AQUINAS AND IDEOGENESIS

The Process of the Formation of Ideas

According to the Psychology of St. Thomas Aquinas, O.P., as Based on the Psychology of Aristotle

by

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The problem of the origin of ideas has puzzled philosophers from the beginning. The theories advanced range all the way from extreme idealism to extreme sensism. The purpose of this paper is not to trace the history of the different theories, but rather to explain the theory of one philosopher, namely, St. Thomas Aquinas.

This is, by no means, a physiological study of the various powers which play a role in this process, and I have limited myself considerably on this point.

I have limited myself also, as far as I was able, to what St. Thomas himself said, not dwelling upon the modern additions to his theory.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The basic problem of the origin of ideas is the fact that the formal object of intellectual knowledge is different from that of sense knowledge. The question is to account for this supersensuous object. Has it an existence outside of and independent of the intellect? If so, has the intellect been confronted with these ready-made notions from the beginning? Some schools of philosophy have held the affirmative answer to these questions and these we know as the exaggerated spiritualists. The opposite extreme of this spiritualism is the theory of sensism. The Thomistic theory of the origin of ideas holds a position exactly midway between the two erroneous extremes.

It is well to examine these two extreme theories of knowledge before embarking on the discussion of the Thomistic theory. The one
extreme, sensism, sensualism or sensationalism, is the very general theory that thought has not an object different from that of sentience and that accordingly sense-experience is quite adequate alone to account for all our so-called intellectual knowledge. The difference is merely quantitative, not qualitative. It is also called empiricism. The rejection of Innatism and of a priori systems together with renewed stress on the importance of experience as a source of knowledge are strong points in the empirical philosophies. However, by making ideas the immediate objects of human knowledge, they have made it impossible to know whether there is conformity to reality. Their position raises ideas to the status of "things" known and must be immediately known and thus knowledge becomes logically impossible or else an act of faith. This theory has its modern advocation in Locke, George Berkeley, and Hume.

The other extreme, and by far the older of the two, has its beginning in the ultra-realism of Plato, and is held in the dualism of Descartes in
the ontologism of Malebranche, in the pantheistic monism of Spinoza, and in the innate a priori mental forms of Kant. A common characteristic of many philosophers who justly insist on the spirituality of the soul is to unduly exaggerate the opposition between mind and body. Suprasensuous mental products, such as the ideas of being, unity, the true, and the like, cannot, these philosophers maintain, have been originated by sensuous observation; they are presupposed in all experience and transcend it. They must consequently have been innate or inborn in the mind from the beginning, before all acquired knowledge.

Maher\(^3\) states four objections to this theory. First he rejects it as a gratuitous hypothesis. Unless it can be demonstrated that some portion of our knowledge cannot be accounted for by the combined action of sense and intellect, the assumption of such a native endowment is unwarranted. But this demonstration is impossible, and the fact still remains that the vast majority of knowledge can be traced to experience. Secondly, by the very nature
of the case there can be no evidence that ideas existed antecedent to experience. Thirdly, all of the earliest ideas of man are of objects known by sensible experience, it is about such sensible material objects that his first judgments are elicited. Lastly, the tendency of physiological science is to make the doctrine of the mutual independence of body and soul less tenable every succeeding day.

It is clear from the foregoing that neither of the two extreme theories is suitable as a theory for the origin of ideas. While both have their good points a theory must be found that encompasses both the experience aspect and the spiritual aspect. This, then, is what St. Thomas did, following the basic principles and outline of the Stagirite. Aquinas' theory is somewhat of the middle road between the two extreme theories.


CHAPTER II

COGNITION IN GENERAL

A necessary pre-requisite in the study of the process of idea formation is an understanding of cognition in general. Cognition implies a union of knower and object to be known. In some way the determinations or forms of the object are united with the knower, and therefore the subject in some way has the form of the known. He does not have this form as his own form, but as the form of the object known. Retaining his identity, he becomes the object. Accordingly, the knower has a twofold existence---he exists physically as this man or that animal, and cognitively as the object known. The object also has a twofold existence, it exists physically, outside the knower as this tree or that tree, and cognitively in the knowing subject as the object known. Therefore, the cognitive existence of both the object and the subject are the same thing.

The foundation of cognition lies in immateriality, that is, immateriality is the root of
cognition.\textsuperscript{1} Cognition means that a being is not limited with respect to form. But the principle of limitation with respect to form is matter.\textsuperscript{2} Therefore, it is absence of matter which enables a being to have more than one form. By absence of matter we do not mean absolute and essential independence of matter, but merely that a cognitive being must have at least a certain emergence above the totally passive reception of forms which characterizes matter as matter. Cognition does not consist in a passive reception of form of the object or a transition from potency to act, although in a finite being it does not occur without such a transition.

Father Koren says in his \textit{Introduction To the Philosophy of Animate Nature}: 

A cognitive potency is potential with respect to many objects, but its acts are acts of knowing definite objects; hence the potency will have to be determined to the object which it will actually know. Except in the case of self-knowledge this determination will come from without. Since the form of a finite object is limited to being the form of this object and no other, it cannot immediately be the form determining the knower, but has to determine
the knower by means of an intermediary, called an impressed species. This impressed species actuates the cognitive potency, specifies the act of knowing as knowledge of this definite object and no other, and presents this object to the knower, thus enabling him to become the object.\(^3\)

This impressed species is necessary because there must be a proportion in immateriality between the object known and the cognitive potency, since the knower has to become the known and the known must become the knower.

The end of cognition, then, is the object known, and this object known as the terminus of the cognitive act is the expressed species. These two terms, expressed species and impressed species, will play a significant role in this study of the process of ideogenesis and will be explained more fully later.


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 103.
CHAPTER III

SENSATION

The discussion of cognition in general, having been completed, the problem of the formation of ideas can be presented in the light of the psychology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The Thomistic approach begins with the principle that there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in some way in the senses. Koren gives the following examples as proof for this principle:

a) If the working of the imagination is disturbed through injury to the brain, poisoning... or other causes, the intellect itself does not function properly even with respect to problems which previously were understood.

b) When we have to explain a difficult intellectual problem we try to find sensible examples or analogies, so that phantasms may be formed which can aid the intellect in the understanding of the problem.

c) If the phantasms of a sensible thing are completely absent, the intellect cannot form a proper idea of the thing; for instance, it is impossible to give a proper
idea of color to a man who has been blind since birth.

Accordingly, it is clear that our intellect does not operate without the phantasm.²

Since this is true, the problem is attacked by an examination of the senses and of sense cognition. This portion of the process of idea-formation covers the area from the object to be known up to and including the expressed sensible species or the phantasm.

Man's sensitive knowledge proceeds from his senses, of which there are two general divisions: the external or special, and internal. The external senses give rise to his sensations. The internal senses are responsible for his percepts, images or phantasms, memories, and estimations. In the order of being and necessity, his external senses come first, since all his knowledge starts with sensation. In the order of excellence, however, his internal senses come first, since their knowledge is more perfect than the cognitions of the external senses.³

In sensation, that is, the cognition proper to the external senses, one is immediately presented with this problem: sensation is obviously an operation
material in nature, but it is also somewhat immaterial. This is so because it is a process of knowledge and, as has been seen above, knowledge is an operation in which a corporeal knowing subject becomes (receives the form of) another corporeal thing without losing its own identity. This immaterial element must be accounted for in the explanation of sensation, an explanation that takes into account the immateriality found in all knowledge, even in the lowest sort—sensation.

St. Thomas says that sense is a passive potency, and is naturally changed by the external sensible (anything capable of being sensed). It is clear that man's sense powers are primarily passive, for a man is not always sensing, but senses successively. Since sensation is the action of an operative potency in act, a sense power must first be actuated so that it can perform the immanent action of sensing. The sensed object brings about this actuation of the sense; it is the initial cause in sensation. All external sensation implies a transient action of the object upon the sensing subject; hence, all sensation has a passive
element. The sense is indeterminate and must be acted
upon by the external object in order to be in act
to the production of a specific sensation.\(^5\)

At this point, it must be remembered that
in the process of sensation there are two phases:
The passive phase, in which the sense is informed
and determined by the external object; and the
active phase, which properly constitutes the act
of knowledge, and in which the informed power
determines itself.

The sensible object, by its action, causes
a material change in the sense organ, a change which
can be accurately determined and measured by experi­
mental methods. In sensation, however, there must
be another change, a reception of form in the im­
material order, simultaneous with and in some way
dependent on the change in the sensory organ. This
reception of form is the education of the sensible
species from the sensory operative potency and is a
pre-requisite for the immanent action of sensation.
This form, a representation of the sensible object,
is an immaterial form and is the term of immaterial
change. St. Thomas explains this:
...Change is of two kinds, one natural and the other spiritual. Natural change takes place when the form of that which causes the mutation is received according to its natural being into the thing changed, as heat is received into the thing heating. But spiritual (immaterial) change takes place when the form of what causes the change is received according to a spiritual mode of being into the thing changed, as the form of color is received into the pupil, which does not thereby become colored. Now, for the operation of the senses, a spiritual change is required, whereby an intention of the sensible form is effected in the sensory organ. Otherwise, if a natural mutation alone sufficed for the action of the sense, all natural bodies would have sensation when they undergo alteration.6

As has been seen, it is the object which actuates the sense, and it does this by its transient action through some sort of contact which acts upon the sense power. If this same change is accompanied by an immaterial change in the power (an eduction of a representative species from the operative potency of sense), there must be an intimate union between sense organ and sense power. This union can be explained analogously by means of act and potency. The power may be said to be the "act" of the organ. This means that the soul exercises its operation
through its distinct operative potency of one of the various senses.

The genesis of sensation, then, is as follows: The corporeal object, being sensible, acts upon the sense organ by some sort of contact. Because the sense organ is material, the change which takes place in it is primarily material. But since the operative potency is somewhat immaterial its mutation will be more or less immaterial according to the perfection of the power. Accordingly, this mutation or change, which terminates in the sensible species, must be both material and immaterial. The dual nature of the subject of reception requires two distinct types of becoming for any alteration of the senses. Consequently, the sensible species, in so far as it is received into an immaterial potency, will be a representative form (a form without matter); but, since the power depends on a material organ, it will be a form representative of the individual.  

More must be said about the nature of this sensible species. In Thomistic psychology the impression which the object makes upon the sense
organ is called the impressed sensible species, that is, the sensation is the impressed sensible species. The action of the sensation whereby it presents itself to the internal senses (which shall be seen later) is called the expressed sensible species.  

The proper function of a species, whether sensible or intelligible, is to cause the exterior object to be present to the power of knowledge. On the material plane, a knowable object of any kind cannot form a cognitional union with a knowing power except through the medium of a species or form. This is true of the sense object, which is material and therefore has to be raised to a preliminary degree of immateriality even for sense knowledge. In the species the object possesses this prerequisite mode of immateriality and can therefore determine the act of sensation in its initial stage, but it is the sense faculty itself, after being informed by the species, that actively elicits the act of sensation. 

The production of the species does not consist in dislodging a form from the object and giving it
to the power of knowledge, but simply in the actuation of the faculty through the influence of the object.


6Aquinas, *loc. cit.*

7Renard, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXTERNAL SENSES

Next we turn to the object of sensation. Now the object of sensation is anything which is present to the sense. That which is present to the external senses taken individually is called a proper sensible, an aspect so peculiar and reserved to the one sense that it cannot be known by another sense. For example, color is a proper sensible of the sense of sight. In the following discussion of the nature and distinction of the external senses, it will be shown that each sense has an object proper to itself and these, then, are the objects of sensation.

From the time of Aristotle, scholastic philosophers have held to the scheme of five external senses. These are: sight; hearing; touch; taste; and smell. St. Thomas also adheres to this enumeration. An external sense is any power which gives immediate cognition of the external material would in one of its sensible properties. The most convenient order
of procedure in the discussion of the various ex-
ternal senses will be to start from the simpler and
more easily described powers, and to go on gradually
to those of a higher, more varied and complex nature.
It is not the purpose here to go into the physiological
machinery of the senses, but rather the aspect of
the sensations which they give rise to.

Taste is the first external sense to be
examined. The formal object, or that which differenti­
tiates it from the other senses, is flavor. The
sensations of this power do not possess such definite
qualitative differences as to fall into well-determined
groups, and consequently there is no general agree­
ment on the classification of different tastes. The
proper pleasure of the sense is sweetness; its proper
pain is bitterness. The cognitional value of this
sense is very low. Continuous stimulation rapidly
deadens its sensibility; its recuperative power is
tardy, its sensations are wanting in precision, and
they can be but very imperfectly revived in imagination.
The main grounds of its cognitive inferiority lie
in its essentially subjective character, and in
the fact that its value is primarily nutritive, not
cognitive. Abstracting from the information afforded by concomitant tactual sensations, taste originally gives very little knowledge of external reality, and therefore must be ranked lowest as a medium of communication with the physical world.

The formal object of the sense of smell is odor. This sense resembles that of taste in many respects. Vagueness is a marked feature of each; continuous excitation renders both obtuse; their recuperative power on the cessation of the stimulus is weak; and both are originally of a like subjective character. The sense of smell stands higher in order of refinement. Its sensations are more easily revived in imagination; and, being awakened by objects at a distance, these sensations assume the character of premonitory signs of other future experiences.

The sense of touch covers the most extensive area of the human organism with tactile receptors distributed over the whole surface of the body and inside the body itself. Touch is a generic name for many specific senses, even Aristotle admitted.
the possibility of many sensations of touch. The sense of touch really comprises several specifically different senses. To it are attributed tactile sensations strictly so called (pressure, contact, shock, etc.) and thermal sensations (warmth and cold); also there are connected with it, muscular or, as they are otherwise called, kinesthetic sensations and those of pain. These last it would seem are due to an over-stimulation of any of the sensory nerves. From this, the proper object of touch can be said to be those things or objects which cause warmth, cold, pressure, and pain.4

The proper object of the sense of hearing is sound. The sense is aroused by vibratory movements transmitted from the sonorous substance through the air or other medium to the ear. Sensations of hearing naturally divide into two great classes, those of musical, and those of non-musical sounds. Another important division is that into articulate sounds the words of language, and inarticulate sounds. When these last are non-musical they are called noises. Sounds of all kinds are
highly susceptible of being conserved in the memory and reproduced in imagination, and they are also readily associated with other mental states. The very delicate sensibility concerning differences in quality, intensity, and duration, in addition to the very revivable and associable character of its sensations - all conspire to give the ear such high potential intellectual value. For, when once a few elementary experiences have been gathered by the other senses, this power is enabled, by appropriating them, to put one in position to take possession of the rich treasures of knowledge acquired by the whole human race.\(^5\)

The object of sight is the visable. Within the realm of the visible we find two things, color and the illuminable. Color is visible in itself, whereas the illuminable is only visible through color. Considering the matter more closely we notice that all bodies, whether transparent or opaque, have in common a certain quality, the diaphanum or transparent. Of itself, the diaphanum is pure potency; it is actualized by fire or the
celestial bodies, and when in act, it is light. But light itself is only a principle of visibility, it does not become visible in fact until it is actualized by color, which then becomes the limit or extremity of bodies. Therefore, an object will be actually visible when its diaphanum (which it has in common with other bodies) is illuminated by light and furthermore determined by color. In all this there is no trace of local movement; the whole process is a qualitative alteration.\textsuperscript{6}

The numerous capabilities would be sufficient of themselves to secure to sight high cognitional rank, but it is to the fact that the eye affords an immediate presentation of surface extension, that its fundamental importance as a source of objective knowledge is due.

In completing the discussion of the external senses it is necessary to look at the external senses and the impressed and expressed species. When some object is sensed the organ undergoes a physical material change. The power undergoes immaterial change, by having the species of the object impressed
upon it. This representation is immaterial, but since the senses apprehend things which are material, concrete, and individual the sensible species must retain those characteristics which distinguish and determine the individual concretely. We call those characteristics the conditions of matter. Thus, the sense object is received in the sense without matter because cognition is based on immateriality, but with the conditions of matter because sensation is knowledge of the individual things in their concreteness. In external sensation there is no expressed species because the object is present.

1Mercier, op. cit., p. 190.
3Maher, Psychology, p. 146.
4Ibid., p. 68.
5Maher, Catholic Philosophy, p. 75.
CHAPTER V

THE INTERNAL SENSES

Human knowledge begins with the operation of the external sense—sensation. It is caused initially by the action of the sensible object on the sense. This knowledge, however, is imperfect and incomplete. From here it is necessary to go on to a higher form of sense cognition than the external senses and namely to the internal senses. An internal sense is a sense power which uses the images of the other senses as its immediate object, or which gives only mediate sensory knowledge of the external material world. Thomas offers arguments establishing the need for four internal senses. These arguments are based on the general principle that operations which cannot be reduced to one and the same principle—because they have different formal objects—must be assigned to diverse operative potencies. The four internal senses are: the unitive or common sense, the imaginative, the estimative, and the memorative

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To begin with, this question must be answered: what happens to the product of the senses—sensation? This is where the common sense comes into the process of ideogenesis. The common sense, also called the central synthetic or unifying sense, is an internal sensitive potency by means of which a knowing subject perceives the actual sensations of the external senses, distinguishes between them and combines them. Now, the external senses by their very nature cannot perform any of the above functions and therefore the existence of the common sense is necessitated. The common sense is an organic potency, because its object is the concrete and individual sensations which here and now affect the sensing subject. The proper object of the central sense is the sensations of the external senses.

The central sense is actuated by the impressed species of the external senses. It is produced by the actual sensation of the external senses. The action of the central sense does not produce an expressed species, but terminates in the external sensations as here and now acting upon the central sense, the reason being the same as for there being
no expressed species in sensation. For the purpose of such a species is to determine the termination of the act of cognition when the object itself cannot do so either because it is not present or because it is not proportionate to the cognitive potency in immateriality. By termination is meant the state or condition of a being after a change or at the present moment in a still continuing change. But the object of sensation is actually present and proportionate to it in immateriality. Hence it would be useless to admit an expressed species for either sensation or the common sense.³

In summary, the common sense is the sense by which we sense we are sensing: it apprehends as one the sensations which the external senses apprehend as many: and the common sense receives its impressed species from the actual sensations of the external senses. There is no expressed species because the actions of the common sense terminate in the external sensations which are present. The impressed sensible species of the common sense is what Thomistic Psychologists call the "percept".
Another problem to consider is this: one can and does have conscious experience of singular, concrete material objects even apart from the actual presence of these objects, how is this possible? This leads to the discussion of the second internal sense, namely, imagination.

Imagery or phantasm is not confined to visual images, although the word "image" has, through usage, become rather definitely associated with objects of sight. Imagery is always limited to singular, concrete, material objects. Imagery or phantasm is not an idea. Anable says the following:

Since imagination is so limited—and indeed, it is even further limited, because we cannot imagine any object of which we have not had previous actual sense experience, either in itself or its components—an image or phantasm is not thought. An image or phantasm is not an idea.
What then, is the imagination? It is an internal sensitive potency by means of which a knowing subject retains the species of objects apprehended by the external senses and by the central senses; it reproduces them, and combines them into more complex sense images. The imagination is actuated by impressed species received from the central sense. In some way, the imagination is able to retain this species, exactly how is not known. When actuated by this species, the imagination produces as the term of its action an expressed species, and this is the phantasm or image. Such an expressed species must be admitted, because the act of imagining requires a term corresponding exactly to that which is imagined by its very nature, for the thing imagined cannot be greater or less that the image or phantasm. Phantasms, it must be noted, are not retained when the imagination ceases to act; since the phantasm is the terminus of the act of imagining and therefore ceases when this act ceases. Whenever the imagination is actuated again by the retained impressed species, the corresponding phantasm is produced. This must not
be confused with memory. The *differentia* of imagination is reproduction, while that of memory is recognition. The chief features is which remembrance differs from mere revival of images are:

(1) The freedom of the imagination as to the number and variety of its acts, the limited character of our recollections; (2) the casual and variable order of the former states, the regularity of the latter; (3) the isolated nature of imaginary events, the solidarity or relatedness of remembered occurrences, which are inextricably interwoven with multitudes of other representations; (4) the peculiar reference to my own actual experience involved in the act of identification or recognition, which forms part of the recollection but is absent from the creations of fancy.6

The next internal sense to be discussed, is the estimative sense which in man is called the cogitative sense because of its close connection with the intellect. This is an internal sensitive potency by means of which a knowing subject senses the useful or harmful character of sense objects. The impressed species of the estimative sense comes
from the sense objects themselves through the mediation of the central sense when the object is present and through the imagination when the object is absent. In man the estimative sense is different from that in animals because it is closely bound up with reason. It operates in conjunction with and in subordination to the intellect. In animals, the end, the means and the pattern of actions have already been more or less predetermined by the Creator. In man, however, this power is not totally predetermined by nature, but is overlaid by the effects of intellectual learning. Its functions as an instrument of reason proceeding by the sensory comparison of one sense impression with another and coming to a conclusion. In man the knowledge of what is helpful among sense objects is tempered and directed by reason.

The doctrine of the estimative power has been evolved as an explanation for certain animal reactions that would otherwise be unaccountable, and similar reactions are observable in man in his sense activity. So St. Thomas looks at this sense in two different ways: in animals and in
man as the estimative sense, and further in man as the cogitative power. The cogitative power is called by some, inferior reasoning, by St. Thomas, ratio particularis. The cogitative power differs from the estimative in that its field of operation is broader, but even more in that by reason of its adjacency to the higher faculties of intellect and will, and in regard to concrete, individual objects or images, it can institute a manner of comparison and discourse that borders on the strictly rational discourse of man.7

In general, its function consists in being a sort of mediating faculty between sense on the one hand, which grasps the material singular, and the intellect on the other, which is the faculty of the abstracted essence. It serves to prepare the immediate phantasms for the consideration of the intellect; and it is also instrumental in accommodating the higher commands of reason to the practical realm in the world of sense.

The last internal sense to be discussed has a limited and precise function. This sense is memory. It has been shown above that the mere
conservation and reproduction of sense impressions is the function of the imagination. The sensory memory is an internal sensitive potency by means of which a knowing subject recalls past sensory experiences, with a recognition of the past in so far as it has affected us favorably or unfavorably. It receives its impressed species from the estimative sense.

What the memory does is to store up the non-sensed species or intentions known by the estimative and cogitative powers. Thus it is able to revive these experiences in consciousness through recall of the appropriate species. The really distinctive characteristic of memory is its power to represent past things as past. In animals the recalling of the past takes place automatically, which is to say instinctively; but in man it may also come about through a studied search of the background of experiences that resembles intellectual inquiry. Even as man's estimative power is more perfect than the animal's and is called the cogitative power, and the inferior reason, so also is man's memory
more perfect and is called reminiscence.

To summarize the functions of the internal senses Koren might well be directly quoted:

From the foregoing considerations it should be clear that the various senses are not juxtaposed without any connection, but are interdependent. Only the external senses deal directly with the outer object. The central sense takes its object from the external sense; the imagination depends for its object on the central sense; the estimative sense receives it from the central sense or the imagination; and the memorial potency depends for its object upon the estimative sense. Thus we see that the various sense powers are ordered to secure for the animal the attainment of the maximum of perfection possible in a purely sensitive being. In man the sense potencies are further ennobled by serving as instruments in the preparation of intellectual activities.

The aspect of sensitive cognition which is of concern here is the expressed sensible species of the imagination -- the phantasm. For it is at this point that the intellectual knowledge begins and it is at this point that the discussion of the senses ceases.

1Wuellner, op.cit., p. 114.
2 Renard, *op.cit.*, p. 132.


4 Anable, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

5 Ibid.


7 Gardeil, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-76.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTELLECT

Having completed the discussion of the formation of ideas up to and including the phantasm, the basic problem of the process of ideogenesis now crops up. This question must be answered: How can the object, which is material, or its phantasm, which is partly material, move a spiritual operative potency, the possible intellect, from potency to act?

The possible intellect is the intellectual power by means of which a knowing subject understands the essence of a thing, expresses it in the concept, makes judgements, reasons, and retains all this intellectual knowledge. The first activity of the possible intellect is the only one of concern here, that of understanding the essence of a thing and expressing it in a concept. The object of the intellect can be either material, anything which can be known by the intellect, or formal, the particular aspect under which material object is
is known. The formal object can be common, that is, anything which exists or can exist, or proper, that is, abstract essences of material things.

Since the intellect is considered as a human intellect united with the body in the process of ideogenesis, we are concerned with the proper formal object which is being existing in matter, that is, the abstract essence of material things. This is what the intellect knows directly, primarily, and essentially. All other things which it knows are known indirectly, in relation to the proper formal object of the intellect.¹

The imagination is incapable of producing an object in the strict sense intelligible, for the object of the intellect is of a higher type than that of the senses. Further the intellect itself is not selfsufficient here, for at first it is nothing more than the possibility of knowledge, it is the mere power of knowing; it cannot therefore determine itself nor produce its own object.²

For the potential intellect cannot be both in potency and in act with respect to the
same object at the same time. Therefore there must be in the soul a special spiritual power, always in act, which is called the agent or active intellect. St. Thomas in affirming the existence of the agent intellect says:

...Since forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible, it follows that the natures of forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible. Now nothing is reduced from potency to act except by something in act; as the senses are made actual by what is actually sensible. We must, therefore, assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by the abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity of an intellect, under the aspect of the agent.³

The agent intellect, being a spiritual power always in act, illumines and transforms the phantasm. Using the transformed phantasm as its instrument, the agent intellect educes from the potency of the possible intellect an accidental form (the intelligible species), which, since in this abstractive process the phantasm is completely dematerialized of all its concrete, individual, material aspects,
is immaterial and can represent the object according to its universal nature. The intelligible species is strictly immaterial because it is educated from a strictly immaterial faculty and caused by a strictly spiritual power, and this is the agent intellect using the phantasm, separated from the conditions of matter, as an instrument. Since the intelligible species is immaterial, it is intelligible in act; and, being educated from and united to the possible intellect, it actuates the intellectual powers so that the intellect in act must produce the operation of knowledge. Because it is strictly immaterial, it is not only stripped of all matter, but even of the individuating conditions of matter. Therefore, it does not and cannot represent an individual essence, for matter is the principal of individuation. Consequently, intellectual knowledge resulting from this actuation must be of universal, absolute essences.

The intellectual cognosciive power, the possible intellect, because it is primarily a passive potency, needs to be informed and actuated
by the intelligible species. This species is obtained by the process of abstraction as mentioned above, by the joint causality of the agent intellect and the phantasm. The agent intellect is the principle efficient cause; the phantasm is the subordinate, instrumental cause. Once the possible intellect has been thus informed and actuated, it is in act as regards operation. The immanent action which follows is the act of understanding and is terminated in the expressed intelligible species, the idea.

To understand the need of a term distinct from the operation of understanding, we must consider that intellection is an immanent action. The actuation of the possible intellect by the education of this species is not the intellectual operation of knowing, it merely prepares for this act. The act of understanding, which the actuated potential intellect produces, is a quality uniting the faculty with the object, for knowledge is a union. But, since the object is not present as such in the faculty, it cannot be united with the
faculty unless in the intellectual operation the intellect form for itself an internal intentional term. The intellect must produce a form of the object known. The product of this—the concept or idea—is the thing as understood. It is an intellectual expression of the thing known. It is that by means of which the object itself is known. It is not that which is known as such. St. Thomas sets this forth in the following text:

...It must be observed that the external objects which we understand do not exist in our intellect according to their own nature, but it is necessary that our intellect contain their species whereby it becomes intelligible in act. And being in act by this species, as by its proper form, it understands the object itself. And yet the act of understanding is not an action passing into the object understood...but it remains in the one who understands; although it bears a relation to the object understood, for the very reason that the aforesaid species, which is the formal principle of intellectual operation, is the image of that object.

It must furthermore be observed that the intellect informed by the species of the object, in the act of understanding produces in itself a kind of
intention of the object understood, which intention reflects the nature of that object and is expressed in the definition thereof. This indeed is necessary, since the intellect understands indifferently a thing absent or present, and in this point agrees with the imagination. Yet the intellect had this besides, that it understands a thing as separate from material conditions, without which it does not exist in reality; and this is impossible unless the intellect forms for itself the aforesaid intention.

Now this understood intention, since it is the term, so to speak, of the intellectual operation, is distinct from the intelligible species which makes the intellect in act and which we must look upon as the principle of the intellectual operation, although each is the image of the object understood; since it is because the intelligible species, which is the form of the intellect and the principle of understanding, is the image of the external object, that the intellect in consequence forms an intention like that object; for such as a thing is, such is the effect of its operation. And since the understood intention is like a particular thing, it follows that the intellect by forming this intention understands that thing.\(^5\)

Thus, when the agent intellect abstracts from the phantasm an impressed intelligible species is educed from the potential intellect which in turn moves the potential intellect to actuality. The
terminus of this action is the concept or idea.

1Pyne, op.cit., p. 263.
2Maher, Psychology, p. 256.
3Aquinas, op.cit., p. 398.


A summary of this study of the process of ideogenesis follows, with the construction of a diagram and an explanation of steps in the process.

The object acts, the external senses react, that is, the object sends forth certain forms of
energy which stimulate the sense organs and thus change them materially. The external senses react with a sensation. They have the form of the object immaterially impressed on them. In the presence of these sensations, the Central Sense combines them into a perceptual whole (percept) which it refers back to the object from which the stimuli originally came by having the various species impressed upon it through the medium of the external senses. It combines these impressions into one percept.

The estimative sense then senses the useful or harmful character of the sensation. Strictly speaking this sense does not play a role in the formation of ideas. The sensory memory stores these percepts so that a knowing subject can recall past sensory experiences, with a recognition of the past in so far as they have affected favorably or unfavorably. The imagination receives the impressed sensible species of the object from the Central Sense and forms a sensible image of it (a phantasm). This is the expressed sensible species of the object.
This phantasm is an immaterial likeness of the object on a sensory level, but does retain the conditions of matter.

The agent intellect then turns its attention to the phantasm. It completely dematerializes this sense image of all its concrete, individual material aspects, thus revealing the abstract, universal, immaterial essence of the thing. It makes the essence, which is potentially able to be understood, actually able to be understood. It produces the intellegible species which impressed itself on the potential intellect.

The potential intellect, having been impressed with this intelligible likeness of the object, then expresses the intelligible content of this abstracted essence in a concept, the expressed intelligible species — the idea.¹

BIBLIOGRAPHY


