustained by an integral philosophy of human consciousness, which, arguably, is what constitutes the roots of learning.

### **Ideal Education is a Self Encounter**

Lonergan's transcendental approach to education and learning emphatically emphasizes the primacy of the self of the learner as the supreme vehicle of learning. The 'self' of the learner refers to the learner's capacity for knowing, his consciousness, his innate abilities and possibilities of being, his experiences, his environment and all around him that he socializes with. Lonergan, like Socrates, portrays self knowledge as both a prerequisite and the goal of qualitative learning and character formation through education. He notes, "as always enlightenment is a matter of the ancient precept, know thyself" (Lonergan, *Natural Rights and Historical Mindedness* 179). In reference to human action, this may be reinterpreted as "Be thyself." The weight of this imperative basically lies in its transformative character to effect radical change in the way we see ourselves, others, and the world. Thus, the integral transformation of the human situation through the process of critical reflection is the purpose of education (Centano, par. 10). This is

why progressive education emphasizes that the interests of the learner be prioritized in education. Lonergan goes beyond interests to emphasize the 'whole self' of the learner- his essence as the human person. Education for Lonergan is, hence, more targeted to character and integral wellbeing than mere skill acquisition or the material welfare of the learner.

Any educational enterprise that does not challenge the learner to encounter himself and know himself better is not integral; it falls short of the Lonerganian standard. What Lonergan's transcendental philosophy of knowing and doing intends to teach is: *know thyself* and *be thyself*. ("Lonergan's Philosophy and...", 52). It seeks to make the individual learner an attentive subject. It calls on the learner to be intelligent in insights and to be reasonable in his judgment. By doing so, one can be responsible in one's conduct. Jacques Maritain's acquiesces with this position. He notes:

In a more precise manner, the aim of education is to guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person armed with knowledge, strength of judgment and moral virtues, while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nations and the civilization in which he is involved, and preserving in this way the century- old achievements of generations (10).

### **Generalized Empirical Method: Ideal for Teaching and Learning**

Lonergan developed a transcendental method for learning describes as Generalized Empirical Method, GEM. The GEM not only identifies basic concepts about the structures of reality, but also traces them to their sources in the subject. A method, in a general sense, is a way to learning. Centano submits that, for Lonergan, learning is a self-correcting method of discovering oneself, and thereby being oneself by discriminating the shortcomings of the contents of knowledge (Centano, par. 17). In this vein, "Learning then follows the transcendental guidelines: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible. This means that the success of an integral learning process involves keeping the transcendental educational imperatives" ("Lonergan's Philosophy and...", 53).

Lonergan posits that "the function of method is to spell out for each discipline the implications of the transcendental precepts, be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible" (*Philosophy of God and Theology* 48). These



transcendental precepts which form the imperatives of education and learning are expatiated below:

Being attentive is the act of consciously attending to what is there, perhaps by phenomenological analysis. This means to observe things as they are, it is to perceive our experience clearly and accurately. The imperative of being intelligent, commands us to understand the pattern of our experiences, even the whole of our life. In practice, intelligence is the grasp of an issue in its entirety without being encumbered by its details; this implies a grasp of insight. Being reasonable implies achieving a determinate evaluation of what needs to be decided on through critical discernment, out of the available choices. The final command of being responsible, consummates the movement of the other imperatives and of the dynamic structure of rational self-consciousness. It implies bearing witness to the truth (*Philosophy of God and Theology* 48).

Education is then supposed to be an instrument that helps the individual to broaden his worldview through the attainment of manifold insights about world. Lonergan submits that “the process of learning is the gradual accumulation of insights bearing on a single domain” (Lonergan, *Insight* 286). He admits that “such learning is not without teaching. For teaching is the communication of insight. It throws clues, the pointed hints that lead to insight. It cajoles attention to drive away the distracting images that stand in insight’s way” (*Insight* 286). This means that insight has great implications for teaching and learning, because what appears simple to the teacher because he has grasped the insight, may be puzzling and complicated to the student. Also, the teacher, who already has the insight, can point out the pattern to be recognized, emphasize what is similar, and play down what is irrelevant. The teacher cannot, however, have the insight for the student (*Philosophy of God and Theology* 54). That remains a personal acquisition. This is the essence of the transcendental method; what constitutes knowledge to the student must be entirely a product of the experience of the student- result of his self encounter with the object of knowledge which, in turn, leads him to self awareness.

### **Three Levels of Knowing and the Progressive Education**

Lonergan's emphasized experience, understanding and judgment as critical aspects of learning. He posits that knowledge passes through three levels- level of experience, level of understand and the rational level. These levels are different but interrelated. True learning, according to this viewpoint, takes place only at the rational level. This is because it is only at this third level that the learner begins to apply the elements of knowledge acquired at the first and second level into practical use through decision making (judgment). This has thorough implications for progressive education.

Unlike the Lonerganian viewpoint, progressive education emphasizes more the first level- that learning be based on the experience of the learner. This is good but not adequate. Although the progressivist stance could lead to understanding which is Lonergan's second stage of knowing, it may not lead to true knowledge which is the third stage where the learner is able to apply knowledge acquired to decision making (judgment). The true essence of education is integral development of the learner, and until education is able to affect positively the mode of being of the learner (his daily judgment or decision making), it remains lacking in integrality. Education is not just about cognitive development. It is more about the development of the whole person- integral development. While the progressive and even traditional pedagogy may lead to cognitive development, both would struggle to attain the goals of integral development; hence, the need for Lonergan's transcendental approach.

### **Conclusions**

Education and learning are critical to human development and the preservation of human existence in the cosmos. This is why, from time immemorial, scholars have been concerned with the right pedagogy for the transfer of knowledge. In the realm of philosophical speculation, issues concerning knowledge fall within the purview of epistemology. This article studied Lonergan's transcendental epistemology with emphasis on his transcendental learning method. Effort was made to strike relations between Lonergan's presuppositions and those of advocates of progressive education.

The core of Lonergan's transcendental method is instantiated in his tripartite division of the stages of learning. Although his postulations are not devoid of imperfections, Lonergan's transcendental approach presents important elements that could improve on the pragmatic approach to learning projected by

progressivists. Among many others, his position that true learning takes place at the third stage of knowledge acquisition- what he described as the level of rationality, is a remarkable upgrade on the progressive method.

A learner that imbibes the Lonerganian transcendental method to knowing will not only acquire knowledge; he will also be able to integrate the knowledge acquired to problem-solving. Such a student or pupil would realize that education is not just a necessity to acquire a skill and earn a living. It is, more importantly, a means of self awareness and self development. This realization would enable the student to approach education and learning with the right predisposition; hence eschewing the negative tendencies, like examination malpractices, truancy, etc that students usually indulge in other to escape the rigours of ideal education.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study of Lonergan's metaphysical epistemology and its impact on progressive education, the following are recommended:

- Teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders in the educational enterprise should respect the importance of the learners' experience to integral education. Therefore, the learning programme should be structured in suchwise that it recognizes the primacy of the learners' experience to education and learning.
- Employers of labour and skilled personnel at all levels of the economy- private or government should deemphasize ownership of certificate as the primary requirement for employment. In line with Lonergan's epistemology, emphasis should be placed on competence and productivity. This is because learning is not theory but practice, and true learning is productivity- the ability to make impassionate and invaluable judgment.
- Teachers, parents and other stakeholders of education should instill the Socratic dictum "Knowledge is Virtue" on students. This is in line with Lonergan's position that the ideal education is targeted at self knowledge and integral self development. Therefore, anyone that passes through school with an excellent certification, and yet lacking in moral and human formation is uneducated. This disposition would help eschew the tendency toward examination malpractice that is becoming prevalent in some climes since the students' focus on education would be shifted from certification to self development.

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