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Insight Revisited

It will perhaps be of interest if I narrate briefly how *Insight* came to be written. I studied philosophy at Heythrop from 1926 to 1929. At the same time I was to prepare for a degree as an external student at the University of London. Many of my fellow students had a similar lot, and classes on the Latin and Greek authors were regularly held by Fr. Harry Irwin and on mathematics by Fr. Charles O'Hara.

Philosophy, accordingly, had no monopoly on our time or attention. The text books were German in origin and Suarezian in conviction. The professors were competent and extremely honest in their presentation of their wares. I was quite interested in philosophy, but also extremely critical of the key position accorded universal concepts. I thought of myself as a nominalist, made a detailed study of H. B. W. Joseph's *Introduction to Logic*, and read several times the more theoretical passages in Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. Newman's remark that ten thousand difficulties do not make a doubt has served me in good stead. It encouraged me to look difficulties squarely in the eye, while not letting them interfere with vocation or my faith. His illative sense later became my reflective act of understanding.

It was on leaving Heythrop that I was encouraged to think I might work in philosophy. I was bidding Fr Joseph Bolland farewell, listed to him the subjects I was doing at London, and asked him which is the one I should concentrate on. He replied that I should keep in mind that superiors might want me to teach philosophy or theology. I answered that there was no question of that since I was a nominalist. He in turn said: 'Oh! No one remains a nominalist very long.' It was, in current parlance, a quite 'cool' reply from a high member of the establishment (Bolland then was a consultor of the English province, later its provincial, its tertian master, English assistant in Rome, and visitor to the houses of study in the United States) at a time when

anti-modernist regulations were still in full force.

In the summer of 1930 I was assigned to teach at Loyola College, Montreal, and despite the variety of my duties was able to do some reading. Christopher Dawson's Age of the Gods introduced me to the anthropological notion of culture and so began the correction of my hitherto normative or classicist notion. As Fr Bolland had predicted, my nominalism vanished when I read J. A. Stewart's Plato's Doctrine of Ideas. In writing this paper I recalled that I had been greatly influenced by a book on Plato's ideas by some Oxford don. I had forgotten his name and the exact title of the book, so I went down to the library, patiently worked through the cards listing books on Plato and, finally, when I got to 'S' found my man. I got the book out of the stacks, took it to my room, and found it fascinating reading. It contained so much that later I was to work out for myself in a somewhat different context, but at that time it was a great release. My nominalism had been an opposition, not to intelligence or understanding, but to the central role ascribed to universal concepts. From Stewart I learnt that Plato was a methodologist, that his ideas were what the scientist seeks to discover, that the scientific or philosophic process towards discovery was one of question and answer. My apprehension, then, was not that precise. It was something vaguer that made me devote my free time to reading Plato's early dialogues (Stewart followed Lutoslawski's order) and then moving on to Augustine's early dialogues written at Cassiciacum near Milan. Augustine was so concerned with understanding, so unmindful of universal concepts, that I began a long period of trying to write an intelligible account of my convictions.

I was sent to Rome for theology, and there I was subject to two important influences. One was from an Athenian, Stephanos Stephanu, who had entered the Sicilian province of the Society and had been sent to Louvain to study philosophy at a time when Maréchal taught psychology to the Jesuit students and the other professors at the scholasticate taught Maréchal. Stefanu and I used to prepare our exams together. Our aim was clarity and rigor -- an aim all the more easily obtained, the less the thesis really meant. It was through Stefanu by some process of osmosis, rather than through struggling with the five great Cahiers, that I learnt to speak of human

knowledge as not intuitive but discursive with the decisive component in judgement. This view was confirmed by my familiarity with Augustine's key notion, veritas, and the whole was rounded out by Bernard Leeming's course on the Incarnate Word, which convinced me that there could not be a hypostatic union without a real distinction between essence and existence. This, of course, was all the more acceptable, since Aquinas' esse corresponded to Augustine's veritas and both harmonized with Maréchal's view of judgement.

I did my tertianship in France at Amiens, but the moment memorable for the present account occurred after Easter when we were sent to Paris to the Ecole sociale populaire at Vanves to listen for a week to four leaders a day of the mouvements spécialisés of Catholic Action then in full swing. The founder of the school and still its Rector had built the school in the teeth of great opposition, and had obtained the money to pay the workmen in the same last-minute style as that narrated by Teresa of Avila in her account of her foundations. He was a man I felt I must consult for I had little hope of explaining to superiors what I wished to do and persuading them to allow me to do it. So I obtained an appointment and, when the time came, I asked him how one reconciled obedience and initiative in the Society. He looked me over and said: "Go ahead and do it. If superiors do not stop you, that is obedience. If they do stop you, stop and that is obedience." The advice is hardly very exciting today but at the time it was for me a great relief.

Meanwhile in Rome Fr Ledochowski was holding a special general congregation. An item of interest to me was his exhortation to the assembled provincials to donate men to the Gregorian. The Upper Canadian provincial at the time was a relief pitcher from England and he donated me. I was informed of this at the end of tertianship and told to do a biennium in philosophy. The following September, however, I had a letter from Fr. Vincent MacCormick informing me that most of the English-speaking students at the Gregorian were in theology and that I, accordingly, was to do a biennium in theology. During the course of that

year I was informed that I was to begin teaching theology, not at the Gregorian, but at the Immaculée Conception in Montreal.

There I went in 1940 and for six years I had considerable opportunities to add research and writing to my duties as a professor. Theological Studies had just been founded and a friend who knew the editor let me know that copy would be welcome. So I rewrote my dissertation and the result was accepted.[1] In 1933 I had been much struck by an article of Peter Hoenen's in Gregorianum arguing that intellect abstracted from phantasm not only terms but also the nexus between them. He held that that certainly was the view of Cajetan and probably that of Aquinas. Later he returned to the topic arguing first that scholastic philosophy was in need of a theory of geometrical knowledge and secondly producing various geometrical illustrations such as the Moebius strip that fitted in very well with his view that not only terms but also nexus were abstracted from phantasm.[2] So about 1943 I began collecting materials for an account of Aquinas' views on understanding and inner word. The result was a series of articles that appeared in Theological Studies from 1946 to 1949. They took into account the psychological, metaphysical, and trinitarian aspects of Thomist thought on the subject. Their basic point was that Aquinas attributed the key role in cognitional theory not to inner words, concepts, but to acts of understanding. Hoenen's point that intellect abstracted both terms and nexus from phantasm was regarded as Scotist language; both terms and nexus belong to the conceptual order; what Aristotle and Aquinas held was that intellect abstracted from phantasm a preconceptual form or species or quod quid erat esse, whence both terms and nexus were inwardly spoken.[3]

As soon as I finished the Verbum articles I began writing Insight. But before speaking of it I must add a few further items in its prehistory. When I began teaching at L'Immaculée Conception, Fr. Eric O'Connor returned from Harvard with his Ph. D. in mathematics and began teaching at Loyola in Montreal. Later in a conversation it transpired that he was having difficulty in his efforts to teach and I asked him whether he

was using the highly formalized methods then in vogue. He said that he was and I suggested that he concentrate on communicating to his students the relevant insights and that on this basis the students would be able to figure out the formalizations for themselves. My suggestion worked. The result was that I had an expert mathematician who also knew his physics (during the second world war he helped out at McGill university and taught quantum theory there) whom I could consult when writing the earlier chapters of Insight.

Another factor was that a group of Montrealers, including Fr O'Connor, founded the Thomas More Institute for Adult Education after the end of the war in 1945. I gave a course there on Thought and Reality. In September there were about forty-five students coming; at Easter there still were forty-one. It seemed clear that I had a marketable product not only because of the notable perseverance of the class but also from the interest that lit up their faces and from such more palpable incidents as a girl marching in at the beginning of class, giving my desk a resounding whack with her hand, and saying 'I've got it.' Those that have struggled with Insight will know what she meant.

I worked at Insight from 1949 to 1953. During the first three years my intention was an exploration of methods generally in preparation for a study of the method of theology. But in 1952 it became clear that I was due to start teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome in 1953, so I changed my plan and decided to round off what I had done and publish it under the title, Insight, A Study of Human Understanding.

The problem tackled in the book was complex indeed. At its root was a question of psychological fact. Human intellect does not intuit essences. It grasps in simplifying images intelligible possibilities that may prove relevant to an understanding of the data. However, naive realists cannot remain naive realists and at the same time acknowledge the psychological facts. For them knowing is a matter of taking

a good look and objectivity was a matter of seeing just what was there to be seen. For them my account of human understanding would appear to present intelligence as merely subjective and so imply an empiricism and, if they managed to get beyond empiricism, they would find themselves mere idealists. Accordingly, besides convincing people of the precise manner in which human understanding operates and ^d evelops, I also had to persuade them to drop intuitionist assumptions and come to understand the discursive character of human knowledge. Besides the world of immediacy alone known to the infant, there is also the world mediated by meaning into which the infant gradually moves. The former is Kant's world in which our only immediate apprehension of objects is by intuition and our only intuitions are sensitive. The latter is the world of a critical realism in which the objects are intended when we ask questions and known when the questions are answered correctly.

The first eight chapters of Insight are a series of five-finger exercises inviting the reader to discover in himself and for himself just what happens when he understands. My aim is to help people experience themselves understanding, advert to the experience, distinguish it from other experiences, name and identify it, and recognize it when it recurs. My aim, I surmise, is parallel to Carl Roger's aim of inducing his clients to/advert to the feelings that they experience but do not advert to, distinguish, name, identify, recognize.

The first chapter draws on instances of insight in mathematics. I began there because it is in mathematics that the content and context ^ of an insight/// are more clearly and precisely defined. Again, it is in mathematics that one has the clearest proof of the existence of preconceptual operations on the intellectual level. Apart from its mistaken assumption of uniqueness, Euclidean geometry is not mistaken. But this does not mean that it is rigorous. Euclidean proofs frequently rest on valid but unacknowledged insights.[4] Contemporary mathematicians employ highly formalized methods to avoid the use of insights that are not explicitly formulated for, what is not explicitly formulated, is not subject to control.

Chapters two to five draw on physics for their illustrations. Here insights are well enough defined, but they are much more in a context of ongoing process. Again, while mathematical formulations rest on insights, and while the insights rest on diagrams and other symbols, still this process can remain implicit with explicit attention concentrated on rigorously logical formulation and proof. In contrast, in the natural sciences, besides the logical operations of description, the formulation of hyptheses, the deduction of assumptions and implications, there also occur such non-logical operations as observation, discovery, the planning and execution of experiments, the presence or absence of verification and, in the latter case, the modification of the hypothesis or the substitution of another different hypothesis. So the second chapter is devoted to ongoing structures of discovery, the third to the canons of empirical method, the fourth to the complementarity of classical and statistical heuristic structures, and the fifth to a clarification of the meaning of special relativity.

Chapters six and seven are concerned with the operations of commonsense intelligence. While this is the universal manifestation of intelligence, it also is the most difficult to objectify clearly and distinctly. Common sense is more at home in doing than in speaking, and its speaking is apt to be terse and elliptical or else metaphorical if not fanciful. It is a development of intelligence that is prior to that achieved in system, science, logic, and so it is prior to the systematic mode of differentiated consciousness. It does not argue from principles but attends to proverbs, i. e., to brief bits of advice that are worth attending to when the occasion arises. It does not define terms but, along with the analysts, knows when they are used appropriately. It is a specialization of intelligence in the realm of the particular and the concrete and, while it always remains a necessary specialization, still it is open to as many revisions and qualifications as there develop other specializations that take over areas that common sense once assigned to its own omnicompetence.

Chapter six touches on the bias of the dynamic unconscious and here I wish to take advantage of the present opportunity to draw attention to two works that I have found very enlightening and, in some measure, to confirm the surmises I expressed in Insight. Herbert Fingarette in The Self in Transformation conceived neurosis as cumulatively misinterpreted experience. Both the experience and the misinterpretation are conscious though not adverted to, identified, named, distinguished from other experience and interpretations. What is properly unconscious and, as well, the goal of profound striving in the psyche is the correct interpretation of the misinterpreted experience. Eugene Gendlin in "A Theory of Personality Change" set himself the task of saying just what was meant by personality change and just how psychotherapy brings it about. I found it a most helpful study.

It was about 1937-38 that I became interested in a theoretical analysis of history. I worked out an analysis on the model of a threefold approximation. Newton's planetary theory had a first approximation in the first law of motion: bodies move in a straight line with constant velocity unless some force intervenes. There was a second approximation when the addition of the law of gravity between the sun and the planet yielded an elliptical orbit for the planet. A third approximation was reached when the influence of the gravity of the planets on one another is taken into account to reveal the perturbed ellipses in which the planets actually move. The point to this model is, of course, that in the intellectual construction of reality it is not any of the earlier stages of the construction but only the final product that actually exists. Planets do not move in straight lines nor in properly elliptical orbits; but these conceptions are needed to arrive at the perturbed ellipses in which they actually do move.

In my rather theological analysis of human history my first approximation was the assumption that men always do what is intelligent and reasonable, and its implication was an ever increasing progress. The second approximation was the radical inverse insight that men can be biased and so unintelligent and unreasonable in their choices and decisions. The third

approximation was the redemptive process resulting from God's gift of his grace to individuals and from the manifestation of his love in Christ Jesus. The whole idea was presented in chapter twenty of Insight. The sundry forms of bias were presented in chapters six and seven on common sense. The notion of moral impotence, which I had studied in some detail when working on Aquinas' notion of gratia operans, was worked out in chapter eighteen on the possibility of ethics.

The first seven chapters of Insight deal with human intelligence in so far as it unifies data by setting up intelligible correlations. The eighth chapter moves on to a quite different type of insight, in which one grasps a concrete unity-identity-whole. This I referred to as a thing, and I contrasted it with the already-out-there-now-real of extraverted animality, which I referred to as body. Both of these, of course, are to be contrasted with Aristotle's substance, which is the first of a series of predicaments and arises, not from a study of human intelligence, but from an analysis that basically is grammatical. It arises, I mean, not in an account of the genesis of the mediation of a world through meaning, but in a study of the meanings so generated. Finally, when Aristotle's notion of substance is taken over by a naive realist, it acquires the meaning of what is underneath the already-out-there-now-real.

Chapters nine, ten, and eleven have to do with judgement. Chapter nine endeavors to say what we mean by judgement. Chapter ten investigates the immediate ground of judgement and finds it in a grasp of the virtually unconditioned, a view that was preceded in my thinking by some acquaintance with Newman's illative sense. It differs from the naive realist and empiricist opinion, which thinks of verification simply as matter of attending to data and not as a matter of finding data that fit in with an hypothesis. It further differs, of course, from the old notion that judging can be a matter of comparing concepts and discovering that one entails another. Such entailment we considered to yield no more than analytic propositions. To reach analytic principles the compared concepts in their defined sense have to be verified in experience.

Chapter eleven asks whether any true judgements occur and it attempts to meet the issue by asking whether I am a knower. The 'I' is the unity-identity-whole given in consciousness; a 'knower' is one who performs the operations investigated in the previous ten chapters; and the reader is asked to find out for himself and in himself whether it is virtually unconditioned that he is a knower. The alternative to an affirmative answer, as presented in Method in Theology, is the admission that one is a non-responsible, non-reasonable, non-intelligent somnambulist.

Not only are the 'I' and its cognitional operations to be affirmed but also the pattern in which they occur is pronounced invariant, not of course in the sense that further methodical developments are impossible, nor in the sense that fuller and more adequate knowledge of the pattern is unattainable, but in the sense that any attempt to revise the pattern as now known would involve the very operations that the pattern prescribes.

Chapter twelve attempts an account of the notion of being. Distinguish notion, idea, concept, and knowledge of being. Knowledge of being occurs in true judgements. Concepts of being are objectifications of the notion of being. The idea of being is the content of the act of understanding that understands everything about everything. The notion of being is our ability and drive to ask questions for intelligence (what? why? how? what for? how often?) and for reflection (is that so? are you certain?). That ability and drive is prior to all acts of understanding and also to all concepts and judgements. As there is no limit to the questions we can ask, the notion of being is unrestricted. Accordingly, it is not categorial but transcendental.

A point not made in Insight I have since learnt from Fr. Coreth. It regards spheres of being. Real being is known when the fulfilling conditions are data of sense or of consciousness. Restricted spheres of being when the fulfilling conditions are not data but some lesser requirement: the merely logical is what satisfies criteria of clarity, coherence, and rigor; the mathematical is any freely chosen set of suitable postulates with their conclusions rigorously drawn; the hypothetical

is an instance of the logical that has some likelihood of being relevant to an understanding of the data of sense or of consciousness. Finally, there is transcendent being, and to this topic we return when we come to chapter nineteen.

Chapter thirteen raises the key question of objectivity. It is a key question because insights are not intuitions. They are not of themselves knowledge of what really is so. Of themselves they merely grasp what may be relevant to what one is imagining and, if one's imagining is sufficiently accurate, to an understanding of what is so. Now if the intuitionist view of insight is mistaken, some other meaning has to be found for object, objective, objectivity. So I distinguished a principal notion and three partial notions. The principal notion is that A and B are objects if it is true that (1) A is, (2) B is, and (3) A is not B. Further, if it is true that A is the subject and that B is not the subject, then there occurs an instance of the subject-object relation. The three partial notions of objectivity were referred to as the experiential, the normative, and the absolute. Absolute objectivity is reached with the grasp of a virtually unconditioned. Experiential objectivity is provided by the data as given. Normative objectivity arises when the exigences of one's intelligence and of one's reasonableness are met. If the virtually unconditioned is represented by the syllogism, If X, then Y; but X; therefore Y, then the major becomes known through normative objectivity, the minor becomes known through experiential objectivity, and the virtually unconditioned becomes known when the conclusion is drawn.

With chapter thirteen the book could end. The first eight chapters explore human understanding. The next five reveal how correct understanding can be discerned and incorrect rejected. However, I felt that if I went no further, my work would be regarded as just psychological theory incapable of grounding a metaphysics. Unfortunately that type of argument could be repeated. A metaphysics could be possible and yet an ethics impossible. An ethics could be possible and yet arguments for God's existence impossible. In that fashion

seven more chapters and an epilogue came to be written. Some of the points made then I still like; others have been superseded in the light of further reading, conversing, reflecting.

I have not been moved to change my mind about the first three chapters on metaphysics, i. e., on chapters fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. My usage of the word, myth, is out of line with current usage. My contrast of mystery and myth was between symbolic expressions of positions and of counter-positions. It was perhaps justifiable in the context of Insight, but it is not going to be understood outside of it, so another mode of expression is to be desired.

But in chapter seventeen my

Further, the account of mystery has to be filled out with what chapter four of Method in Theology says about religious experience.

Similarly, the third section of chapter seventeen on the truth of interpretation has been given a more concrete expression in chapters seven to eleven of Method. A systematic account of the problems of interpretation there yield place to an orderly set of directions on what is to be done towards moving to the attainment of a universal viewpoint. In this connection I may perhaps mention a doctoral dissertation presented at Fordham by Terry J. Tekippe on The Universal View point and the Relationship of Philosophy and Theology in the Works of Bernard Lonergan. It illustrates very well an intermediate position between what I had worked out in Insight and, on the other hand, the views presented in Method in Theology.

in the later work

A principal source of the difference between these two works is that I was transferred from Toronto to the Gregorian University in Rome in the summer of 1953. There for the first ten years I was there, I lectured in alternate years on the Incarnate Word and on the Trinity to both second and third year theologians. They were about six hundred and fifty strong and between them, not individually but distributively,

they seemed to read everything. It was quite a challenge. I had learnt honesty from my teachers of philosophy at Heythrop College. I had had an introduction to modern science from Joseph's Introduction to Logic and from the mathematics tutor at Heythrop, Fr. Charles O'Hara. I had become something of an existentialist from my study of Newman's Grammar of Assent. I had become a Thomist through the influence of Maréchal mediated to me by Stefanos Stefanu and through Bernard Leeming's lectures on the unicum esse in Christo. In a practical way I had become familiar with historical work both in my doctoral dissertation on gratia operans and in my later study of verbum in Aquinas. Insight was the fruit of all this. It enabled me to achieve in myself what since has been called Die anthropologische Wende. Without the explicit formulations that later were possible, metaphysics had ceased for me to be what Fr. Coreth named the Gesamt- und Grund-wissenschaft. The empirical sciences were allowed to work out their basic terms and relations apart from any consideration of metaphysics. The basic inquiry was cognitional theory and, while I still spoke in terms of a faculty psychology, in reality I had moved out of its influence and was conducting an intentionality analysis.

The new challenge came from the Geisteswissenschaften, from the problems of hermeneutics and critical history, from the need of integrating nineteenth century achievement in this field with the teachings of Catholic religion and Catholic theology. It was a long struggle that can be documented from my Latin and English writing during this period and from the doctoral courses I conducted De intellectu et methodo, De systemate et historia, and eventually De methodo theologiae. The eventual outcome has been the book, Method in Theology.

In Insight the good was the intelligent and reasonable. In Method the good is a distinct notion. It is intended in questions for deliberation, Is this worth while? Is it truly or only apparently good? It is aspired to in the intentional response of feeling to values. It is known in judgements of value made by a virtuous or authentic person with a good conscience. It is brought about by deciding and living up to one's decisions. Just as intelligence sublates sense,

just as reasonableness sublates intelligence, so deliberation sublates and thereby unifies knowing and feeling.

Again in Insight the treatment of God's existence and nature, while along the lines developed in the book, none the less failed to provide the explicit context towards which the book was moving. In Method the question of God is considered more important than the precise manner in which an answer is formulated, and our basic awareness of God comes to us not through our arguments or choices but primarily through God's gift of his love. It is argued that natural and systematic theology should be fused in the manner of Aquinas' Contra Gentiles and his Summa theologiae.

Finally, what is perhaps novel in Insight, is taken for granted in Method. The starting point is not facts but data. Development is a gradual accumulation of insights that complement, qualify, correct one another. Formulation sets the development within its cultural context. Marshaling and weighing the evidence reveals judgement to be possible, probable, at times certain.

Notes

1) "St. Thomas' Thought on Gratia Operans," Theological Studies 2(1941), 289-324; 3(1942), 69-88, 375-402, 533-578. The work has been recently issued in book form with updated references by J. Patout Burns. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, New York: Herder & Herder, 1971.

2) Petrus Hoenen,"De origine primorum principiorum scientiae," "De philosophia scholastica cognitionis geometricae," and "De problemate necessitatis geometricae," Gregorianum 14(1933), 153-184; 19(1938), 498-514; 20(1939), 19-54.

3) "The Concept of Verbum in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas," Theological Studies 7(1946), 349-92; 8(1947), 35-79; 404-44; 10(1949), 3-40; 359-93. The articles appeared in book form under the editorship of David Burrell at Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967 and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968.

5 4) Herbert Fingarette, The Self in Transformation, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and the Life of the Spirit, New York: Basic Books, 1963; Harper Torchbook 1177, 1965.

6 5) A chapter in Personality Change edited by Philip Worchel and Donn Byrne, New York: John Wiley, 1964.

7 6) See index to Insight s. v. "real."

8 7) See Method in Theology, p. 17.

9 8) See the study of Karl Rahner by Peter Eicher, Die anthropologische Wende, Karl Rahners philosophischer Weg vom Wesen des Menschen zur personalen Existenz, Freiburg/Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1970.

4) See Method in Theology, p. 213, note 63.