

# Lonergan's Theory of Historiography and His Metaphysical Presuppositions

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## Abstract

*This article focuses on the importance that Lonergan attributes to historical knowledge (historiography). After having traced the cultural and ecclesial climate that led him to take an interest in the question, this text presents the ambitious project by Lonergan denominated "transcendental method" and of the "functional specializations" in which he articulates this method. Then it analyses the functional specialty "History" and the various related themes: the presuppositions of his theory of historiography, historical objectivity and perspectivism, and the role of values in historical knowledge. In the conclusion, a critical balance is formulated starting from the aspects raised.*

**Keywords:** Historicity, historiography, metaphysics, perspectivism, systematics, Vatican II

The name of the Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard J.F. Lonergan (1904-1984) is often associated to his main work *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (1953)<sup>1</sup>. Through this work, his intention was to transpose the fundamental Thomistic acquisitions in the cultural background of his time, characterized by scientific revolution and post-Kantian philosophy. He afforded the study of the insight inasmuch as he intended both to find an invariant basis from which all the different sciences depend and to favour knowledge integration.

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<sup>1</sup> Lonergan 1992.

On 1953 Lonergan came back to the old continent to teach systematic theology at the Gregorian University in Rome up to 1965: it was the same university where he had prepared his doctorate about *gratia operans* in Thomas Aquinas a decade before (1940)<sup>2</sup>. This change of place came out to be very favourable for his research, as he encountered the continental philosophies, especially historicism, existentialism and hermeneutics.

He addressed his studies towards human historicity and historiography. His interest for human historicity led him to recognize the social and cultural influences on human consciousness, as well as to acknowledge a cultural pluralism, in spite of the vision of a normative and universal culture in which, according to him, the Catholic theology had closed itself in the last centuries<sup>3</sup>. He deepened his reflection on consciousness from a historical/cultural point of view in particular through the notion of "meaning", going beyond the mainly transcendental analysis begun in *Insight*. His interest for historiography arose from his knowledge of the XIX century German Historical School, after he read some XX century works on historicism and hermeneutical philosophy<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Lonergan, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Following the reflections of the German philologist Bruno Snell, Lonergan named this cultural vision "classicism". With this term he indicated the vision according to which circumstances were something accidental, but a substance, a nucleus, a stable, fixed, immutable root rested beyond them. He stated also: "To confine the Catholic Church to a classicist mentality is to keep the Catholic Church out of the modern world and to prolong the already too long prolonged crisis within the Church"; see "Doctrinal Pluralism" at 75 (in Lonergan, 1996b: 70–104).

<sup>4</sup> First, Lonergan read three classics of the historiographical method of the late XIX century: the *Historik* (1857-1882) of Johann G. Droysen, the *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode* (1889) of Ernst Bernheim, and the *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898) of Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos. For historicism, his interest was for Wilhelm Dilthey, and more marginally for Friedrich Meinecke and Max Weber. For the interpretation of the historicism, he read mostly Karl Heussi, Erich Rothacker, Peter Hünemann, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. He gave great attention to the French historian Henri-Irénée Marrou. For the English and American historiography, one has to mention mostly Carl L. Becker, and Robin G. Collingwood, in the second place Arnold J. Toynbee, Eric Voegelin, and Christopher Dawson, to a lesser extent George P. Gooch, Bruce Mazlish, Patrick Gardiner, and Fritz

From this study, Lonergan reached the conviction that it was time for theology to abandon the Neo-Scholastic *Denkform* to face the historical critical research and its interpretation of the Christian sources. In fact, the painful event of modernism seemed to be over after Pio XII's last remarks against the *nouvelle théologie*, while the historical studies had invaded the theological knowledge thanks to the forward direction of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council.

Anyway, Lonergan was a "systematic" theologian. So, he had understood the impossibility to proceed with the old speculative theology style, but at the same time he did not want the theological knowledge could get lost in the labyrinth of the historical and philological studies. His aim was to link and reconcile history and theology. However, the relationship between history (exegesis, history of dogma, etc.) and systematics (speculative theology) required a base within a wider frame. He found such base at the end of his route from *Insight* to the publication of *Method in Theology* twenty years later (1972)<sup>5</sup>, a route undertaken with the aim of establishing what he called a "transcendental method", suitable to lay the foundations of the single methods used in the different fields of knowledge. Lonergan organized this method in some functional specialties. Among them he described "History", to which he gave the goal to establish (through the rational judgment) the real development of the past events. As regards this goal, one has to verify whether the fact, that Lonergan found "History" on the metaphysical knowledge expressed in *Insight* and in particular on the rational judgment, really allows to ascribe his historiographical theory within the historiography of histo-

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Stern. Lonergan also studied the contributions of the philologist Snell and the philosophers Ernst Cassirer and Gadamer. On Lonergan's approach on these authors (see Guglielmi, 2015: 61–154).

<sup>5</sup> Lonergan, 2017b.

rians, or rather within a critical and epistemological philosophy of history<sup>6</sup>.

### **1. Transcendental method and functional specialties**

The methodological question recurred up to *Method in Theology*, but there through the more sophisticated project of the so-called "functional specialties", on which his transcendental method has been articulated. He defines this method in these terms:

It is a method, for it is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. It is a transcendental method, for the results envisaged are not confined categorially to some particular field or subject, but regard any result that could be intended by the completely open transcendental notions<sup>7</sup>.

The starting point was the same of *Insight*: the analysis of all the stages of the knowledge process. However, the increase of level number of the formally dynamic structure of intentional consciousness was a novelty.

According to the Canadian philosopher, the individual person is characterized by a stream of spontaneous self-arranged operations, which constitute the intentional consciousness as a dynamic, norma-

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<sup>6</sup> Here I will not focus on the question of the relationship between history and systematics in Lonergan's thought according to the line of the speculative approach of R.M. Doran (1990; 2012; 2005). Rather, I will adhere to a historiographical research perspective. Thus, my study has a greater affinity with the works of Th.J. McPartland (2001; 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See Lonergan 2017b: 17-8. Our author uses this adjective carefully to avoid misunderstandings. He it therefore distinguishes the transcendental in the scholastic sense that opposes the categorical, and the transcendental in a Kantian sense that reveals the conditions of possibility of knowledge of an object. Of course he connects here to the "transcendental" in the Kantian sense.

tive and invariant structure. In detail, Lonergan identified four levels of consciousness.

The first one, so called "experiential", is made up by all the operations the person follows in his sensory extroversion: feeling, paying attention, and imagining. Lonergan underlines that in this first stage the person is present to himself as experiencing, and expresses his intentionality by paying attention and selecting data.

The data of sense, in turn, are a substratum for higher activities, which spontaneously arise in the person urged by his need to investigate data, find an intelligible connection and finally reach understanding. Lonergan calls this second level "intellectual", because it is the result of questions for intelligence, such as "what is it?", "why?", "how?". Following these questions, the empirical data are investigated, examined, and definitions, postulates, conjectures, hypotheses, and theories about them are formulated. So the intelligent individual goes beyond the experiential individual, because through insight grasps an intelligible connection in the data and among them. Then, what is reached in the insight is expressed in concepts. These are the final product of the intelligent individual's activity (supposing, thinking, considering, grasping, formulating, defining) and in particular of his insight, which is a key operation of the whole knowledge process.

However, according to Lonergan, the individual is not satisfied to formulate hypotheses, conjectures or concepts. In fact, human investigation does not stop at the questions for intelligence, but goes on with the question for reflection: "is it true?". This question expresses the further intentional energy of the individual who wishes to overcome imagination, idea, theory, concepts and systems, and asks himself whether what was carefully experimented and cleverly understood is really true or not. So the third level of consciousness reveals the rational individual who, avoiding the conflict among the understood results, wants to be subjected only by the truth criterion, that

is to establish what is, or is not, real. In Lonergan's opinion, a complete knowledge is reached only by the rational judgment. Pretentious ideas, brilliant theories, thorough thinking systems are not enough; we need to judge the truthfulness and rationality of these thoughts. Through the judgment, Lonergan insists, the individual grasps something, and such grasping is not a mere logical process, a mechanical abstraction, but a new insight, by which the individual becomes conscious that there are no other relevant questions from which further insights may arise to complete or modify the previous insight<sup>8</sup>.

However, aside from experience, questions for intelligence and concepts, questions for reflection and judgments, also questions for deliberation do emerge in the human mind: this is the fourth level of consciousness, the level of the existential individual who has to manage decisions, freedom, self-control, and the direction he wants to give to his life. According to Lonergan, this fourth level gives man the chance to reach a more complete self-transcendence compared to the results of the previous levels. In fact, by passing from a level to the next one the individual gets only a partial self-transcendence, while it is only at this fourth level, the moral one, that he gets a real existential self-transcendence. By asking himself "what have I to do?", "is it worthwhile?" and performing the specific operations (conscious deliberation, reliable valuation, free decision, and action) outcoming from these questions, the individual, Lonergan concludes, oversteps knowledge opening himself to the universe of values and to the responsible action.

In this way, Lonergan explains the intentionality of consciousness as related to a variation of levels. The individual experiences and realizes more and more his own subjectivity when he moves from the simple sense operation (empirical consciousness) to intellectual oper-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lonergan, 1992: 309.

ation (intelligent consciousness), to judgment on intellectual results (rational consciousness), and to practice of his own freedom (moral consciousness)<sup>9</sup>.

Then, starting from his investigation of the human cognitive and deliberative activity, the Canadian philosopher traced two sets of “functional specialties”, each set with four specialties, with aims and results similar to those of the four levels of consciousness (at this point, we are interested to the first set). In fact, as the result reached at the experience level consists in the discovery and collection of data, so the specialty “Research” (for example, textual criticism) pursues the goal to search for pertaining data and make them available to the students for their researches. And, as at the second level of consciousness, that of the intelligence, one grasps the connection among the discovered data, so “Interpretation” has to understand the meaning that the author intended for a text made now available by “Research”. Again, as the reason confirms, through judgment, the existence or not existence of truth, so the “History” specialty has to establish what had really happened in the past. Finally, as at the fourth level, that of decision, the individual struggles with a practical choice and with what this choice implies (values conflict), so “Dialectic”, meant as evaluative history, has to recognize and highlight conflicts about values, facts, meanings and experiences in view of their further resolution<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> With other words, Lonergan wrote: “On all four levels, we are aware of ourselves but, as we mount from level to level, it is a fuller self of which we are aware and the awareness itself is different” (Lonergan, 2017b: 13).

<sup>10</sup> The primary interest of Lonergan is directed to the application of functional specialties, derived from the transcendental method, to theology. In continuity with the theological tradition of the *auditus fidei* and of the *intellectus fidei*, Lonergan distributes this project in two distinct phases of the theological exercise. A first phase “mediates” the past of the Christian tradition; a second phase, called “mediated”, deals with formulating and applying the Christian message to the present cultural context. In other words, the first phase assumes the task of using all the resources of historical-critical and hermeneutical research to meet the constitutive past of a particular religious tradition. The second phase undertakes to

Lonergan defined these specialties as “functional” because they refer to the operations of consciousness, which every student performs. However, even if each student of whichever field works at all the four levels of consciousness (experimenting, understanding, judging, and deciding), the difference of the specialties is based on the fact that each of them works to reach its own goal. For example, Lonergan pointed out that in “Research” a textual critic works not only at the experience level, as if he ignores the other consciousness levels, but has to choose the right method (decision level) to reach the discovery (intelligence level) of what he may reasonably affirm (judgment level) that it has been written in the original text (experience level). In other words, the textual critic works on all the four levels, though his aim is the end of the first level, that is establishing the data<sup>11</sup>. Lonergan extended this argument to the other specialties, as they are interdependent and alternating in a cumulative process: “Interpretation” depends on “Research”, and vice versa; “History” depends on both “Research” and “Interpretation”, and provides them a context and prospects within which they can work; “Dialectic” depends on “History”, “Interpretation”, and “Research” and, at the same time, provides heuristic structures to “Interpretation” and “History”<sup>12</sup>.

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elaborate a theological discourse capable of integrating itself fully into the present of the believing community, and more generally of the culture. Because of this double articulation, according to Lonergan, in theology there are not four, but eight functional specialties. The first phase is ascending (from the connection to experience to the connection to responsible choice); it is common to theology and other human sciences: theology *in oratione obliqua*; it consists of the specialties “Research”, “Interpretation”, “History” and “Dialectic”. The second phase is descending (in an inverted order, from the connection to responsible choice to the connection to experience); it is peculiar of theology: theology *in oratione recta*; it consists of the specialties “Foundations”, “Doctrines”, “Systematics”, and “Communications”. Cf. Lonergan, 2017b: 120–130.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ib.*: 128.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ib.* 134–135.

## 2. Critical history

In his *Method in Theology* Lonergan got back the *Insight* transcultural basis to provide a methodological groundwork to the varied world of culture that, in his opinion, until then did not have a methodological unification. Thus, this second work, even if it attests (in *kulturgeschichtlich* terms) a number increase of research fields (meaning, hermeneutics, and historiography), must be read in formal continuity with *Insight*. On the other hand, this continuity is guaranteed by the same epistemological and metaphysical system on which the historiography theory of *Method in Theology* is based. As an example, we may refer to the closeness of *History* to rational consciousness. A historiography based on a reflective understanding, like Lonergan's one, must have the goal of establishing (judgment) what happened. But even before going through this central aspect, we find the connection with the knowledge doctrine presented in *Insight* in the distinction between experience, intelligence, and historical judgment that opens the § 2 "Historical experience and historical knowledge" of chapter "History" in *Method in Theology*. As Lonergan thought that knowledge was made up of experience, intelligence, and judgment, so he believed that the historical knowledge was the result of historical experience, historical intelligence, and historical judgment. Historical experience represents the first form of history, that is living or existential history, and extends also to a first and rudimentary objectification, defined as "pre-critical history" by Lonergan himself. Historical intelligence and historical judgment work the passage from existential history to putting it to theme, and so represent the "critical history".

As for the first form of history, the existential history (*res gestae*) or living tradition, which forms a community, it was defined by Lonergan as "history that it is written about". This existential history is well expressed by the psychological time, that is the stream of acts

made by a conscious individual, which extends to the past through memories and to the future through expectations<sup>13</sup>.

Lonergan defined the objectification of existential history, the *historia rerum gestarum*, simply as "history that is written". It is this kind of history that underlines the passage from the historical experience to history meant as a methodologically based knowledge of the past. However, the passage into scientific history does not occur immediately, but gradually. The first objectifications of existential history, such as autobiographies (in the form of diaries or memories) or biographies, are still simple and rudimental stories. Lonergan included in pre-critical history also the narration of particular events<sup>14</sup>. These have the aim to promote the knowledge and the identity of a group. Lonergan did not define this kind of stories with other names, but they can be led back to the category of Croce's "pseudo-history"<sup>15</sup>. In fact, in Lonergan's opinion pre-critical history is characterized by its intent to narrate (chronicle), persuade the reader, and defend its own community from external detractors (poetic and oratorical stories) and so on.

Unlike pre-critical history, critical history does not turn anymore towards simple details or proof collection, nor does pursue apologetic goals. According to Lonergan, the aim of critical history is to grasp changes, processes, and developments (co-operations, institutions, relations, values) which have caused a situation of standstill or, otherwise, the decline or ruin of a group or nation<sup>16</sup>. Although this goal is very different from the simple narration of chronicles, Lonergan added that a historian cannot fulfill his job by resorting to an abstract logic, either theological (theology of history) or dialectic (philosophy of history), but he always has to refer to real human individuals and

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. "Time and Meaning" at 106-08 (in Lonergan, 1996a: 94-121).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lonergan, 2017b: 171-173.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Croce, 1921: 11-45.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Lonergan, 2017b: 173-183.

to their specific actions. At the same time, critical history gives a more complete vision of the past than the previous forms of history, even if it refers to the roughness of life. Hence, this assertion opens up the analysis of the theoretical nucleus of Lonergan's historiographical reflection and of his metaphysical foundation.

### **3. Metaphysical structure and historiographical theory**

In his *Insight* Lonergan worded metaphysics as the integral heuristic structure of the being proportionate to human knowledge. In this structure, Lonergan included and identified the act of knowing and the known content; he affirmed that, while the "content" of a cognitive action is still unknown until a specific knowledge is reached, the same cannot be said about the general characteristics of the "act" used for this knowledge. As a matter of fact, these characteristics are known, and can provide a premise for the content that has to be known. Therefore, Lonergan linked the metaphysical elements of potency, form and act to the operations that cause knowledge (that is, experience, insight, and rational judgment). Through this heuristic and transcendental setting of metaphysics, Lonergan wanted to overcome the dogmatic and fixed concept of metaphysics on which philosophers like Cassirer had already worked, and to open it to a confrontation with science and common sense. The metaphysical knowledge was no more conceived as an exclusive knowledge that keeps out all other knowledge, but as taking over the results of the other knowledge integrating them in a coherent view<sup>17</sup>.

According to this premise, Lonergan affirmed that metaphysics also gives the methodological and epistemological conditions of "History". In fact, he confirmed his metaphysical vision also about historical knowledge. Beyond sensism, idealism, and naive realism, he be-

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<sup>17</sup> Cf Lonergan, 1992: 418–419.

lieved, on one side, that the object is different from the subject and, on the other side, that the object has the characteristics of the same cognitive process of the subject. If, in general, the being represents all that can be attentively "experimented", cleverly "understood", and rationally "judged", in the same way historiography, as a particular knowledge within the wider metaphysical horizon, has to retrace the same epistemological and ontological structure. So, according to Lonergan, we can get a real historical knowledge only through the judgment operation, because only through a factual judgment ("it is it really so!") the subject can catch and recognize an object of thinking as something belonging to the absolute realm of being. Then, historical judgment is just a specific case of application of reflective understanding. By the judgment, the historical inquiry finally grasps the actual evidence and the historian can determine what had happened in the past<sup>18</sup>. Only within this speculative background it is possible to understand why Lonergan insisted in thinking that "History", even if connected with the specialties "Research" (experience) and "Interpretation" (understanding), has a higher aim as its goal: to present what has happened, stressing on the rational judgment formulated after having grasped a virtually unconditioned. And indeed, in Lonergan's system, this complete knowledge can be reached only at the third level, by the rational judgment<sup>19</sup>.

Hence, in Lonergan's opinion, the historical judgment is an operation overcoming "Interpretation", because – and this is a crucial point of his theory – the task of the prior specialty "Interpretation" is to settle, through the study of witnesses, what an author or a personality of the past meant (meaning), while it is only "History" that properly knows, because only the historian, by weighing the testimo-

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lonergan 2017b: 217.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ib.*: 128.

nial evidences,<sup>20</sup> formulates the judgment on how the events of the past had actually taken place. This historical judgment goes very over the meaning found in "Interpretation", because critical history discovers something that, up to then, has been merely "experimented" and "understood", but not properly "known"<sup>21</sup>. By giving to the functional specialty "History" a specific goal and result, Lonergan did not intend to affirm that "History" only accomplishes the operations of the corresponding consciousness level. Within every specialty, all the operations of the four levels of consciousness are in act<sup>22</sup>, but the operations of the other three levels have to be considered as functional to the purposes of the specialty of the main level taken into account. That is why the historian operates also at the second level, that of intelligence (understanding), but the historical intelligence is here at the service of the superior and specific goal: judging (rational knowledge) how facts had really developed. Hence the same historical intelligence cannot be compared to the intelligence or understanding proper of "Interpretation". The goal of "Interpretation" is to understand what the authors meant, while the intelligence of "History", overcoming the intentions of authors, wants to understand the object to which the sources referred.

Lonergan recalled some meaningful points in order to clarify the peculiarity of historical intelligence. First, it is necessary to identify

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<sup>20</sup> Lonergan conceived the same reorganization of the testimonies as a simple re-edition of the historical experience, and not as a historical knowledge. He believed that only by this knowledge it is possible to grasp the evidence of the testimonies and then to establish what was really happening (see Lonergan, 2017b: 175). However, arguing that by the only search for evidence the contemporary (or the historian) produces a mere "re-edition" of historical experience, Lonergan seems not to recognize the fact that the heuristic phase already represents a distance away and an interpretation of the historical experience. Any contemporary (or historian) always selects the material according to personal interests.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ib.*: 182.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Lonergan recognized that the interpreter also operates at the four levels of consciousness, experimenting, understanding, judging, and evaluating; nevertheless, the purpose of the interpretation, according Lonergan, remains to understand the meaning of a text (see *Ib.*: 158).

authors and set them in their space and time, to study their environment, to verify which goals they had in their writing, who their readers were, which their sources were and what use they did of them. This is a step to the first goal of the historical intelligence, that is to understand what the authors of the sources intended to do and how they did it. From this result, it was possible for Lonergan to face the proper object of the historical intelligence: "understanding the process referred to in one's sources" and so "determining [judgment] what was going forward in the community"<sup>23</sup>. This passage from the historical intelligence to the historical judgment occurs through a self-correcting learning process: a combination of questions, intellections, conjectures and images gives origin to further questions, to a more accurate selection of the testimonial evidences and to further intellections resulting from the obtained historical discoveries. New connections and interconnected entireties come out gradually, the arrangement process goes on more and more; intellections are no more vulnerable<sup>24</sup> and the historical research comes to an end. If no further questions are presented, the historian can "affirm" that, on the basis of what turned out to him, the issue is closed. However, this assertion occurs only by the operation of the rational judgment. Only the historian is able to detach himself from the personalities and their intentions, in order to establish (historical judgment) what has happened in a group or in a community. At this point, one of the cornerstones of Lonergan's theory comes out clearly: the difference between the goal of interpretation and that of history, a difference that plunges its roots in Lonergan's epistemological theory that does not exchange

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<sup>23</sup> *Ib.*: 177.

<sup>24</sup> On vulnerable and invulnerable insights, cf. Lonergan, 1992: 309.

understanding (*Verstand*) with the faculty of judgment, but distinguishes understanding from judging<sup>25</sup>.

From these Lonergan's statements about historical knowledge based on the rational judgment, it is easy to recognize the peculiar influence of the Thomistic philosophy, in particular of the judgment grasping the absolute and unconditioned aspect of an object of thinking (concept). Furthermore, we may consider the wider plan of the functional specialties of *Method in Theology*, which also includes the four specialties "Foundations", "Doctrines", "Systematics", and "Communications", all devised by Lonergan as specific cases of theology<sup>26</sup>. At this point, we think that these last four specialties conditioned the elaboration of the specialties of the first phase, those having the task to meet the past and a value not only for the theological matter. Actually, the theological concern to mediate the Christian message into the present cultural context, that is the systematic and pastoral perspective of theology, not only brought Lonergan to duplicate the functional specialties when referring to the theological knowledge, but also prevailed over the previous specialties "Research", "Interpretation", "History", and "Dialectic", assigning them concerns in some way opposed to their character and making the positive knowledge connected to these specialties subordinate or oriented to the theological reflection.

But this is just the point: if "History" (like the other three specialties of the first phase) was just a regional area of interest within the wider metaphysic horizon, Lonergan could not but set the historical knowledge within this specific architecture of knowledge. A mean-

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<sup>25</sup> "Understanding grasps in given or imagined presentations an intelligible form emergent in the presentations. Conception formulates the grasped idea along with what is essential to the idea in the presentations. Reflection asks whether such understanding and formulation are correct. Judgment answers that they are or are not." (Lonergan, 1992: 300).

<sup>26</sup> See above, note 10.

ingful validation on this matter can be found in an image used in *Method in Theology* to define the task of "History":

In military terms history is concerned, not just with the opposing commanders' plan of the battle, not just with the experiences of the battle had by each soldier and officer, but with the actual course of the battle as the resultant of conflicting plans now successfully and now unsuccessfully executed (Lonergan, 2017b: 168).

We may transpose this statement in terms of the isomorphism elaborated in *Insight* between the acts of knowledge and the ontological structure of every kind of reality proportioned to the knowledge process. Then, this statement means that, as through the judgment the subject overcomes the data collected from experience (potency) and the hypotheses of intelligence (form) in order to catch the reality just like it "is" (act), so through the historical judgment we go beyond "Research", which collects the personal evidence of the soldiers and the officials about the battle, and beyond "Interpretation", which collects the meanings intended and planned by each single chief, in order to catch the "actual" development of the battle.

The image of the battle unequivocally sets Lonergan's theoretical standing about historiography, and at the same time allows some basic observations and objections. First of all, it reconfirms a well circumscribed idea of "Interpretation", divergent from an ontological idea of hermeneutics. Secondly, by insisting on the judgment that catches the actual development of the battle, Lonergan seems to wink just at the objectivistic idea of historiography, especially in its positivist version, from which he had tried to distance himself. Finally, having considered the metaphysical ground on which Lonergan based the functional specialty "History", we have to acknowledge that Lon-

ergan's historiographical theory involves an excess of the transcendental over history, and so it moves towards an epistemological philosophy of history rather than on the way of the historiography practiced by historians. Therefore, historians' historiography seems to move towards other directions compared to this epistemological philosophy of history, which insists specifically on the rational judgment. In general the historians deal with disciplinary epistemology (method, approach to sources, historical knowability), even in its different orientations. They are more interested in the interpretation criteria that is the traceability of a reenactment. For this reason, historiography generally puts in the focus the matter of criteria and procedures used in the reenactment, which, in turn, must necessarily be visible to the reader; it does not consider the historical interpretation subordinate to the historical knowledge. In addition, it is just from this metaphysical background that we understand the different historiographical codifications so frequent in Lonergan's works. For instance, think about the organization of history in "autobiography and biography" (objectification of living or experiential history), "pre-critical history", "critical history", and "evaluative history". It is an organization in compliance with the four levels of consciousness on which Lonergan's transcendental method is based.

#### **4. The question of values in history**

If, through the self-corrective and cumulative learning process, "History" reaches what Lonergan elsewhere calls the "universal viewpoint"<sup>27</sup> compared to the fragmented data and various interpretations, therefore establishing the way past events actually occurred, could the wide Lonergan's project be considered as concluded? Not properly. Recalling and explaining some statements of Meinecke and

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Lonergan, 1992: 587-591.

Becker,<sup>28</sup> Lonergan carried on his thought wondering if history, in addition to determine what had happened in the past (judgments of fact), should also give judgments of value about the same events. Actually, with this question related to the values within historiographical research, Lonergan did not intend to merely take part in the discussion raised by historicism, but rather to close the wider project begun with the previous functional specialties. "Research", "Interpretation", and "History" aimed at an encounter with the past, and did not set moral, social, or cultural goals, at least in a direct way. However, as, according to Lonergan, the difference between judgments of fact (rational level) and judgments of value (moral level) is already operative in the subject (while the decision justified by value is not an arbitrary operation, because it is based on the spontaneous and structured relationship between rational and existential consciousness), the historian himself cannot stop his work at the only critical history (rational judgment), but he rather goes beyond the mere ascertainment of facts, up to the evaluation of facts (value judgment). Therefore, the meeting with the past cannot be complete if, in addition to history that understands the events, this one will not be followed by a history that could evaluate the results, distinguishing the good from the evil. "Research", "Interpretation", and "History"

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<sup>28</sup> "Friedrich Meinecke has said that every historical works is concerned both with causal connections and with values but that most historians tend to be occupied principally either with causal connections or with values. Moreover, he claimed that history, as concerned with values, '... gives us the content, wisdom, and signposts of our lives'. Carl Becker went even further. He wrote: 'The value of history is ... not scientific but moral: by liberating the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, it enables us to control, not society, but ourselves – a much more important thing; it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than to foretell the future'" (Lonergan, 2017b: 230–231). Lonergan refers here in particular to the essay of F. Meinecke, *Kausalitäten und Werte in der Geschichte* (1928), that he read in the English translation of F. Stern (1956: 267–288). Regarding Carl L. Becker, Lonergan takes up here a statement quoted by Ch. W. Smith (1956: 117). For the writings of Becker, Lonergan refers to their collection edited by Ph.L. Snyder (1958).

approach but do not achieve an encounter with the past. They make the data available, they clarify what was meant, they narrate what occurred. Encounter is more. It is meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects, and allowing one's living to be challenged at its very roots by their words and by their deeds (Lonergan, 2017b: 232).

According to Lonergan, we can only realize this operation by a further integration represented by the evaluative history actualized by "Dialectic", which examines the vagueness of the human processes, both of the past human beings and the historians themselves. Therefore, all the specialized fields of the historical studies have to be employed in a continuous and always unfinished endeavor of mediation of the universal history. "Research", "Interpretation", "History", and "Dialectic" take part to the development of the historical life (historicity) and, in particular, "critical history" and "evaluative history" operate a critical and evaluative objectification and mediation of the original vital and dramatic history. So, Lonergan could affirm the relevance of the evaluative history within the scientific history just on the basis of an ontological concept of history, which deepens its roots in the metaphysical position according to which the being is at the same time intelligible, true, and good. Ontology of history and metaphysical reflection let Lonergan put in succession judgment of fact (rational) and judgment of value about the events and the personalities of the past. Therefore, the evaluation did not appear an intrusion operated by the historian, because it corresponds both to the ontological structure of reality with its transcendental peculiarities (*verum et bonum*) and to the relationship between the human being's goodness (reality) and the historian's judgment of value.

## **5. Historical objectivity between perspectivism and universal viewpoint**

Difference between interpretation and history; peculiarity of the historical intelligence; unconditioned character of judgment; need of an evaluative history: weren't all these characteristics overabundant to be conferred to historiography? Going on in our reading of *Method in Theology*, especially chapter nine entitled *History and the Historians*, it doesn't seem risky to assume that Lonergan himself asked this question. In these pages, in fact, we can feel a kind of awareness of how problematic and incomplete was the historical knowledge. This might be the reason that brought Lonergan to report in these pages all the issues which had been discussed in the *Methodenstreit*, started in Germany between XIX and XX century and of which he interpreted the event through the reading (but not only) of authors such as Rothacker and Heussi. In particular, Lonergan adopted from Heussi his debate about the positivists' tendencies, the ascertainment of the limitedness and complexity of history, as well as of the historian's conditionings (language, education, environment), which determined a rule of perspective (point of view) in the historical survey<sup>29</sup>.

By examining such problems, Lonergan came to a more determined ontological conception of history, interpreted as a great process within which the historian's very personal development is integrated. According to Lonergan, the general process of history and the individual historian's development give origin to a series of different points of view, from which different selective processes are clarified. In turn, different histories take shape from the different selective processes; such different histories, even if they are not contradictory, do not provide a complete knowledge and explanation of the historical facts, but only incomplete and approximate portraits of a tremen-

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Ib.*: 203–204.

dously complex reality.<sup>30</sup> In this way Lonergan, on one side, embraced an ontological concept of history as an ongoing process, a kind of space from which the historian himself comes and to which relates himself, but, on the other side, he also did not define this process idealistically, because he did not mention an intellect able to bend and direct the tangible historical flux to the fulfillment of a recondite sense. However, it is also true that the uncertain outcomes of perspectivism, more in detail the *Sinngebung* as subjective ascribing of meaning, put Lonergan in precarious balance in relation to his concept of objective knowledge of the past. So he had to clarify:

In saying that historian cannot escape his background [...] I am not retracting in any way what previously I said about the “ecstatic” character of developing historical insight, about the historian’s ability to move out of the viewpoint of his place and time and come to understand and appreciate the mentality and the values of another place and time. Finally, I am not implying that historians with different background cannot come to understand one another and so move from diverging to converging views on the past (Lonergan, 2017b: 206)<sup>31</sup>.

This position is very revealing of the concept of historicity to which Lonergan had come during his career; this concept did not involve the declaration of a radical finitude of the human being, of a

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<sup>30</sup> Each historian, performing his researches starting from his own context, raises questions different from those of other historians, and describes the results of his investigation (historical narration) in a different way. Thus, according to Lonergan history remains an open cumulative process; by its gradual advancement, the context within which events have to be understood widens. In turn, by the progressive enlargement of the context, the perspectives also change (see *Ib.*: 179-180).

<sup>31</sup> *Ib.*: 204-205.

distrust in the possibility to reach an objective knowledge.<sup>32</sup> From the theoretical premises of the historicity of thought and action, Lonergan inferred

1) that human concepts, theories, affirmations, courses of actions are expressions of human understanding, 2) that human understanding develops over time and, as it develops, human concepts, theories, affirmations, courses of action change, 3) that such change is cumulative, and 4) that cumulative changes in one place or time are not to be expected to coincide with those in another (Lonergan, 2017b: 302)<sup>33</sup>.

Nevertheless, this description of historicity did not base an idea of perspective subjectivity, to which the search of regulative criteria for the development of historical world and of knowledge (judgment) of the past is precluded. On the contrary, Lonergan's perspectivism was not as much the statement about the historian's inability to come out of his ideas, as the awareness that the objectivity of knowledge has to be reached through personal paths<sup>34</sup>.

The discussion about perspectivism was also an indirect chance for Lonergan to self evaluate his proposal. In fact, if historiography is dealing with time defined individualities (institutions, places, persons), Lonergan had to admit, as he actually did, a series of problematic elements. First, it was necessary to consider the choice at the base of the historian's work. This operation, originating from the spontaneous development of common sense and intelligence while being influenced by the historian's personal background, could not be

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<sup>32</sup> On the question, see Beards, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> See also "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness" at 170-75 (in Lonergan, 2017a: 163-76).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Lonergan, 1996b: 75-6.

explained in its starting conditions nor in its effective realization, but had only to be recognized in the results it produced. Consequently, the results of historiography could not be expressed in a well-defined system.

Furthermore, the evolution of the historical research had to be intended as the achievement of a deeper comprehension of particular realities and not as the enlargement of a wider and wider system. Therefore, if the scientist looks for a complete explanation of phenomena through laws and structures that can include other phenomena, the historian cannot tend to this kind of explanation because he is dealing with particular facts that are not included in a general law.

Finally, Lonergan had to recognize not only that the historians' works could raise many doubts, but also that historiography itself did not offer any other verifications except that of doing the work again. Thus, these reflections convinced him to moderate the pretensions conferred to critical history and to admit that, even if directed by a method, history does not realize the method properties in the same way as science<sup>35</sup>.

## **6. Some critical considerations**

Purposing an essential presentation of Lonergan's historiographical theory, we opted for a reconstruction of the basic theoretical cruxes of his thought. Obviously this implied not only a deeper care to his main works, but also a lack of space for the comparison he established with some of the most representative historians of the last two

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<sup>35</sup> It should be remembered the definition of "method" proposed by Lonergan: "A method is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results" (Lonergan, 2017b: 8). However, in relation to the history Lonergan wrote: "Finally, while it can be said that history is a science in the sense that it is guided by a method, that that method yields univocal answers when identical questions are put, and that the results of historical investigations are cumulative, still it has to be acknowledged that these properties of method are not realized in the same manner in history and in the natural and the human sciences" (*Ib.*: 207). See "The Philosophy of History" at 56-7 (in Lonergan, 1996a: 54-79).

centuries. But, if we do not want to be attracted to lock his theory in an abstract cage, we consider worthwhile, at the end of this work, to recall some questions Lonergan expressed in *Method in Theology*, from which we may perceive how he felt the limit of his theory.

His observations about the complexity of a reconstruction of historical events, about the individuality of history that cannot be easily turned into what we could see as a new *mathesis universalis*, mostly raised doubts and induced Lonergan to resize his ambitious project of a universal mediation of the past.

This impression strengthens if we also reflect on the architecture of *Method in Theology*. It arouses curiosity the fact that a well-organized work, which seems not to leave anything hanging (thanks to Lonergan's analytic style), which up to "History" develops coherently by assigning a singular specialty to each chapter, all at once breaks its harmonic rhythm to introduce a piece not properly expected: *History and Historians*. Lonergan, in fact, had just finished the chapter about "History" and it would have been congruent to expect a chapter about "Dialectic". Why, then, a further chapter about *History and Historians*? Mere editorial choice, or rather a warning that the "assault on the citadel"<sup>36</sup> would not be so feasible, because the historical knowledge raises more questions than solutions? And, more specifically, why did Lonergan insist on distinctions, acknowledge some difficulties, declare the inexhaustibility and complexity of the problems raised by the historical knowledge?

This uncertainty became even thicker in the following years. Within a series of lessons held in 1976 at the Queen's University (Kingston, Canada) on the topic "Religious Studies and Theology",

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<sup>36</sup> In a conference at St. Paul's Seminary of Pittsburgh (1968), Lonergan enthusiastically affirmed: "Transcendental method is the assault on the citadel: it is possession of the basic method, and all other methods are just so many extensions and adaptations of it". See "The Future of Thomism" at 46 (in Lonergan, 2016: 39-47).

Lonergan spoke about an “end of the age of innocence”<sup>37</sup>. The acknowledgement by the modern thought of the complex net of thoughts, passions, actions, interests, religious options, social pressures and dialectic contrasts, which make up the subject in his historical condition, was the symptom of the sunset of the concept of man as master of himself and author of his destiny. Furthermore, according to Lonergan the historical consciousness itself had caused a clear awareness of the historicity of the human life, of the plurality and diversity of the existing cultures, and of the differences between the present cultures and the past ones. Nevertheless, he concluded that, even if historicism and hermeneutics had freed the human spirit from dogmas and preconceptions of the past, they had not been able to orient human judgments and choices, imposing, in this way, the ghost of relativism.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is easy to understand why the Canadian philosopher insisted on the rational knowledge and on the need to formulate judgments able to budge from the spiritual lethargy where scholarship and hermeneutics had closed the human spirit<sup>39</sup>.

These statements reveal the mood of a no longer young scholar. If, on one side, Lonergan still believed in the metaphysical and transcendental foundation of the specialties in which he had included the

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<sup>37</sup> “The end of the age of innocence means that authenticity is never to be taken for granted” (Lonergan, 2017a: 151).

<sup>38</sup> “[...] if individual subjectivity is understood to mean the subject as correlative to the world of immediacy, then [...] individual subjectivity, so far from offering a secure foundation, gives rise to serious doubts and well-founded uneasiness [...] shortcomings of individuals can become the accepted practice of the group [...] which] can become the tradition accepted in good faith by succeeding generations [...]” (*Ib.*: 145–146).

<sup>39</sup> Already in the previous decade (1965), on a conference held at the Marquette University of Milwaukee, Lonergan declared: “But the vast modern effort to understand meaning in all its manifestations has not been matched by a comparable effort in judging meaning. The effort to understand is the common task of unnumbered scientists and scholars. But judging and deciding are left to the individual, and he finds his plight desperate. There is far too much to be learnt before he could begin to judge. Yet judge he must and decide he must if he is to exist, if he is to be a man.” See “Dimensions of Meaning” at 244 (in Lonergan, 1988: 232–245).

positive knowledges, on the other side, this solution does not seem to make him free from any doubt. Anyway, it is true that he could not, nor had to, travel until the end and analyse the rifts impressed on his system by the historical consciousness. He could not, because he was already losing his forces; he had not to, because he had reached a "cultural synthesis" just in the middle of that general mood of disorder and discussion where the Catholic theology had entered in the twenty years period after the Vatican II Council.

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