

**Class 7: October 19, 2009**

## **History**

**Question 1: What is the difference between history 1 and history 2? Which of these is the subject matter of these two chapters?**

Lonergan distinguishes the history that is written about (history 1) from the history that is written (history 2).

History 2 aims at expressing knowledge of history 1. These chapters are about history 2 as it attempts to express knowledge of history 1.

**Question 2: Do the two chapters have different emphases? Why is the material divided into two chapters?**

Chapter 8 treats the procedures that lead to a knowledge (history 2) of history (history 1), the **heuristic structures** involved in moving toward historical knowledge; while chapter 9 treats

- (1) various problems connected with the writing of history,
- (2) what historians have said about these problems, and
- (3) what Lonergan says about what these historians have said.

He begins by insisting that the object of historical inquiry and the nature of historical investigation are matters of some obscurity, ‘mainly because historical knowledge is an instance of knowledge, and few people are in possession of a satisfactory cognitional theory’ (175). In note 1, he notes the interesting observation of Gerhard Ebeling that ‘modern historical science is still a long way from being able to offer a theoretically unobjectionable account of the critical historical method, and that it needs the cooperation of philosophy to reach that goal.’

Chapter 8, then, for the most part represents an attempt to apply what Lonergan would regard as a ‘satisfactory cognitional theory’ to historical investigation, while chapter 9 shows some of the ways in which historical investigation has become obscure due to the lack of such a satisfactory cognitional theory.

**Question 3: Lonergan begins the chapter by noting that the object of historical inquiry and the nature of historical investigation are matters of some obscurity. What for him is the object of historical inquiry? Where in the text is evidence for your answer?**

178-79: ‘The historian envisages a quite different object [from that of interpretation]. He is not content to understand what people meant. He wants to grasp what was going forward in particular groups at particular places and times. By “going forward” I mean to exclude the mere repetition of a routine. I mean the change that originated the routine and its dissemination. I mean process and development but, no less, decline and collapse.

When things turn out unexpectedly, pious people say, "Man proposes but God disposes." The historian is concerned to see how God disposed the matter, not by theological speculation, not by some world-historical dialectic, but through particular human agents. In literary terms history is concerned with the drama of life, with what results through the characters, their decisions, their actions, and not only because of them but also because of their defects, their oversights, their failures to act.'

**Question 4: What is Lonergan's overall attitude to the critical historical method? Again, what indications from the text can you provide?**

Critical historical method represents a genuine possibility of knowledge, but its practitioners are 'still a long way from being able to offer a theoretically unobjectionable account of the critical historical method, and ... it needs the cooperation of philosophy to reach that goal.' Footnote 1 on p. 175.

Section 3, on 'Critical History,' is Lonergan's attempt to offer that philosophical cooperation. Study of that section will further fill out the answer to this question, as will discussion of perspectivism, relativism, and other special questions toward the end of chapter 9.

**Question 5: What is the point of the first section of chapter 8, 'Nature and History?' To put the question another way, why are these reflections on time introduced at the beginning of the study of the writing of history?**

The point of section 1, with its reflections on time in science and human studies, is to elucidate the field of historical investigation and to distinguish it from the field of natural science. 'Time' here is not the time studied in physics. The historian certainly needs the Aristotelian notion of time as the number or measure determined by successive equal stages of movement, for he has to date his events. But this notion of time is limited to counting, measuring, and relating to one another in a comprehensive view all possible instances of such counting and measuring. This notion also suggests the image of time as a raceway of indivisible instants. That notion is removed by advertence to the identity of the substratum, the identity that is moving, and this clue enables us to advance to our *experience* of time. The time of our lives is really a time *span* that centers around a psychological present, reaches into a past, a tradition that converges psychologically and experientially on this present, and from this present anticipates a future that both carries on and modifies that tradition. Memory is communal as well as individual, and history is concerned with (177) 'the pooled memories of the group, their celebration in song and story, their preservation in written narratives, in coins and monuments and every other trace of the group's words and deeds left to posterity. Such is the field of historical investigation.'

**Question 6: What is the field of historical investigation? What differentiates this field from the field of natural-scientific investigation? What is the relevance of chapter 3, on Meaning, for understanding the historical field? How does this introduce a difference between history and natural science? How do historical and scientific expression differ?**