

Education as Cultural Transmission or Transformation: a conversation with Nietzsche, Weil, Arendt and Lonergan

David de Carvalho
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I came up with the idea for this talk back in February, before COVID-19 took hold. It seemed like a good idea at the time. As I sat down to start writing, it occurred to me that perhaps I had bitten off more than I could chew, and that the context had changed. I became a tad anxious that I would do a poor job. But I was consoled by G.K. Chesterton's observation that some things worth doing are worth doing badly. Tonight what I am doing – and I leave it to you to judge how well it is done – is worth doing: namely grappling with the issue of education and culture. Some might challenge me: Why am I talking about such an esoteric subject far removed from the practical realities of schools, about long-dead thinkers, at a time like this? We are in the midst of a crisis? There is a job to be done! Why aren't we discussing COVID?

To which I reply: yes, we are in the midst of a crisis, but it's not the one everyone is talking about. COVID is a health crisis, for sure, that is causing an economic crisis, that could develop into a political crisis, but it has also exposed a deeper, cultural crisis that has been unfolding for centuries. This is important, because it is our culture that shapes how we respond, individually and collectively, to new circumstances and challenges. And our culture both shapes, and is shaped by, how we are educated.

¹ *Virgil Reading the "Aeneid" to Augustus, Octavia, and Livia* by Jean Baptiste Joseph Wicar was painted over a four-year period, 1790-93, at the height of the French Revolution. It depicts the poet Virgil reading from Book VI of his epic poem about the founding of Rome by the Trojan hero, Aeneas, to the Emperor Augustus, who ushered in the empire following the civil strife that put an end to the republic. Virgil is instructing the emperor in the city's foundational myth. The emperor's sister, Octavia has fainted at one of the verses that describes the fate of her son, Marcellus, foreseen by Aeneas during a visit to the underworld. What is Virgil, the teacher-poet, up to here – cultural transmission or transformation?

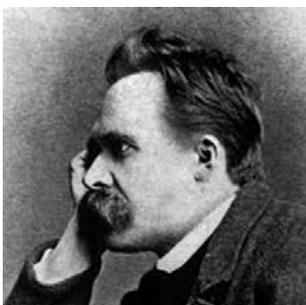
Accordingly, as educators, we need to have a clear vision about education's purpose and its relationship to culture. We each need to have our own answer to the question: what is the purpose of education?

Is it, as per the classical tradition, to transmit the values of our culture by exposing students, in the words of Matthew Arnold, to the *"best that has ever been thought and said"*? Or is it more utilitarian, to help students find a job and to support social order? Is it humanistic, focussing on the development of the student's personal capabilities and potential? Is it "progressive" as opposed to traditional, valuing the child's own experience more than formal learning? Or is it ultimately about effecting social reconstruction? Is it none of these, or all of them?

And what of "culture"? It is one of the most contested words in English. The sense in which I am using tonight is to indicate a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group. We can trace this meaning back to the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, the 18th century German philosopher, theologian and poet, who was critical of the Enlightenment idea that the history of mankind was one of inexorable progress from savagery to 18th century Europe as the pinnacle of development. In his unfinished "Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity", Herder addressed the following paragraph to peoples from all ages and places:

Men of all quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature.

So how do we compare cultures? What makes a culture strong? Why do cultures decline? What is the relationship between education and culture? My aim this evening is very simple, but also somewhat ambitious: to explore these questions by taking a tour through the educational ideas of some philosophers whose work has contributed to my own thinking about education's relationship to culture. But each of the thinkers I will be discussing tonight warrant a lifetime's study, and all I can hope to achieve is to whet your appetite for further exploration, without being excessively guilty of injustice through the necessarily abbreviated nature of my remarks. But before we get to their ideas, let us meet them in person.



First, perhaps the most well-known of this group of four: Friedrich Nietzsche. Born 1844, into a deeply religious family, died 1900, having suffered a debilitating psychological breakdown in 1889. Never married. Arguably the philosopher who had most impact on the 20th century, whether through the way his writings about "the will to power" and the "superman" were hijacked by the Nazis, or through his preparing the ground for post-modern nihilism via his pronouncement of "the death of God".

Second, Simone Weil, a French philosopher, political activist and mystic who enlisted to fight in the Spanish Civil War on the republican side. Born 1909, died 1943 aged only 34 from heart failure and self-imposed malnutrition in solidarity with starving French soldiers. The coroner's report said that "the deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat whilst the balance of her mind was disturbed". Albert Camus, author of "The Plague" and Nobel Prize winner, described her as "the only great spirit of our times".



Third, Hannah Arendt, 1906-1975, perhaps best known for her phrase "the banality of evil", her observation about Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi war criminal, whose trial in Jerusalem in 1962 was the subject of one of her most controversial books. She wrote prolifically on topics ranging from totalitarianism to epistemology and is one of the most important political theorists of the twentieth century.

Finally, perhaps the least well-known, but someone who deserves to be far-better known, the Canadian Jesuit philosopher, Bernard Lonergan, 1904-1984, who according to Time Magazine in 1970, was "considered by many intellectuals to be the finest philosophic thinker of the 20th century". He wrote mainly on epistemology, and in my view his ideas are very relevant to the times in which we live.



Friedrich Nietzsche wrote only one work, quite early in his career, that explicitly addressed the issue of the role of education vis-a-vis culture, but the topic features in many of his subsequent writings. In 1872, at the age of 27, he delivered five lectures with the title, "On the Future of our Educational Institutions".

Here, Nietzsche describes what he sees as twin evils, "ruinous" changes in the Prussian education system. First, there is the extension of education too widely to sections of the population that may not want or need it, that is the broad masses, the working classes, a section of the population that in his later works he refers to as "the herd": *"In large states education will always be mediocre, for the same reason that in large kitchens the cooking is always bad."* Second, there is a consequential pollution of the purposes of education so that its primary function was now to be at the service of the state and the economy. He deplors this as a "dumbing down" of educational standards that is particularly damaging for the more gifted teachers and students, such that *"Culture is tolerated only insofar as it serves the cause of earning money"*. Seen in this light, Nietzsche is unashamedly elitist and anti-democratic in his educational philosophy.

He deplors the "prevailing ethic" in the population at large that equates the good life with happiness and happiness with wealth and consumption, such that these things are the only reason why one would seek an education. Education is consequently mechanised to mass-produce the skills required by the economy and the state. *"What is the task of higher education? To turn a man*

into a machine. What are the means employed? He is taught to suffer being bored.” But the true purpose of education is the cultivation of the individual’s capacity to contemplate and appreciate and embody that which is beautiful, true and good. The capacity to do this is what Nietzsche calls “genius”, and it is extremely rare.

In later works Nietzsche expands on his elitist views about the purpose of education as it relates to culture and the role of the person of genius and the role of art, especially music. The genius is able to exercise a form of spiritual leadership in a culture war, along with men like him (they are always men), to bring about cultural rebirth and transformation.

But what is the nature of this cultural rebirth that Nietzsche seeks to lead? Nietzsche works through this issue over the rest of his life. He believed that Christian culture and what he called its “slave morality” – with its emphasis on humanity as inherently sinful, that can only be saved by a crucified god, its focus on the next world rather than this world, on meekness and compassion and life-denying guilt and forgiveness - has suppressed the more robust, vital and healthy culture and morality of classical Greece and Rome. He sees Christianity as a usurping weed that has grown up and choked off society’s access to these truly life-affirming cultural roots. These weeds have to be cleared away so that classical culture can be reborn.

In his view, Christian morality relies on a set of metaphysical beliefs about the existence of a loving god that are simply no longer credible. God is dead. We have killed him with our science and rationality. But Nietzsche is no Enlightenment rationalist. He wants to replace the Christian god with a new religion, a new mythology, because science and rationality will never satisfy our deepest longings. So *“Interest in education will acquire great strength only when belief in God and his care is renounced, just as the art of healing flourished when belief in miracle cures ceased.”*

Nietzsche’s educational philosophy was very much one of cultural transformation to be led by great men of genius and great artists formed in the virtues of the ancient Greeks and Romans, before the Christian rot set in and began to cut the elite off from their true, aristocratic and noble natures and their will to power. Education should cultivate geniuses with the moral courage to say yes to life in the face of meaninglessness.

Here it is worth quoting Nietzsche’s famous text on the death of God, which he puts into the mouth of a madman in his most famous work, Thus Spake Zarathustra.

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?”

Nietzsche is not rejoicing. He is deeply concerned that this loss of metaphysical underpinnings of morality will lead to chaos. Since God is dead, the morality that sustains a community must find a new source of authority. No longer able to sustain itself through the reward and punishment of the afterlife, it must turn to “soft power” – power without psychological coercion – the power of art. Education’s role, then, in respect of the elite (Nietzsche doesn’t care about the majority) is a radical cultural and artistic transformation that relies on a return to our cultural origins, the classical Greek tragic vision of fate and suffering.

Like Nietzsche, Simone Weil is concerned for the rediscovery of cultural roots. The title of one of her most important works is “The Need for Roots”, published posthumously with a preface by T.S. Eliot. But unlike Nietzsche, Weil’s attention is on the fate and suffering of workers, rather than a small band of elite culture warriors. Like Nietzsche, Weil is concerned about the atomisation of society and the damage to cultural roots that the industrial revolution had wreaked, with its focus on mass production and consumption with no attention to questions of ultimate meaning and the true, the beautiful and the good. But unlike Nietzsche, who disdained political action, Weil sees cultural reconnection as an inherently political struggle.

But before I go on to say more about Weil, I need to warn you – if warn is the right word - that she, like Bernard Lonergan, are both people of religious faith, specifically Christianity. This runs against the grain of our increasingly secularised culture after “the death of God”. However, this enhances rather than diminishes their relevance to our age. The Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz regarded Weil as extremely important, and reflecting on the post WW2 artistic attitude to the subject of religion he stated,

“To write on literature and art was considered an honourable occupation, whereas anytime notions taken from the language of religion appeared, the one who brought them up was immediately treated as lacking in tact, as if a silent pact had been broken.”

In the task of confronting cultural decline, tact is a luxury, and nobody could accuse of Simone Weil of having excessive tact, or any tact at all for that matter.

Now, for Weil, the aim of education is development of the capacity to work with attention. This concept of attention in Weil’s philosophy is complex. For Weil, developing the capacity to pay attention, especially to things that one might not be intrinsically or initially interested in, is the purpose of schooling. Now this might seem very strange to claim as the purpose of education. But what does she mean by “attention”? As teachers, many of us would have spoken the words “Pay attention!” to our students at one time or another.

For Weil, attention is the disposition of the subject that is radically open and available to the reality of other people – especially those who suffer - to ourselves, customs and traditions, ideas; and to what is good, true, and beautiful. In other words, to be attentive is to be curious about the whole of reality, and to have the capacity to focus one’s mind on the task of asking and answering questions about reality. And if we are attentive to our world, we cannot help but be moved to act for justice, out of love. Here are some quotes...

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.”

“Love of God is not the only substance of attention. Love of neighbour, which we know is the same love, consists of the same substance. The afflicted have no need of anything else in this world except someone capable of paying attention to them. The capacity to pay attention to an afflicted person is something very rare, very difficult; it is nearly a miracle.”

“Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.”

But what has this to do with culture? The loss of balance she saw in the culture of modern industrial society was the way it dehumanised factory workers in particular, and sapped them of

any desire or interest in anything other than physical survival. She worked in a car factory for a year and experienced firsthand how the relentless machinery that demanded the worker's constant and full attention and physical effort left them mentally exhausted with no capacity to engage in, to pay attention to, anything else. All they could do, through eating and sleeping and being entertained, was, in the words of Marx, simply to reproduce themselves as factory fodder for the next day, and the next, on and on until you could no longer work.

"It is inhuman when one's attention has nothing worthy to engage it, but on the contrary, is constrained to fix itself, second by second, up the same trivial problem."

So Weil's focus on development of the capacity for attention as the purpose of schooling was entirely consistent with her view that the social order, and the cultural underpinnings that sustained it, needs transformation in order that workers would be free to engage with questions of meaning and purpose, to inquire about what is true, beautiful and good.

For Weil, modern industrial society encourages a feeling of rootlessness, a lack of community, and it is education's role to overcome this rootlessness, by reconstructing schools to help children discover meaning in their daily lives in the context of community. She feared that specialisation was becoming too dominant in schools, replacing general knowledge education, that is, education about things that all students have in common and roots them in a sense of community.

Such schools, she feared, would produce students who could hold down a secure job but who didn't understand the meaning and purpose of their daily life nor had any desire to do so. They would have little interest or capacity to construct a framework that allows them to critique society. They need never have been exposed to music, art, literature, philosophy, history, or science other than to improve their value in the employment market or to widen the range of products they might be interested in consuming.

Weil's advocacy for the rediscovery of social and communal roots through education was both conservative and progressive: the rediscovery of traditional culture was not only key to transforming and overcoming the soullessness of the culture of modern consumer capitalism, but also a bulwark against totalitarianism.

What would Weil say about developing the capacity for paying attention if she were alive today? I think she would be very concerned about how our so-called smart-phones, meant to be a means of communication, have become, as they say, "weapons of mass distraction", nodes of narcissism that hold us back from paying attention to and discerning the true nature of the problems that beset our culture.

Hannah Arendt's essay "The Crisis of Education" was first published in 1961 in a collection of essays entitled "Between Past and Future". The title of the volume relates to the creative tension that exists between conservatism and radicalism – exemplified in both Nietzsche and Weil, in different ways - and its overarching theme is the crisis of authority in America in the mid-20th century, of which "the crisis of education" is but one manifestation.

Arendt's concept of authority is somewhat counter-intuitive. Similar to Weil, she argues that fascism, communism and totalitarian movements were possible because of communal rootlessness

that follows a decline in traditional sources of authority. In other words, coercive authority filled a vacuum where communal, traditional authority once was.

So we should make a distinction between authority that is authoritarian and authority that is authoritative, which is based on voluntary deference to and trust in the wisdom of elders, their experience and expertise. For Arendt, education is impossible without this kind of authority being exercised by teachers. A key concept for her is “natality”, or “newness”. Education is a double process of gradually initiating children – new human beings - to the old adult world into which they have been born, and gradually empowering them to make that old world new.

This educative process comes to an end when the young person must take their place in the world and begin to shape it according to their own lights. Education begins in the family, but then requires the school as the institution which acts as the passageway between the private space of the family and the public space of the adult world. Thus education mediates between the private world and the public world and also between the past and the future, between the old and the new.

This is a concern of many conservative educationalists who fear loss of tradition. For example, in “The Closing of the American Mind”, Allan Bloom described tradition as a seam that connects the present with past and provides a sense of unity to the different periods of human civilisation through a grand narrative. The educator’s role is to repair and nourish this seam or to “*protect and cultivate the delicate tendrils*” of tradition, so that the past can continue to guide and provide the future with a sense of coherence and unity.

Arendt believed that the project to recover or strengthen the ligaments of tradition was a lost cause, and that this has serious implications for education. For education relies on the authority of the teacher, and that authority in turn has depended on cultural tradition. But with the decline of the power of tradition in the modern world, from where does the teacher get their authority? Here the teacher must become a kind of spokesperson for the world into which the young person is being initiated. They must own up to the fact that we, the adults, have created this world, we are responsible for it, with all its strengths and weaknesses.

Yet Arendt was deeply troubled by what she saw as the failure of the American public education system to accept this responsibility. She saw the abrogation of this responsibility by the system in the way it implemented progressive concepts such as “child-centred” education. She was critical of the view that teachers did not need to be subject matter experts, only pedagogical experts. Both these things led, in her view, to an undermining of the authority of the teacher. A further manifestation of this is that “*special importance was attached to obliterating as far as possible the distinction between play and work – in favour of the former.*”

Arendt is annoyed by this because the purpose of education is the gradual initiation of child into the adult world, where life is not just a game. But she was concerned that in contemporary schooling,

“The very thing that should prepare the child for the world of adults, the gradually acquired habit of work and of not-playing, is done away with in favour of the autonomy of the world of childhood.”

Education must lead students from being children to being adults, able to cope with difficulty and act with moral responsibility for the world and make it new. There are echoes of Simone Weil here, when she said that *“Whoever ... remains a child is never free, in any state of society.”*

So for Arendt – the role of education is cultural transmission as the necessary precursor of cultural transformation. What Arendt does not do, however, is specify what kind of transformation is needed, how the next generation should exercise their responsibility for the world. She states baldly that *“the function of a school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living.”* It must not impose the political views of the adults onto the children. She explicitly eschews the temptation of *“revolutionary movements of a tyrannical caste”*, to use the education system as a form of political indoctrination. The final sentences of “The Crisis in Education” read as follows (note the references to love):

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.

I now turn, finally, to the thought of Bernard Lonergan. Like Nietzsche, Weil and Arendt, education for Lonergan was just one of many fields to which his overarching philosophical approach could be applied and for which it has practical implications. Where Lonergan differs from the others, however, is that the primary focus of his philosophy is epistemology, that is, the question of what it is to know.

Lonergan’s major work is “Insight: a study in human understanding”, published in 1957. Like Weil, for Lonergan it is our ability to be attentive to our experience, especially the experience of thinking and knowing, that is the starting point. I’ll take a little time to set out the key points of his epistemological theory, then discuss how this relates to education and culture.

Lonergan methodically sets out the process by which we come to know anything, including knowledge about how we come to know. Lonergan makes a bold claim that

“Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.”

In brief, Lonergan’s theory of cognition is that human knowing is a dynamic structure that relates the functions of experiencing, understanding, and judging to one another. These are different levels of intentional consciousness, with each level linked to the next by different types of questions.

Four levels of consciousness


Experiencing
Factual Questions
 What?
 When?
 Who?
ATTENTION


Understanding
Questions for insight
 Why is this happening?
 How do I make sense of this?
INTELLIGENCE


Judging
Reflective Questions
 Is this so?
 Which is (or most likely to be) true?
REASONABLENESS


Deciding
Deliberative questions
 What should I do?
 How should I act?
RESPONSIBILITY

On the first level, we pay attention to the data of experience, and we ask factual questions about what, when, who, etc. Then we bring our intelligence to the task of noticing patterns and asking questions for insight about what explains the data, what could cause these patterns? On this second level of consciousness, answers to these questions take the form of concepts and ideas and hypotheses that could explain the data of experience. Then one has to exercise reason when judging between these potential understandings, asking which of them is true, or at least, most likely to be true. At this third level, when we have honestly asked and answered all the relevant reflective questions, we can make a judgement as to the truth or falsity of a proposition. This is how we come to know.

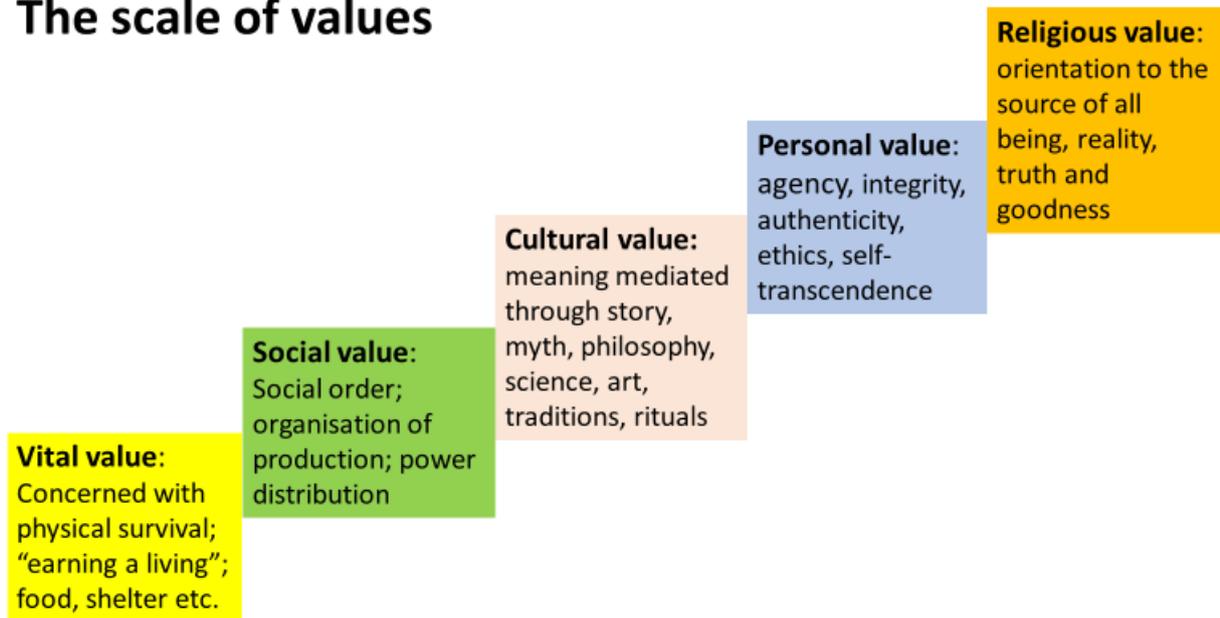
But – and this is a very important but - there remains a recognition that this knowledge is always to some extent contingent, not absolute. One has to make judgements about the world in order to live in the world successfully, but one must always be open to the possibility that further data and reflective questions may lead one to a new judgement.

Finally, one asks deliberative questions, about how you are going to act in response to what you have come to know. Deciding how to act responsibly is the fourth level of intentional consciousness. We are not only knowers, we are doers.

“On this level subjects both constitute themselves and make their world. On this level we are responsible, individually, for the lives we lead and, collectively, for the worlds in which we lead them.”

Now when we are deciding how to act, we act according to values. We seek to bring about things or states that we value. Lonergan identifies an ascending scale of values.

The scale of values



There is the "vital" level of value which is the most basic, concerned with the particular goods essential to the quality of physical life such as food, health and shelter and earning a living.

Social values are concerned with the good of order, the organisation of the economy, and the distribution of social power for the sake of ensuring society as a whole has access to those "vital" level goods.

Beyond physical survival and social order, and supportive of them, there is the level of cultural value, which is concerned about the meaning of our common life together, as mediated through story, myth, philosophy, science, history, the creative arts and literature and many other systems that have developed over thousands of years.

But we are not just products of economic, social and cultural forces. These things may shape us, but they don't determine us. So personal values deal with issues of individual agency and integrity, and self-transcendence, and acting ethically and responsibly according to what we believe is good.

But how do we come to know what is good? Here is where religious value makes itself felt in Lonergan's scheme. Religious value is that drive within us that urges the person to enter into communion with the source of all reality, the ultimate ground of all being and all goodness. This guides our ethical decision-making at the personal level of value.

However, we are held back from living according these values by bias. Bias is whatever prevents us from questioning what we think we know, and whatever prevents us from acting in a manner that is consistent with our inner drive to do what is good. We must strive to overcome this bias in ourselves. We must strive to expand our perspective beyond the horizon into which we are born and live our lives, and which frames our perceptions and our emotional responses to situations. This takes deep stores of self-awareness and humility and usually involves some form of conversion - intellectual, moral and religious. Through conversion one is "turned around" from subtle,

unacknowledged illusions about oneself and reality toward a critical appropriation of oneself as one really is, and toward the real world for which one is truly responsible.

How does this play out culturally? Well, just as bias can hold individuals back from approaching the true and the good more fully, so also bias can infect whole societies and the cultures that shape a society's ability to respond to new challenges.

For Lonergan, *"it is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticise, correct, develop, improve such meaning and value"* as is needed to sustain a society's way of life. When a culture is functioning properly, it not only infuses social cooperation with meaning and purpose, but it also criticizes and revises social practices in response to new circumstances as they arise both internally and externally. A successful culture is resilient because it is adaptable. A crisis occurs whenever a culture is no longer able to perform its proper function and respond creatively to changing circumstances, and social order begins to break down.

Lonergan diagnosed the cultural failure of modernity as being a consequence of the optimistic hyper-rationalism of the Enlightenment. Modernity has been unable to accept that virtually all the truths we hold to be self-evident common sense are in fact contingent, not absolute, and that the march of human progress is not inevitable. We could say that it is the failure to adapt to this reality that has given rise to the so-called "culture wars", with conservatives recoiling in horror from the loss of traditional social and moral norms, while post-modernists embrace and rejoice in the loss of normativity.

Lonergan describes the process of a community or culture descending into crisis. *"Finally, the divided community, their conflicting actions, and the messy situation are headed for disaster,"* he writes.

"For the messy situation is diagnosed differently by the divided community; action is ever more at cross purposes; and the situation becomes still messier to provoke still sharper differences in diagnosis and policy, more radical criticism of one another's actions, and an ever deeper crisis in the situation."

The needed response to the crisis of culture is authenticity - authenticity both on the part of individuals and of societies. But authenticity is an ambiguous and contested term. For Lonergan, authenticity is *self-transcendence*. At its most primordial level, self-transcendence comes back to the underlying human drive to know – wonder, and the ubiquitous phenomenon of *questioning*. Genuine questions draw us beyond anything we have as yet come to understand, accept, believe or value. Authenticity, being true to oneself, does not mean, as Nietzsche might suggest, following your own will to power. Rather, authenticity responds genuinely to the questions that one has put to oneself about oneself and one's culture.

Lonergan's approach can then be summarised through what he referred to a set of transcendental precepts associated with each level of intentional consciousness: be attentive when experiencing; be intelligent when seeking understanding; be reasonable when judging; be responsible when deciding how to act. And beyond this, at the affective level of emotion or feeling, where are motivated to act according to what we value, we must be in love with the world, with God.

So for Lonergan the essence of education is nothing other than to foster attentiveness, intelligence and reasonableness. The judgments current in our society or any other, whether matters of common sense, science, or value, are to be affirmed not as unquestionable dogmas, but simply as the best that attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness have come up with thus far, even though those judgements may have been affected by collective bias. As new circumstances arise, there is more evidence to be attended to and more hypotheses to be envisaged which will, in time, render many of these judgments liable to modification or even outright rejection.

Education, then, must keep consciousness open and flexible by way of expanding it through the realization of how others have experienced, understood, judged, and decided. In other words, education must foster critical respect for our past, for the culture we have inherited, always leaving open the possibility of amending cultural practices in response to new realities and new questions. Education therefore serves simultaneously the purposes of social and cultural continuity, and social and cultural change, of cultural transmission and transformation.

To conclude, the approach to education that each of these thinkers developed was in response to the cultural needs of their times, as they saw them. Nietzsche and Weil were both concerned that education was in the process of just producing factory fodder. Nietzsche wanted education to form the cultural leaders who would create a new art for a society at risk of despair and chaos in the face of meaninglessness, whereas Weil wanted the working classes to have the ability and the freedom, to pay attention to the true, the beautiful and the good. Arendt, like Weil, saw rootlessness and loss of traditional authority as a precursor to totalitarianism, and as an antidote wanted educators to take responsibility for the adult world into which they were initiating their students. For Lonergan, education plays a key role in the formation of human beings whose authenticity is crucial to a culture's ability to self-correct its course in the face of new situations and challenges.

What new situation do we face today? What are the needs of our time that our culture must meet? And will our culture do its job? I am minded here of the opening stanza of Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*, written after WW1 and in the context of the devastating flu pandemic:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity*

So what do you think is the role of education in relation to our sense of meaning and purpose as mediated through our culture? How will you work to cultivate young minds and hearts capable of understanding and loving themselves and the world into which we initiate them and then transforming both themselves and that world in accordance with their unrestricted and innate desire to know and to pursue what is good? These are questions we must ask ourselves, and we must never be satisfied with the answers.

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