

INSIGHT: PREFACE TO A DISCUSSION.

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When the Reverend President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association so generously invited me to address you, he asked me to speak on my book, Insight. Since then, to my deep regret, I have had to drop both my original hope to be present at this meeting and, as well, my original plan to correlate personal development with philosophic differences. I must be content to provide a preface for a discussion, and to this end I have selected three questions that my book seems to have raised and, in any case, may possess an intrinsic interest of their own. They regard (1) the primacy of the ontological, (2) the finalistic notion of being, and (3) knowledge of concrete, actual existence.

The most shocking aspect of the book, Insight, is the primacy it accords knowledge. In the writings of St. Thomas, cognitional theory is expressed in metaphysical terms and established by metaphysical principles.¹ In Insight, metaphysics is expressed in cognitional terms and established by cognitional principles. The reversal appears complete. If Aquinas had things right side up -and that is difficult to deny- then I have turned everything upside down.

In attenuation, I should like to urge that even Aquinas occasionally turns things upside down. He wrote:

Anima humana intelligit se ipsam per suum intelligere, quod est actus proprius eius, perfecte demonstrans virtutem eius et naturam.²

This I should be inclined to translate:

The human soul understands itself by its understanding, which is its proper act, perfectly demonstrating its power and its nature.

But, however the passage is translated, it seems clear that a psychological act, named intelligere, is the basis of a perfect demonstration of the nature and the power of the human soul. Now ~~power~~ power and nature are metaphysical entities. To demonstrate them perfectly involves one in a long list of metaphysical theorems.

¹ There are, of course, exceptions. For example, "hoc quilibet in se ipso experiri potest, quod quando aliquis conatur aliquid intelligere, format aliqua phantasmata sibi per modum exemplorum, in quibus quasi inspiciat quod intelligere studet." Sum.theol., I,q.84,a. 7c.

² Sum.theol., I, q.88, a. 2 ad 3m.

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Yet we have Aquinas' own word for it that a perfect demonstration of these metaphysical entities may be derived from a consideration of intelligere, the proper act of the human soul.

Further, I do not feel that I am arguing from a stray sentence. It is Aristotelian and Thomist doctrine that knowledge of objects precedes knowledge of acts, that knowledge of acts precedes knowledge of potencies, that knowledge of potencies precedes knowledge of the essence of the soul.³ Nor does contemporary Scholasticism adopt a different procedure. It appeals to the ~~potency~~ potency, intellect, to distinguish the human soul from the brute. It appeals, if not to the act of understanding, then to the ~~understanding~~ universal concept, to obtain knowledge of the potency, intellect.

Further, this clear-cut instance of the primacy of the cognitional fits in with a larger doctrine. There is the standard Aristotelian and Thomist distinction between what is first quoad se and what is first quoad nos. If one asks for what is first quoad se, for cognitional reasons, the order is inverted: knowledge of objects grounds knowledge of acts, knowledge of acts grounds knowledge of potencies, knowledge of potencies grounds knowledge of the essence of the soul.

On this showing, then, the ontological and the cognitional are not incompatible alternatives but interdependent procedures. If one is assigning ontological causes, one must begin from metaphysics; if one is assigning cognitional reasons, one must begin from knowledge. Nor can one assign ontological causes without having cognitional reasons; nor can there be cognitional reasons without corresponding ontological causes.

Moreover, this interdependence is not limited to the particular case of the human soul. It is universal from the very nature of rational and objective knowledge. Thus, many of you would agree that Aquinas added existence, the actus essendi, to Aristotle's ontological causes; but you also would contend that, corresponding to this ontological cause, there is a cognitional reason, the judgement of existence. Again, (73) Aristotle affirmed matter and form as ontological causes; but Aristotle did not affirm these ontological causes without having cognitional reasons, namely, sense and insight into phantasm.⁴

³ De Anima II, 4, 415a 16ff. In II de Anima, lect.6, §304; Sum.theol., I, q.87, aa. 1-3, et loc.par.

⁴ See Metaphys. 2,17; The Concept of Verbum in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, Theol Studies VII(1946), 359ff. Might I take this occasion to note that the pages on quod quid est, quidditas (370-72) were far too much influenced by such statements as "quidditatis esse est quoddam esse rationis" (In I Sent., dist.19,q.5,a.1 ad 7m) and "Intellectus ...duplex est operatio. Una qua format simplices rerum quidditates; ut quid est homo, vel quid est animal..." (De Ver., q.14,a.1c.). On quidditas, the proper object of intellect, see Theol.Studies X (1949), 18-28.

Finally, not only is there interdependence; it is also true that development must begin from the cognitional reasons. What began with Aristotle was, not form, but the knowledge of form. What began with Aquinas was, not existence, but knowledge of existence. In like manner, any genuine development in Aristotelian and Thomist thought, if conducted on Aristotelian and Thomist principles, will originate in a development in man's understanding of the material universe;⁵ from a developed understanding of material things it will proceed to a developed understanding of human understanding; and from a developed understanding of human understanding it will reach a clearer or fuller or more methodical account of both cognitional reasons and ontological causes.

(74) With such a development the book, Insight, is concerned. Since St. Thomas wrote, there has piled up a heap of disputed questions that St. Thomas himself never treated directly and explicitly. Since he wrote, there has occurred a notable development in man's understanding of the material universe. Since he wrote, there has arisen an array of disciplines with new problems that press upon the Catholic philosopher and especially the Catholic theologians. Since he wrote, the human situation has changed profoundly in many ways. To meet these issues fairly and squarely, I think it is necessary yet not enough to select a minimum number of certitudes on which all agree, to strive for a thorough knowledge of mediæval thought, to deduce new conclusions from old premisses. What our time demands of us is more; it asks us, I believe, to know and to implement Aristotelian and Thomist method, to acknowledge in man's developed understanding of the material universe a principle that yields a developed understanding of understanding itself, and to use that developed understanding of human understanding to bring order and light and unity to a totality of disciplines and modes of knowledge that otherwise will remain unrelated, obscure about their foundations, and incapable of being integrated by the Queen of the Sciences, theology.

My second topic has to do with the notion of being, and I shall begin with a problem. You will agree, I believe, that there is one and only one ens per essentiam, that it is not an immediate object of our knowledge in this life, that the only immediate objects of our present knowledge are entia per participationem. It follows that our intellectual knowledge of being cannot result from abstraction of essence. For, if from a horse I abstract essence, what I abstract is the essence, not of being, but of horse; if from a man I abstract essence, what I abstract is the essence, not of being, but of man; and the same holds for every other immediate object of our present knowledge. No being by participation can yield us knowledge of the essence of being, because no being by participation has the essence of being; and what is true of essence, equally is true of quiddity, nature, species, and form. A being by participation no more has the quiddity of being, the nature of being, the species of being, the form of being, than it has the essence of being.

⁵ Sum. theol., I, q. 87, a. 3c: ...id quod primo cognoscitur ab intellectu

humano est huiusmodi obiectum (natura rei materialis); et secundo cognoscitur ipse actus quo cognoscitur obiectum; et per actum cognoscitur ipse intellectus, cuius est perfectio ipsum intelligere. Et ideo Philosophus dicit quod obiecta praecognoscuntur actibus, et actus potentiis.

Now this fact gives rise to a problem. What differentiates intellect from sense is precisely its grasp of essence or, if you prefer, its grasps of quiddity or nature or species or form. But in this life we do not grasp the essence or quiddity or nature or species or form of being. How then can we have any intellectual notion, any intellectual concept, any intellectual knowledge of being? Indeed, to put the problem with the sharpness that is essential, how is it that we have precisely such an intellectual notion of being that (1) we can conceive the ens per essentiam and (2) we can pronounce the only beings that we do know directly to be merely entia per participationem?

(75) Further, this problem of the notion of being is not unique, isolated, ~~unparalleled~~ unparalleled. If in this life we cannot know God by his essence, it also is true that we know the essence of material things only rarely, imperfectly, doubtfully. If our knowledge of essence is so rare and imperfect, should we not conclude either that Aristotle and Aquinas were mistaken in characterizing human intellect by knowledge of essence or, perhaps, that we have not intellects in the full sense of that term?

Many of you, I feel, will incline to the latter alternative. Human intellect is in genere rerum intelligibilium ut ens in potentia tantum,⁶ it belongs to the realm of spirit merely as potency. Its knowing is process. It is not some simple matter of grasping essence and affirming existence. It is the prolonged business of raising questions, working out tentative answers, and then finding that these answers raise further questions. Dynamism, process, finality are fundamental features of our intellects in this life. Hence, knowledge of things by their essence is for us, not an accomplished fact, but only the goal, the end, the objective of a natural desire.⁷

⁶ Sum.theol., I, q.87, a. 1c.

⁷ The paradox might be put in other terms. Thus, we cannot think without concepts. Yet Aquinas holds that concepts proceed from acts of understanding (Sum.theol., I, q.27, a.1c.) and that in order to reach understanding we have to think (cum volo concipere rationem lapidis, oportet quod ad ipsam ratiocinando perveniam. In Ioan., I, lect.1). The sole exception to this necessity of reasoning is natural knowledge (ibid); and natural knowledge is of ens and such principles as the principle of contradiction (C.Gent., II, 83 §31). Compare the notion of heuristic structure in Insight, passim.

Moreover, according to Aquinas, the object of the natural desire of our intellects includes the ens per essentiam. When we learn of God's existence, spontaneously we ask what God is; but to ask what something is, releases a process that does not come to rest until knowledge of essence is attained; therefore we have a natural desire to know God by his essence.⁸

By such reasoning I was led in Insight to affirm that our natural intellectual desire to know was a natural intellectual desire to know being. The desire, precisely because it is intelligent, is a notion. But the notion is not any innate idea or concept or knowledge. It is a desire for (76) ideas, for concepts, for knowledge but, of itself, it is merely discontented ignorance without ideas, without concepts, without knowledge. Again, it is not a postulate. Postulates are parts of hypothetical answers, but the desire to know grounds questions. Nor is there any need to postulate questions. They are facts.

What is the issue here? I think it both very simple and very fundamental. If intellect is not characterized by its capacity to grasp essence, then I believe that one parts company from Aristotle and Aquinas and, as well, from any adequate account of the nature of human intelligence. If, on the other hand, intellect is characterized by its capacity to grasp essence, then the fact that our knowledge of essence is so slight, can be met only by a full recognition of the essentially dynamic character of our intellects and, in particular, of our notion of being.

My third topic had to do with the objective universe of being. According to Insight this universe is to be known by the totality of true judgements and it is not to be known humanly⁹ without true judgements. Four main questions arise. First, is this universe of being the real world? Secondly, is it concrete? Thirdly, is it the actually existing universe, or merely an essentialist universe? Fourthly, How can concrete, actual existence be known on the account of knowledge offered by Insight?

First, then, is this universe of being the real world? Clearly, if by the real world one ~~means~~ means what is to be known by the totality of true judgements and not without true judgements, then by definition the universe of being and the real world are identical in all respects. However, it frequently happens that the expression, the real world, is employed in quite a different sense. In this sense each of us lives in a real world of his own. Its contents are determined by his Sorge, by his interests and concerns, by the orientation of his living, by the unconscious horizon that blocks from his view the rest of reality. To each of us his own private real world is very real indeed. Spontaneously it lays claim to being the one real world, the standard, the criterion, the absolute, by which everything is judged, measured, evaluated. That claim, I should

⁸ Sum.theol., I-II, q.3, a.8c. C.Gent., III, 25-63.

⁹ See Insight, p. 414.

insist, is not to be admitted. There is one standard, one criterion, one absolute, and that is true judgement. In so far as one's private real (77) world does not meet that standard, it is some dubious product of animal faith and human error. On the other hand, in so far as one's private real world is submitted constantly and sedulously to the corrections made by true judgement,¹⁰ necessarily it is brought into conformity with the universe of being.

Secondly, is this universe of being, known by true judgement, the concrete universe? I should say that it is. To know the concrete in its concreteness is to know all there is to be known about each thing. To know all there is to be known about each thing is, precisely, to know being. For me, then, being and the concrete are identical terms.

However, this view of the concrete has a presupposition. It presupposes that concepts express insights and that insights grasp forms immanent in sensible presentations. To put the matter the other way about, it presupposes that the sensible has been intellectualized through schemes, sequences, processes, developments. On that supposition, human knowledge forms a single whole, and the totality of true judgements is necessarily knowledge of the concrete. On the other hand, if one ignores or neglects insight, then human knowledge splits into two parts.¹¹ Concepts are related to sensible presentations only as universals to particulars. Of themselves, concepts and judgements are abstract, and, to reach the concrete, there has to be added an unspecified series of internally unrelated sensible presentations. On this view, which wholeheartedly I reject, it is paradoxical to maintain that the totality of true judgements is knowledge of the concrete. On this view, knowledge of the concrete is reached by adding to knowledge of the abstract the humanly unattainable totality of sensitive perceptions.

Thirdly, is this concrete universe essentialist, or is it actual and existent? This question arises, I suspect, because there are two ways of analysing judgements and, consequently, two ways of refuting essentialism.¹²

¹⁰ I am inclined to believe, however, that this constant and sedulous correction does not occur without a specifically philosophic conversion from the homo sensibilibus immersus to homo maxime est mens hominis (Sum. THEOL., I-II, q.29, a.4c.). This existential aspect of our knowing is the fundamental factor in the differentiation of the philosophies in Insight.

¹¹ It does so because none of us reach the totality of true judgements. What determines our view of the universe of being is our grounded anticipation of that totality.

¹² The ontological parallel is the question of the necessary and sufficient constitutive principles of subsistence. See my De Constitutione Christi Ontologica et Psychologica, Rome, Gregorian U. Press, 1956.

(78) Thus, one may argue that, while some judgements are merely a synthesis of concepts (a horse is a quadruped), still there are other judgements that involve a simple act of positing or rejecting (this horse exists). On the basis of this analysis, one will proceed to stress the extreme importance of the latter type of judgement and arrive, eventually, at a rejection of essentialism.

On the other hand, one may maintain that every judgement involves a simple act of positing or rejecting, that every human judgement in this life rests, in the last analysis, upon contingent matters of fact, that no synthesis of concepts, of itself, constitutes a judgement. On this view, on its cognitional side, there can be no human knowledge of real possibility or of real necessity without matter-of-fact judgements; and on its ontological side there can exist no real necessities without existing essences and no real possibilities without existing active or passive potencies.

You will find that in Insight this radical rejection of essentialism is worked out in detail. Judgement is, not synthesis, but positing or rejecting synthesis.¹³ This positing or rejecting rests on a virtually unconditioned, that is, on a conditioned that in fact happens to have its conditions fulfilled.¹⁴ Hence, a necessary nexus does not suffice for an analytic principle; the terms of the principle, in their defined sense, must also occur in concrete judgements of the fact.¹⁵ It follows that not only our knowledge of the concrete universe but even our knowledge of metaphysics is just factual.¹⁶ Finally, the theory is sufficiently refined to do justice to the problems raised by symbolic logic, by mathematics, by the probable principles employed in the natural sciences,¹⁷ and by the ontological arguments for God's existence.¹⁸

(79) Fourthly, how is concrete, actual existence known? Now if one asks for the ontological cause of knowledge of existence, clearly one must appeal to the existence of the thing immanent in the thing. On the other hand, if one asks for the cognitional reason justifying our claim to know existence, that reason is a true judgement of the type, This exists. For truth is the medium in which being is known; truth formally is found only in judgement; and existence is the act of being.

Next, how does one know that the judgement, This exists, is true? Here one is asking, not for an ontological cause, but for a cognitional reason. The only possible answer is that, prior to the judgement, there occurs a grasp of the unconditioned. For only the unconditioned can ground the objectivity of truth, its absolute character, its independence of the viewpoints, attitudes, orientation of the judging subject.

¹³ Insight, pp.271ff. On Aristotle, p. 366.

¹⁴ Ibid., chap. X, and p. 653.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 393.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 304-315.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.670f.

Thirdly, in what does this grasp of the unconditioned consist? It is not a grasp of the formally unconditioned, of an unconditioned that has no conditions whatever, of God himself. ~~XIX~~ It is a grasp of a virtually unconditioned, of an unconditioned that has conditions which, however, in fact are fulfilled. Thus, the question, Does it exist?, presents the prospective judgement as a conditioned. Reflective understanding grasps the conditions and their fulfilment. From that grasp there proceeds rationally¹⁹ the judgement, It does exist.

Fourthly, what are the conditions? Let us take an example. Suppose that on this table there is a small but very restless dog, moving about, demanding attention, whimpering, making a nuisance of himself. However, that supposition merely provides an ontological cause. What is first in our knowledge is a stream of sensible presentations. That stream might be organized or unorganized in a variety of manners. It might give rise to the reaction described by Satre in Nausée, or to a vital adaptation if the dog suddenly barked or snapped at one, or to any degree of seeing without noticing, noticing without attending, or attending that issued forth into any of a wide variety of psychological processes. However, you are philosophers. The presentations to you are organized by detached, intellectual inquiry. You verify that they cannot be classed as illusory or hallucinatory. (80) You attend to them, not as kinds of data, but in their concrete individuality. In this stream of individual data, despite their spatial and temporal multiplicity, you grasp an intelligible unity, a single whole, an identity that unites what in space is here and there and what in time is then and now. From that insight there proceeds the concept of a thing. You revert from the concept to the data to conceive the particular object of thought, this thing. In fact, all this supposing has yielded merely an object of thought. But if the supposing all were true, then all of you would be certain of the dog's real, actual existence. Why? Because I have been listing conditions²⁰ of concrete, actual existence, and you have seen that, if the conditions were fulfilled, an affirmation of concrete, actual existence could not be avoided rationally.

Still, you will ask, just where did existence come in? Was it some one of the data, or was it their totality? No, any and all the data are quite compatible with phenomenism, pragmatism, existentialism; but none of these philosophies include Aquinas' actus essendi. Did, then, existence come in with the insight, or with the concept, or with the particularized concept? No, idealists and relativists know all about insights, concepts, and their particularization; and to suppose that these activities yield more than an object of thought is simply essentialism in its radical form. But, then, what can be the origin of the notion of existence, if neither sense nor understanding suffices? I think that, if you will go back over the process just described, you will see that the notion of existence emerged with the question whether the particularized concept, this thing, was anything more than a mere object of thought. In other words, just as

¹⁹ On rational procession, see Theol. Studies VII(1946), 380ff.; X(1949), 370ff; and my Divinarum Personarum Conceptio Analogica, Rome, Gregorian

existence is the act of being, so the notion of existence is the crowning component in the notion of being. But the notion of being is our desire to know, our drive to ask questions. The crowning question is the question for reflection, An sit? Is that so? An affirmative answer to that question posits a synthesis. Through the positing, the "Yes", the "Est", we know existence and, more generally, fact.²¹ Through the synthesis that is posited, we know what exists. or, more generally, what exists or occurs.

(81) What is the issue here? It is a simple and straightforward question of fact.

Is it a fact that our intellectual knowledge includes an apprehension, inspection, intuition, of concrete, actual existence? Or is it a fact that our intellectual knowledge does not include an apprehension, inspection, intuition, of concrete, actual existence?

On the former alternative, ~~however, we first reach the unconditioned~~ a judgement of existence is simply a recognition of what we already know. Hence, on this view, in its basic instance, it is not through true judgement²⁰ that we reach knowledge of existence, but it is through knowledge of existence that we reach true judgement.

On the latter alternative, however, we first reached the unconditioned, secondly we make a true judgement of existence, and only thirdly in and through the true judgement do we come to know actual and concrete existence. ~~On this view, it is~~
On this view, it is only through the actuality of truth that we know the actuality of being; and the truth is reached, not by intuiting actual, concrete existence, but by a reflective grasp of the unconditioned.

Such, I believe, is the issue. Moreover, while I have no doubt that it is a momentous issue with repercussions throughout the whole on one's philosophic attitude, while I am aware that it is a decisive issue in a judgement on my book, Insight, I must also say that attention to the consequences can obscure the stark simplicity of the issue itself. So I put it to you quite simply, What are the facts? Is there or is there not a human, intellectual intuition of concrete, actual existence? I thank you.

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University Press, 1957, pp. 53f., 57ff.

²⁰ For further relevant conditions, see Insight on the notion of the ~~king~~ thing (chap. VIII), on the correctness of concrete insights (pp. 283-87), on such a judgement of fact as the absence of illusion (pp. 280-83).

²¹ Cf. Sum. theol., I, q. 54, a. 2c: "Actio enim est proprie actualitas virtutis; sicut esse est proprie actualitas substantiae seu essentiae!" Cf. Insight, pp. 83, 248, 437 on existence and occurrence. While existence is prior quoad se, occurrence is prior quoad nos. To cover both terms Insight uses the names, fact, factual. On fact, p. 331.