

## *What Is a Concept?*

Time and again, I have found myself blocked in trying to determine wherein or whereby a concept in the emphatic sense is to be distinguished, or alternatively, what exactly is meant by “*conceptual*,” as distinct from such other kinds of understanding as there may be.

On the one hand, there hardly seems the possibility of understanding at all except through concepts, general ideas, universals—from which it follows that “conceptual understanding” is really redundant. On the other hand, there is an obvious difference between, say, prephilosophical interpretation, on the one hand, and philosophical interpretation, on the other, which difference seems sufficiently great, indeed, to call for some such distinction as “*conceptual* understanding” might serve to mark. How, then, is one to solve this problem?

Well, the clue seems to be this: thinking as such is the attempt to achieve definiteness or clarity without running into incoherence *and* to achieve coherence without falling into indefiniteness or vagueness. Otherwise put, thinking is the explication of the implicit *adequately*, with a view to avoiding both vagueness and incoherence. But just this is what it means to say that thinking is, in the emphatic sense, “*conceptual*.” For a concept *sensu stricto* is a means of doing exactly this: explicating the implicit—*adequately*.

Thus it becomes clear how conceptual understanding is, in one sense, simply understanding in its essential continuity, and yet, in another sense, is something more, something, special, something discontinuous with understanding otherwise.