

But it is also true that once they are raised, an intellectual conversion is inevitable. Even positivists, instrumentalists, and pragmatists cannot avoid claiming that their theories are theories, intelligent theories, reasonable, affirmed theories. Even they cannot avoid insinuating that those who disagree with them yield to other attractions than the pure desire to know. Once ultimate questions are raised, spontaneous orientation in the world of sense is finished. For answers have to be intelligent and reasonable. No man dare claim that his answer is stupid and silly. But an account of ultimates based on intelligence and reason cannot avoid being an account of intelligence and reason. For what really is ultimate is what the account is based on.

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in the world of sense is finished. One may argue for a theory that describes such a spontaneous orientation, but the mere fact that one argues reveals one's own orientation is not spontaneous. Its appeal is not and cannot be a philosophic doctrine of positivism or instrumentalism or pragmatism is superfluous if orientation is spontaneous. As long as a man is content with a merely spontaneous orientation, he cannot be bothered with any philosophy. As soon as he becomes interested in any philosophy, he is committed to intellectual conversion, to accepting what is true even though it be strange. As long as a man is concerned with particular issues and problems, he has nothing to do with philosophy; but as soon as he speaks of "all" or "nothing but" he is offering a blueprint for the universe; and however much he may deride metaphysics, he is quarrelling only with the name and embracing the activity. As long as a man is a transparent egoist without a suspicion of reproach attached to unfettered self-seeking, he has no questions to ask about what truly is good and so is pragmatic. If he stops to ask for a criterion to distinguish between the truly and the merely apparently good, he is no longer in a position to settle what is true by appealing to the good.

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good, and so can settle what is true by trying it and finding out whether it is good; but if he stops to ask for a criterion of the good, for a distinction between the truly good and the merely apparently good, he is not in a position to settle what is true by appealing to the good.

The pure desire to know cannot be dislodged from its dominant position. It cannot because it is pure, because it is the opposite of the merely subjective, because its objective is the actuation of intelligence and the attainment of truth. The pure desire to know cannot be stripped of its unrestricted range, and so its object must be the unrestricted; it has to be being, and it cannot be tied down to some restrictive category. If, however, its object is being, then its objectivity must be absolute; the determinations of being are from within, for outside being there is nothing. But it is only in the judgment that absolute objectivity emerges, and so it is only in the judgment that knowing in the full sense is attained. The fallacy that we know by evidence and that knowing the sufficiency of evidence is only putting a rubber-stamp on the already known, is a fallacy; it overlooks the absolute objectivity of knowing in the full sense. That understanding and conception and subjective activities varying from one subject to the next, is another fallacy; they are subjective inasmuch as they occur in a subject; they are subjective if they are truly judged to be false; but they are objective if they are true.

Intellectual Conversion

A distinction has been drawn between a spontaneous and an analytic notion of being. The spontaneous notion of being is the pure desire to know and its determination by the activities of knowing. The analytic notion is an introspective grasp of that desire, its unrestricted range, its heuristic character, its protean content, from it follows a grasp of the criterion and the definition of truth, of the different meanings of objectivity, of the paradoxical orientation to the universe of being, and the contrary orientation to the world of sense.

parallel to the distinction between the spontaneous and the analytic notions of being, there is a distinction between spontaneous and systematic intellectual conversions. Spontaneous intellectual conversions are particular instances in which a person rejects what seems to be or what he wants to be and accepts what truly is. The earth seems to be flat. Were there an antipode, people there would fall off. The sun is the size of a cart wheel. It rises and sets. Liquids and solids are continuous. Gases have no weight. The list could be protracted to include various illusions of the senses, plausible but antiquated opinions, and the subtle interference of sundry appetites with the pure desire to know. But what is relevant is not a complete enumeration of such spontaneous intellectual conversions but rather the reflection that they meet with no great resistance. Intelligence possesses a natural primacy and it operates efficiently in handling particular questions; men prefer truth to error or illusion and to recognize errors and illusions for what they are may involve misgivings and suspicions but sooner or later the power of truth will overcome opposition to what seems strange and queer.

Systematic intellectual conversion is another matter. For it is a change not from a particular error to a particular though strange truth but from one general orientation to another general orientation. It is the rejection of an orientation that is familiar, and the acceptance of an orientation that is odd. It is turning from the world of sense to the universe of being. It is a difficult feat, for it is not so much any particular error but rather a perpetual source of errors that is to be rejected, and it is not so much any particular truth but rather a perpetual source of truths that is to be reached. Again, while it is a change of orientations rather than their consequences that is to be achieved, still the achievement consists in eliminating consequences of one sort and introducing consequences of another; one cannot operate directly upon an orientation. Finally, besides the obscurity of the objective, besides the necessary indirectness of the effort to attain it, there is a certain ineptitude in the forces that alone can be brought to bear. For intellectual conversion is from an orientation that arises spontaneously and remains in possession by sheer inertia; and it is to an orientation that can have no other motivation than mere reasons.

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Intellectual Conversion.

"It is strange, but it is true." Surely one has heard the remark, perhaps one has made it oneself. To be content with the obvious instances, the earth is not flat, people at the antipodes are in no danger of falling off, the sun is not the size of a cart-wheel, it does not rise and set, liquids and solids are not continuous, gases have weight. To acknowledge any of these truths is a partial intellectual conversion. It is to turn away from what seems to be so, and it is to accept what is so. It is a true conversion, but it occurs only in particular instances, and so it is only a partial conversion. The intellectual conversion that is our present topic is total. It goes to the root of the matter. It aims at eliminating the world of sense from its usurped position as an ultimate criterion of truth; and it aims at establishing as sole criterion the sufficient evidence that alone can be the basis of true judgment.

The philosophic enterprise seems to be involved in a number of elementary and opposed paradoxes. At first sight it is useless; it asks questions to which everyone knows the answers. After a bit of a trial it turns out to be hopeless; after all, the greatest brains have been working at it for over two thousand years, and as yet they have reached unanimity on little or nothing. In the third place it proves to be powerless. If philosophers cannot succeed in convincing one another, much less can they hope to convince the rest of men. At least a philosopher is likely to grasp the connection between a valid argument and the life of a reasonable being. But there is an infra-philosophic attitude that can acknowledge an argument to be valid and then proceed to the eloquent question, So what?

How is it that an inquiry, that seems useless because the answers are known, turns out to be hopeless because men do not reach the answers and, indeed, powerless because, even if they did, they could not convince many of their success? A complete answer would be a full account of all the species of intellectual aberration. In the present section our aim is to single out a single, yet principal source of error. More precisely, it is to explain why people think that philosophy is useless, that it raises questions to which the answers are known.

Man is born an animal and, as an animal, he develops without taking thought. It is not by asking and answering questions that he learns to function vitally and sensitively. On those levels development is spontaneous. On the other hand, while intellectual development has its spontaneity, still it is the spontaneity with which we ask questions and accept answers. More significantly, this intellectual development is secondary and complementary. It contributes to the task of determining the structure and parts of the world of sense. But it takes for granted the world of sense itself. By a squatter's right, more ancient than any contract social, we are in the world of sense and our immediate concern is to solve the particular problems that arise, to take things as they are, and to make the best we can of them.