

INSIGHT.

Preface.

In the ideal detective story the reader is given all the clues yet fails to spot the criminal. He may advert to each clue as it arises. He needs no further clues to solve the mystery. Yet he can remain in the dark for the simple reason that reaching the solution is, not the mere apprehension of any clue, not the mere memory of all, but a quite distinct activity of organizing intelligence that places the full set of clues in a unique explanatory perspective.

By insight, then, is meant not any act of attention or advertence or memory but the supervening act of understanding. It is not any recondite intuition but the familiar event that occurs easily and frequently in the moderately intelligent, rarely and with difficulty only in the very stupid. In itself it is so simple and obvious that it seems to merit the little attention

commonly
that it receives. At the same time, its function in cognitional activity is so central that to grasp it in its conditions, its working, and its results, is to confer a basic yet startling unity on the whole field of human inquiry and human opinion. Indeed, this very wealth of implications is disconcerting, and I find it difficult to state in any brief and easy manner what the present book is about, how a single author can expect to treat the variety of topics listed in the table of contents, why he should attempt to do so in a single work, and what good he could hope to accomplish even were he to ~~perfectly~~ ~~sub-~~ succeed in his odd undertaking.

Still a preface should provide at least a jejune and simplified answer to such questions and, perhaps, I can make a beginning by saying that the aim of the work is to convey an insight into insight. Mathematicians seek insight into sets of elements. Scientists seek insight into ranges of phenomena. Men of common sense seek insight into concrete situations and practical affairs. But our concern is to reach the act of organizing intelligence that brings within a single perspective the insights of mathematicians, scientists, and men of common sense.

It follows at once that the topics listed in the table of contents are not ~~so~~ so disparate as they appear on a superficial reading. If anyone wishes to become a mathematician or a scientist or a man of common sense, he will derive no direct help from the present work. As physicists study the shape of waves and leave to chemists the analysis of air and water, so we are concerned not with the objects understood in mathematics but with ~~the~~ mathematicians' acts of understanding, not with objects understood in the various sciences but with scientists' acts of understanding, not with the concrete situations mastered by common sense but with the acts of understanding of men of common sense.

Further, while all acts of understanding have a certain family likeness, a full and balanced view is to be reached only by combining in a single account the evidence obtained from different fields of intelligent activity. Thus, the precise nature of the act of understanding is to be seen most clearly in mathematical examples. The dynamic context in which understanding occurs can be studied to best advantage in an investigation of scientific methods. The disturbance of that dynamic context by alien concerns is thrust upon one's attention by the manner in which various measures of common nonsense blend with common sense.

However, insight is not only a mental activity but also a constituent factor in human knowledge. It follows that insight into insight is in some sense a knowledge of ~~knowledge and so a philosophy. Indeed, as I now must endeavor to indicate, it is a philosophy that corresponds to some of~~

knowledge. Indeed, it^{is} ~~seems~~ a knowledge of knowledge that seems extremely relevant to a whole series of basic problems in philosophy. This I must now endeavor to indicate even though I can do so only in the abrupt and summary fashion that leaves terms undefined and offers arguments that fall short of proof.

First, then, it is insight that makes the difference between the tantalizing problem and the evident solution. Accordingly, insights seem to be the source of what Descartes named clear and distinct ideas and, on that showing, insight into insight would be the source of the clear and distinct idea of clear and distinct ideas.

Secondly, inasmuch as it is the act of organizing intelligence, insight is an apprehension of relations. But among relations are meanings, for meaning seems to be a relation between sign and signified. Insight, then, includes the apprehension of meaning, and insight into insight includes the apprehension of the meaning of meaning.

Thirdly, in a sense somewhat different from Kant's, every insight is both a priori and synthetic. It is a priori, for it goes beyond what is merely given to sense or to empirical consciousness. It is synthetic, for it adds to the merely given an explanatory unification or organization. It seems to follow that insight into insight will yield a synthetic and a priori account of the full range of synthetic, a priori components in our cognitional activity.

Fourthly, a unification and organization of other departments of knowledge is a philosophy. But every insight unifies and organizes. Insight into insight, then, will unify and organize the insights of mathematicians, scientists, and men of common sense. It seems to follow that insight into insight will yield a philosophy.

Fifthly, one cannot unify and organize knowing without concluding to a unification and organization of the known. But a unification and organization of what is known in mathematics, in the sciences, and by common sense is a metaphysics. Hence, in the measure that insight into insight unifies and organizes all our knowing, it will imply a metaphysics.

Sixthly, the philosophy and metaphysics that result from insight into insight will be verifiable. For just as scientific insights both emerge and are verified in the colors and sounds, tastes and odors, of ordinary experience, so insight into insight both emerges and is verified in the insights of mathematicians, scientists, and men of common sense. But if insight into insight is verifiable, then the consequent philosophy and ~~met~~ metaphysics will be verifiable. In other words, just as every statement in theoretical science can be shown to imply statements regarding sensible fact, so every statement in philosophy and metaphysics can be shown to imply statements regarding cognitional fact.

Seventhly, besides insights there are oversights. Besides the dynamic context of detached and disinterested inquiry in which insights emerge with a notable frequency, there are the contrary dynamic contexts of the flight from understanding in which oversights occur regularly and one might ~~say~~ almost say systematically. Hence, if insight into insight is not to be an oversight of oversights, it must include an insight into the principal ~~devils~~ devices of the flight from understanding.

Eighthly, the flight from understanding will be seen to be anything but a peculiar aberration that afflicts only the unfortunate or the perverse. In its philosophic form (which is not to be confused with its psychiatric, moral, social, and cultural manifestations) it appears to result simply from an incomplete development in the intelligent and reasonable use of one's own intelligence and reasonableness. But though its origin is a mere absence of full development, its consequences are positive enough. For the flight from understanding ~~blocks~~ blocks the occurrence of the insights that would upset its comfortable equilibrium. Nor is it content with a merely passive resistance. Though covert and devious, it is resourceful and inventive, effective and extraordinarily plausible. It admits a vast variety of forms and, when it finds some untenable, it can resort to others. If it never refuses to supply superficial minds with superficial positions, it is quite competent to work out a philosophy so acute and profound that the elect strive in vain and for

centuries to lay bare its real inadequacies.

Ninthly, just as insight into insight yields a clear and distinct idea of clear and distinct ideas, just as it includes an apprehension of the meaning of meaning, just as it exhibits the range of the a priori, synthetic components in our knowledge, just as it involves a philosophic unification of mathematics, the sciences, and common ~~sa~~ sense, just as it implies a metaphysical account of what is to be known through the various departments of human inquiry, so also insight into the various modes of the flight from understanding will explain 1) the range of really confused yet apparently clear and distinct ideas, 2) aberrant ~~views~~ ~~views~~ views on the meaning of meaning, 3) distortions in the a priori, synthetic components in our knowledge, 4) the existence of a multiplicity of philosophies, and 5) the series of mistaken metaphysical and anti-metaphysical positions.

Tenthly, there seems to follow the possibility of a philosophy that is at once methodical, critical, and comprehensive. It will be comprehensive because it embraces in a single view every statement in every philosophy. It will be critical because it discriminates between the products of the detached and disinterested desire to understand and, on the other hand, the products of the flight from understanding. It will be methodical because it transposes the statements of philosophers and metaphysicians to their origins in cognitional activity and it settles whether that activity is or is not aberrant by appealing, not to philosophers, not to metaphysic.

metaphysicians, but to the insights, methods, and procedures of mathematicians, scientists, and men of common sense.

The present work, then, may be said to operate on three levels. It is a study of human understanding. It unfolds the philosophic implications of understanding. It is a campaign against the flight from understanding. These three levels are solidary. Without the first there would be no base for the second and no precise meaning for the third. Without the second the first could not get beyond ~~the most~~ elementary statements and there could be no punch to the third. Without the third the second would be regarded as incredible and the first would be neglected.

Probably I shall be told that I have tried to operate on too broad a front. But I was led to do so for two reasons. In constructing ^{a ship or} a philosophy one has to go the whole way: an effort that is in principle incomplete is equivalent to a failure. Moreover, against the flight from understanding half measures are of no avail. Only a comprehensive strategy can be successful. To disregard any stronghold of the flight from understanding is to leave intact a base from which a counter-offensive promptly will be launched.

If however these considerations are granted, it still will be urged that what I have attempted could be executed properly only by the organized research of specialists in many different fields. This, of course, I cannot but admit.

I am far from competent in most of the many fields in which insights occur, and I could not fail to welcome the impressive assembly of talent and the comforting allocation of funds associated with a research project. But I was not engaged in what commonly is meant by research. My aim was neither to advance mathematics nor to contribute to any of the specialized branches of science but to seek a common ground on which men of intelligence might meet. It seemed necessary to acknowledge that ~~that~~ the common ground I envisaged was rather impalpable at a time when neither mathematicians nor scientists nor men of common sense were notably articulate on the subject of insight. What had to be undertaken was a preliminary, exploratory journey into an unfortunately neglected region. Only after specialists in different fields had been given the opportunity to discover the existence and significance of their insights, could there arise the hope that some would be found to discern my intention where my expression was at fault, to correct my ~~q~~ errors where ignorance led me astray, and with the wealth of their knowledge to fill the dynamic but formal structures I tried to erect. Only in the measure that this hope is realized, will there be initiated the spontaneous collaboration that commonly must precede the detailed plans of an organized investigation.

~~There remains only the question, What practical good can come of this book? It is a difficult question to answer. Until recently it would have been regarded as~~

There remains the question, What practical good can come of this book? The answer is more forthright than might be expected. For insight is the source not only of theoretical knowledge but also of all its practical applications and, indeed, of all intelligent activity. Insight into insight, then, will reveal what activity is intelligent, and insight into oversights will reveal what activity is unintelligent. But to be practical is to do the intelligent thing and to be unpractical is to keep blundering about. It follows that insight into both insight and oversight is the very key to practicality.

Thus, insight into insight brings to light the cumulative process of progress. For concrete situations give rise to insights which issue into policies and courses of action. Action transforms the existing situation to give rise to further insights, better policies, more effective courses of action. It follows that if insight occurs, it keeps recurring; and at each recurrence knowledge develops, action increases its scope, and situations improve.

Similarly, insight into oversight reveals the cumulative process of decline. For the flight from understanding blocks the insights that concrete situations demand. There follow unintelligent policies and inept courses of action. The situation deteriorates to demand still further insights and, as they are blocked, policies become more unintelligent and action more inept. What is worse, the deteriorating situation seems to provide the uncritical,

biased mind with factual evidence in which the bias is claimed to be verified. So in ever increasing measure intelligence comes to be regarded as irrelevant to practical living. Human activity settles down to a decadent routine, and initiative becomes the privilege of violence.

Unfortunately, as insight and oversight commonly are mated, so also are progress and decline. We reinforce our love of truth with a practicality that is equivalent to an obscurantism. We correct old evils with a passion that mars the new good. We are not pure. We compromise. We hope to muddle through. But the very advance of knowledge brings a power over nature and over men too vast and terrifying to be entrusted to the good intentions of unconsciously biased minds. We have to learn to distinguish sharply between progress and ~~decline~~ ^{learn} decline, to encourage progress without putting a premium upon decline, learn to remove the tumor of the flight from understanding without destroying the organs of intelligence.

No problem is at once more delicate and more profound, more practical and perhaps more pressing. How, indeed, is a mind to become conscious of its own bias when that bias springs from a communal flight from understanding and is supported by the whole texture of a civilization? How can new strength and vigor be imparted to the detached and disinterested desire to understand without the reinforcement acting as an added bias? How can human intelligence hope to deal with the unintelligible yet objective situations

which the flight from understanding creates and expands and sustains? At least, we can make a beginning by asking what precisely ^{it} is to understand, what are the dynamics of the ~~the~~ flow of consciousness that favors insight, what are the interferences that favor oversight, what, finally, do the answers to such questions imply for the guidance of human thought and action.

I must conclude. There will be offered in the ~~the~~ Introduction a more exact account of the ^{aim} objective and structure of this book. Now I have to make a brief acknowledgement of my manifold indebtedness, and naturally I am led to think in the first place of the teachers and writers that have left their mark upon me in the course of the twenty-eight years that have elapsed since I was introduced to philosophy. But so prolonged has been my search, so much of it has been a dark struggle with my own flight from understanding, so many have been the half-lights and detours in my slow development, that my sincere gratitude can find no brief and exact yet intelligible expression. I turn, accordingly, to list more palpable benefactors: the staff of L'Immaculée Conception in Montreal where the ^{parallel} ~~underlying~~ historical investigation (*) was undertaken;

(*) "The ~~the~~ Concept of Verbum in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas." Theological Studies (Woodstock, Md.) VII(1946), 349-92; VIII(1947), 35-79, 404-44; X(1949), 3-40, 359-93.

the staff of the Jesuit Seminary in Toronto where ~~the~~ this book was written; the Rev. Eric O'Connor of Loyola College, Montreal, who was ever ready to allow me to draw upon his knowledge of mathematics and of science; the Rev. Joseph Wulftange, the Rev. Joseph Clark, the Rev. Norris Clarke, the Rev. Frederick Crowe, the Rev. Frederick Copleston, and the Rev. André Godin who kindly read the typescript and by their diversified knowledge, encouraging remarks, and limited criticisms permitted me to feel that I was not entirely wrong; the Rev. Frederick Crowe who has undertaken the tedious task of compiling an index

There remains the question, What practical good can come of this book? The answer is more forthright than might be expected. For insight is the source not only of theoretical knowledge but also of all its practical applications and, indeed, of all intelligent activity. Insight into insight, then, will reveal what activity is intelligent, and insight into oversights will reveal what activity is unintelligent. But to be practical is to do the intelligent thing and to be unpractical is to keep blundering about. It follows that insight into both insight and oversight is the very key to practicality.

Thus, insight into insight brings to light the cumulative process of progress. For concrete situations give rise to insights which issue into policies and courses of action. Action transforms the existing situation to give rise to further insights, better policies, more effective courses of action. It follows that if insight occurs, it keeps recurring; and at each recurrence knowledge develops, action increases its scope, and situations improve.

Similarly, insight into oversight reveals the cumulative process of decline. For the flight from understanding blocks the insights that concrete situations demand. There follow unintelligent policies and inept courses of action. The situation deteriorates to demand still further insights and, as they are blocked, policies become more unintelligent and action more inept. What is worse, the deteriorating situation seems to provide the uncritical,

biased mind with factual evidence in which the bias is claimed to be verified. So in ever increasing measure intelligence comes to be regarded as irrelevant to practical living. Human activity settles down to a decadent routine, and initiative becomes the privilege of violence.

Unfortunately, as insight and oversight commonly are mated, so also are progress and decline. We reinforce our love of truth with a practicality that is equivalent to an obscurantism. We correct old evils with a passion that mars the new good. We are not pure. We compromise. We hope to muddle through. But the very advance of knowledge brings a power over nature and over men too vast and terrifying to be entrusted to the good intentions of unconsciously biased minds. We have to learn to distinguish sharply between progress and ~~decline~~ ^{learn} decline, to encourage progress without putting a premium upon decline, learn to remove the tumor of the flight from understanding without destroying the organs of intelligence.

No problem is at once more delicate and more profound, more practical and perhaps more pressing. How, indeed, is a mind to become conscious of its own bias when that bias springs from a communal flight from understanding and is supported by the whole texture of a civilization? How can new strength and vigor be imparted to the detached and disinterested desire to understand without the reinforcement acting as an added bias? How can human intelligence hope to deal with the unintelligible yet objective situations