Spring 1964

The Imagination And Its Role In Error

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THE IMAGINATION AND ITS ROLE IN ERROR

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Carroll College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
of Bachelor of Arts
Department of Philosophy
April, 1964

C. J. Kelly
April 1, 1964
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction

I. The Nature of Error
   A. The Nature of Truth
   B. Operations of the Mind
      1. The Act of Judgment
      2. Truth and Judgment

II. The Nature of the Imagination
    A. Definition of the Imagination
    B. Functions of the Imagination
    C. The Role of the Image or Phantasm
       1. Necessity of the Phantasm
       2. Image-Intellect Relationship

III. Elements of the Imagination Contributing to Error
    A. Imagination as the Principle or Source of Error
       1. Objectivity of the Imagination
       2. Influences Affecting the Imagination
    B. Distinction between Image and Perceived Datum
    C. Mental Phenomena Contributing to Error
    D. Pathological Conditions
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is deeply grateful for the assistance rendered him in the successful completion of this thesis. The first debt of gratitude is owed to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Seitz, through whose sacrifice and concern my college education has been made possible.

To the faculty of Carroll College is extended my sincere appreciation for providing the necessary background for the undertaking of this work. In particular, I wish to thank Reverend Cornelius Joseph Kelly, Ph.D., under whose precise direction and careful supervision this thesis has been written.

F.C.S.
INTRODUCTION

In his comedy, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Shakespeare poetically describes the functioning of the imagination:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.1

But Shakespeare also recognized this sense as a power that could serve as a principle of deception:

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!2

John Pyne is cognisant of the significant role played by the imagination in the life of the individual. One's hopes, fears, and loves are largely influenced by his imagination.3

In the normal person the imagination does little harm, but very much good. It is the imagination forming sensorious images to illustrate the abstract ideas in the intellect.

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2Ibid., lines 19-22.
with which it cooperates, that enables us to understand easily and clearly.\(^4\)

Hence when an abstract proposition is enunciated which is difficult to comprehend, one asks the speaker to illustrate. This illustration attempts to embody in a definite image, the lines which his words express in more abstract, general terms.

Because the imagination makes us independent of present sensory stimulation and allows us to soar beyond reality, it is a great tool of the intellect and is usually found well developed in poets, scientists, inventors, and other creative thinkers.\(^5\)

But just as imagination serves as a tool, it also can become a harmful instrument contributing to neurosis, overemotionalism, and illusion. These states in turn make their contributions to error in the intellect.

In order to maintain the imagination as a beneficial instrument, a certain degree of control is imperative. Given too free a reign, an unchecked imagination causes a scientist to become too much of a dreamer or a philosopher to become too much of a visionary. Raith compares the imagination to a tool shop for the mind: if it is not kept orderly and uncluttered, even though it may contain the finest tools, it can be a dangerous place to work. "The intellect must operate with a controlled imagination."\(^6\)

If moderately exercised, the imagination proves most helpful. In almost every normal person there is a "certain play of imagery which is harmless and even beneficial when kept under control."\(^7\) Yet flights from reality

\(^4\)Ibid.


must be controlled. This thesis therefore centers around the following paragraph:

Exuberant and prolific fancy (imagination) when uncontrolled by reason, may divert attention from the essential to the accidental, may pervert and mislead the powers of judgment, and may so confuse the reason that fiction is substituted for objective reality.

More precisely, this thesis will deal with the nature of error and the imagination, and how the source of error actually is in the imagination. In other words, the imagination and the role it plays with regard to error in the intellect will be considered.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF ERROR

The history of ideas and personal experience attest to the fact that the mind consorts more with error than with truth.

Error seems to be even more natural to animals as they actually are than knowledge. For experience proves that people easily deceive and delude themselves, whilst to come to true knowledge they need to be taught by others. Again, the soul is involved in error for a longer time than it spends in knowing truth, for to acquire this knowledge even a long course of study hardly suffices.¹

Before it is possible to analyze error, the nature of truth must be considered. Truth, properly speaking, resides in the intellect and is defined as the conformity of intellect and thing. Hence to know this conformity between the intellect and thing is to know truth. The senses cannot attain truth in this sense for they cannot know the conformity which exists between an object and their perception of the object. The intellect, however, can know its own conformity with an object: it first knows and expresses truth when it judges its idea of a thing to correspond to the thing itself. This the intellect accomplishes by an act of composing and dividing. St. Thomas explains this as follows:

Truth therefore may be in the senses, or in the intellect knowing "what a thing is" as in anything that is true; yet not as the thing known in the knower, which is implied by the word "truth," for the perfection of the intellect is truth as known.

Therefore, properly speaking, truth resides in the intellect composing and dividing, and not in the senses, nor in the intellect knowing "what a thing is." ²

St. Thomas further explains, in the Disputed Question on Truth, that truth depends upon an intellectual comparison, thus it can only be found in judgment.

Just as truth is present in the intellect before it is present in things, so it is present first of all in the act of the intellect which composes and divides rather than in the act of the intellect which forms the essence of things.

The notion of truth consists in the conformity of the intellect with reality. Now, a thing cannot conform to itself, since conformity or equality is predicated of different things. Therefore, truth is found first of all in the intellect when it begins to possess something proper to itself, something which does not exist outside the soul, but which corresponds to what is outside, so that evidence is given of the conformity.

The intellect has only the likeness of the thing existing outside the mind when it forms the essences of things. But when it begins to judge about what is apprehended, then the judgment is something that belongs uniquely to the intellect and is not found outside it in nature. When the intellect conforms to what is outside by nature, it is said to have a true judgment. ³

Since, then, truth is found formally only in a judgment "where affirmation or denial is made of the relation of the subject of a proposition to its predicate," falsity, considered in the formal sense, "can also be only in

²St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I, q. 16, a.2, Corp.
the judgment, since it is the contrary of truth."5

For the investigation of the nature of error, further insights into the knowing process, from the intellect's point of view, must be gained in order to appreciate the imagination's role in knowledge and ultimately in error. The growth of human knowledge has been compared to a type of movement. The intellect's first concepts are imperfect and have to be perfected through a continuous process of sense experience and intellectual abstraction. Because of this process of development, the human intellect must advance through several kinds of operations.

The first of these operations, the grasping of indivisibles, consists in grasping what something is without denying or affirming anything about it. This process is often termed simple apprehension, but this stage is far removed from any connotation of simplicity; it involves conceptual knowledge, but does not as yet include any reference to how or in what way something is.

The other two operations of the intellect follow upon this grasping of indivisibles. One consists in an intellectual composing or dividing to form propositions which is termed judgment. In knowing what man is, for example, we do not, by that fact, have truth nor falsity. Truth or falsity arise when we assert that he is such or such. This is done in the act of composition (and/or division) in which we affirm or deny something of man by referring some subsequently acquired knowledge to the initial knowledge of "what man is."

5Tbid.
The composition (and/or division) of the intellect is expressed by an affirmative or negative enunciation. Conformity, between the intellect and what is, occurs when an enunciation expresses what, in fact, is, or what, in fact, is not. In this case the composition or division of the intellect is true. If, however, an enunciation asserts what is not or negates what is, the intellect is not in conformity with what is or is not and its composition or division is false.

Now it is one thing to have attained conformity of the intellect and what is and it is something else again to know that you have attained it. Thus knowledge of the truth is attained in the third operation when the intellect at the conclusion of a reasoning process makes a judgment that one thing should or should not be affirmed of another. Judgment requires evidence. Evidence is had here by reducing the conclusion into its principles. When the mind succeeds in showing that the conclusion is involved in the very notion of the principles then it has achieved evidence for a certain judgment. The mind rests in its end which is truth, formally and absolutely—knowledge of the true as true.

If, however, judgment is passed without sufficient evidence so that there is no certitude and the mind approves what is actually false, then the result is error formally. Therefore error in the strict sense can only be ascribed to the intellect; in its formal sense error "is due to a faulty judgment in which the person reflects upon his act of judgment and gives assent to it."^6

^6 Ibid, p. 93.
Truth is assured only when the judgment (the act of the intellect joining or dividing a subject and a predicate) corresponds with things as they are. Reality is the basic measure of truth; and a person's knowledge is right in proportion as he succeeds in attaining "that which is," and of identifying himself, intellectually, with the object of his thought. The intellect must constantly refer back to the sense experience when proceeding toward judgments. The image (which will be discussed in detail later) becomes a vital frame of reference for the intellect in composing and dividing. The third act of the mind or reasoning is similarly affected by the image, since it is related to judgment as movement to rest. Since there exists "no essential difference between the imperfect state of a form and its complete realization; neither is there an essential difference between movement and rest in the intellect."9

Yet how can one be certain that the knowledge from which his reasoning begins is an adequate representation of reality?

Only by retracing our steps from end to beginning of the process of cognition. Thus, active intellect abstracts from a phantasm that is derived from experience; and experience is the outcome of actual contact with the world.10

The process of cognition can hence be compared with a chain which connects external reality with the knower; if any one part of the chain becomes weak or distorted, the knower's link with reality is correspondingly affected. Royce summarizes the intellectual process as follows:

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the object impresses itself through a medium physically upon the receptor organ and brain. This physiological activity is the means or instrument by which the object actuates the sensory power which is in potency to know. The resulting impression is called the impressed sensible species. The sense power vitally reacts, uniting with the object intentionally, either directly if the object is present in a percept, or through an expressed sensible species if the object is imagined or remembered.

In any case, the object is now present in the knower as form without matter, but with material qualities, and hence in only a quasi-immaterial state (phantasm). The light of the agent intellect now causes this intentional form to be impressed upon the potential or true intellect in a strictly immaterial or spiritual way, without individual material qualities. This form thus received in the intellect by the joint action of agent and phantasm is called the impressed intelligible species.

Since knowledge does not consist in a purely passive reception of forms, the intellect in turn vitally reacts and produces the expressed intelligible species, also known as idea. It should be noted here that the idea thus produced is not that which is known, but that by which one knows.

What is grasped, first and foremost, is the thing; and the idea is simply the intermediary between the knowing subject and the object known, enabling the latter to become identified, in an intentional way, with the former. The primary purpose of the idea, then, is not to arrest our consciousness (though the idea, too, can become an object of reflection, as Aquinas points out), but rather to direct our thinking to the thing it represents. Only on this condition can our knowledge be objective; and only when it is ob-

11 Royce, op. cit., p. 143.
jective are we certain of its truth. The image itself provides the determination of the intelligible species. But virtue of the image the intellect knows something rather than nothing. Without the image one would be forced to admit that the agent intellect contained everything that the intellect could know. "It is the phantasm which supplies the object from which the agent intellect can abstract the idea of this rather than that." Thus the phantasm explains why one has the idea of horse rather than tree. The agent intellect could never provide the object, nor the phantasm this spirituality of the idea.

The inadequate phantasm can indeed become the weak link in the cognitive chain which can distort the idea. The judgments composed of such ideas would in turn be false, since their content would not be corresponding to reality. In the De Veritate St. Thomas notes that "every time that intellect allows itself to be determined by some fallible sign, it makes room for disorder whether its movement be perfect or imperfect." In the following chapter this fallible sign, the phantasm, will be considered more closely along with the faculty which produces it, the imagination.

\[12^*\] Brennan, loc. cit.
\[13^*\] Royce, op. cit., p. 119.
\[14^*\] Ibid.
St. Thomas considers the imagination both in a broad and in a strict sense. In its more restricted usage, imagination refers to a distinct internal sense power having its own domain of specialized knowledge. In its more common sense the imagination signifies this plus "all internal knowledge, with inextricably intermingled contributions from the common sense, memory, and the cogitative power, in its relations with intellectual knowledge. . . . of external things."¹

In the former sense, St. Thomas, in his Summa Theologica, describes the imagination as "ordained to retain or preserve (sensible) forms received through the senses."² Elaborating on this description, Glenn remarks that aside from being an inner sense which is fitted to perceive, preserve, and reproduce in concrete image the findings of the external senses, the imagination "can also rearrange, reconstruct, exaggerate, minimize, cartoon, and co-mingle the images once formed upon external sensation."³

Regis more precisely notes that "the proper function of the imagination is to preserve whatever is perceived by the external senses and common sense."⁴ Reith attributes a twofold function to the imagination:

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¹L.M. Regis, Epistemology, translated by Imelda Byrne (New York, 1959),
²Reith, op. cit., p. 141.
³Paul Glenn, Psychology, (St. Louis, 1936), p. 261.
⁴Regis, loc. cit.
"to retain images of past external experience and to compose new images from the experience of the past."\(^5\)

Considering first the imagination's role as a receptacle of past external experience, it appears to be of a passive nature, tending toward the same objectivity as sense knowledge. The imagination, left to its own initiative, has no other function than to store the data perceived by the external senses and experienced by the common sense.\(^6\) Regis supports this statement by a passage from the *Summa Theologica*:

> A thing is known, in a second way, by a sort of secondary mutation, which is nothing but a prolongation of the mutation of the particular sense by an exterior thing. This prolonged motion remains even in the absence of exterior objects and characterizes the imagination.\(^7\)

Two prominent figures in the field of psychology and psychiatry, Jahn Cavanagh and James McGoldrick, outline five specific functions of the imagination:

Imagination is an internal cognitive power which is stimulated by the central sense and a) preserves the images of objects perceived by the external senses, b) recalls the images so retained, c) creates or combines new groupings of images, d) does not recognize the images as past or as representing past events, but relives the past as though it were present, and e) projects the images.\(^8\)

No peculiar psychological significance is attributed to these first two stages (which are concerned with retaining images of past external experience), but the creative function is of special importance; it can have disastrous as well as beneficial effects in the life of the

\(^5\)Regis, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

\(^6\)Regis, *loc. cit.*

\(^7\)Ibid.

\(^8\)Cavanagh and McGoldrick, *op. cit.*, p. 111-12.
The function of the imagination of composing new images from the experience of the past will now be discussed. This creative role of the imagination consists "in making composite sensory images from various details of past experiences retained in the imagination." The details of the product of the imagination must, at some time or another, have been received by the external senses, but the arrangement of these details is left to the imagination. For example, the imagination can combine a number of species into an image of an object which has never been directly apprehended by the external senses, "as when it combines the forms of gold and mountain into the image of gold-mountain." Thus the imagination, unconcerned about identification, tends to divorce itself from reality. Without any concern for the objects from which the original percepts were gleaned, the imagination "constructs a new image out of the elements contained in the phantasms stored away in the memory." It is precisely this power to combine various experiences that makes the imagination so valuable an instrument of the mind and yet a tool of error.

The recasting of the sense-perceptions by the imagination can be influenced by "corporeal transmutations, as for example in men who are sleeping or violently insane, or again at the command of reason disposing phantasms in view of intellectual ends." Pyne points out that when the imagination acts in a capricious manner, producing unusual, whimsical phan-

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9Reith, loc. cit.
10Summa Theologica, I, q. 78, a. 4, Corp.
12Regis, op. cit., p. 240.
tasm, it is called fancy. He states further that among the mental products that owe their existence principally to this power are wit and humor.\(^\text{13}\)

In his analysis of the constructive or creative imagination, Maher indicates the cooperation of three factors: purpose, attention, and discriminative selection:

There must be at least in dim outlines before the mind an aim or object to be realized. Then, as in order to satisfy this vague desire the spontaneous activity of the faculty brings forward its materials, the attention is fixed on those likely to fit into the wished-for ideal. Finally, selective discrimination retains those judged to be appropriate and rejects the remainder.\(^\text{14}\)

The creative act of the imagination is not a simple reflex of the individual, but involves a rather integrated effort of three factors. But more important, note how the intellect comes into play as it scrutinizes the material of the imagination. It determines which images are acceptable and rejects the others.

James Royce, Head of the Psychology Department at the University of Seattle, discusses at length the role of the image or phantasm:

"Phantasm" is a word used in traditional Scholastic philosophy to refer to any sensory knowledge from which the intellect can abstract an idea. It does not have any specific reference to fantasy. Although a phantasm is usually elaborated upon the imagination and other internal senses, it is here taken to mean a sensory awareness produced by the combining of any of the special and internal senses. Phantasm is conceived of in Scholastic theory as the

\(^{13}\)Pyne, op. cit., p. 213.

\(^{14}\)Maher, op. cit., p. 166.
subordinate and instrumental efficient cause of the idea, the principal efficient cause being the agent intellect.  

The importance of the role of the image in ideogenesis is briefly traced now. The action of the material object brings the sense from a state of potency to that of act and awakens sense perception "which results in a phantasm of the object in the imagination from which the universal is abstracted." Neither the physical object nor the phantasm directly reveal themselves to the possible intellect. They only furnish the elements or material for the elaboration of the concept. Because they are both concrete and individual, they are not actually intelligible but only potentially so.

The idea, however, is "truly dependent on the phantasm, since it is only through the product of sense that mind can come in contact with its object." In fact, it would appear that the intellect never operates without the use of images. As Aristotle notes, "To the thinking soul, phantasms have the same relation as a sensible object to the senses." But Brennan observes, "it is plain that there is no sensation without the presence of an object impinging on the organs." Therefore, "there is no thinking without the presence of a phantasm." In his Commentary on the De Anima St. Thomas explicitly states that "the intellect always requires phantasms." Brennan says of the dependence of the idea upon the phantasm:

St. Thomas, too, is firm on this point; and in

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15 Royce, op. cit., 118.
17 Brennan, op. cit., p. 284.
19 Brennan, loc. cit.
20 Aristotle, loc. cit.
21 St. Thomas, De Anima, III, vii, 775.
favor of his view, he notes, first, the general tendency of mind to adduce palpable examples, in an effort to clarify its understanding of a problem; secondly, the familiar habit of trying to visualize things that are actually incapable of being seen, such as energy, power, and substance; thirdly, the fact that a man born blind has no conception of color, since there is no phantasm from which he can abstract an idea. 

St. Thomas remarks specifically that the intellect "knows the individual thing indirectly or reflectively, by a return to the phantasms from which it abstracted what is intelligible." Thus the Angelic Doctor continues in the De Trinitate that "the image is the principle of our knowledge, as that from which the operation of the intellect begins, not as something fleeting, but enduring as a sort of foundation of intellectual activity." 

Considering further the image-intellect relationship, St. Thomas remarks that "images are related to the intellect as objects in which it sees whatever it sees either through a perfect representation or through a negation." Hence, one must conclude, "when knowledge of images is impeded, the intellect's knowledge must be completely obstructed."

This chapter has thus presented the nature and functions of the imagination, with special emphasis upon the product of the imagination and the other internal senses, the image or phantasm. In particular, the dependency of the intellect upon this image was stressed, noting, with St. Thomas, that "the soul can't understand without phantasms." And even when the phantasm is present, the intellect must constantly refer to it in an effort to

22Brennan, loc. cit.

23St. Thomas, De Anima, III, vii, 713.

24St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius, translation by Armand Maurer, (Toronto, 1953), VI, 2, ad. 5.

25Ibid.

26Ibid., VI, 2, ad. 2.

27St. Thomas, De Anima, III, vii, 772.
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22 Brennan, *loc. cit.*

23 St. Thomas, *De Anima*, III, vii, 713.

24 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, translation by Armand Maurer, (Toronto, 1953), VI, 2, ad. 5.


28 St. Thomas, *De Anima*, III, vii, 772.
clarify the intellect's understanding of a problem. The third chapter of this thesis will discuss how the imagination actually serves as a principle of error.
Elements of the Imagination Contributing to Error

Briefly summarizing what has been discussed in the first two chapters, it was noted that all knowledge begins in the senses. St. Thomas discusses the role of the imagination in the intellectual process:

For from the apprehension of sense springs the apprehension of the imagination, which, as the Philosopher says, is a movement resulting from sense; and from it in turn springs our intellectual apprehension, because, as is clear in the De Anima, images are as objects of the intellectual soul.\(^1\)

The function of the image or phantasm was described as crucial in the process of thinking: "the intellect always requires phantasms,"\(^2\) or more explicitly, "the soul can't understand without phantasms."\(^3\)

When one link in the intellectual process is weakened or distorted, the rest of the succeeding operations are affected. Hence, if the external senses prove defective or an internal sense such as the imagination elicits an image that is inadequate in representing reality completely, the intellect may form an erroneous concept of reality.

More specifically, the senses can only report the way in which they are affected by reality. But there can be a disproportion between what the senses themselves report and what actually exists. This disproportion is the reason why the imagination is the principle or source of error. The

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\(^1\)Summa Theologica, I, q. 16, a. 2, Corp.

\(^2\)St. Thomas, De Anima, III, vii, 745.

\(^3\)Ibid, III, vii, 772.
intellect is the actual cause of error when it accepts this sense report to be an adequate representation of reality. Hence the ways in which the senses are affected by reality may not be an accurate reflection of the way reality actually exists. The imagination, then, produces an image which reproduces the manner in which the senses were affected by the objective world, but this image might not be an adequate representation of this world. If the intellect accepts this inadequate image as reflecting reality, then error results from this judgment. Imagination can thus be the root of error, but the cause of error always rests in the intellectual judgment.

In itself, the imagination, considered with regard to its function as the recipient of the proper effects of exterior sensibles, has the same objectivity as the external senses. The imagination "is not, as too often stated, a purely capricious power concerned with the likenesses of physical things, but a cognitive power whose activity is an effect of the causality of things upon the soul." It enjoys, therefore, in due proportion, the same objectivity as do the external senses with regard to common sensibles, proper sensibles, and accidental sensibles, at least when they are present. In the absence of these sensibles, however, the imagination's objectivity is strained:

In the absence of these sensibles, the imagination is more sensitive to inner influences, that is, to impulses that come from the will

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Regis, op. cit., p. 271.
through the cogitative power, and then imagination's objective realism can be no longer dealing with the solitary workings of the imagination itself, but with teamwork wherein pressures other than those of exterior things are brought to bear.\textsuperscript{5}

According to the type and the intensity of the pressures exerted on the imagination, it can either go beserk or become the most precious instrument of scientific, mathematical and philosophical knowledge. Van Steenberghen calls attention in particular to the function of the creative imagination: "The play of the imagination, especially its characteristic compositive function, enriches my conscious life, but also complicates it and at times confuses it."\textsuperscript{6}

As an instance of the imagination's ability to confuse, Van Steenberghen first points to the difficulty of distinguishing an image from a perceived datum. This problem of distinguishing between the world of images and the world of perceptions, which he terms "one of the hardest problems in philosophy,"\textsuperscript{7} will now be investigated.

Harmon clarifies somewhat the image-perception distinction by indicating first the similarities that exist between the two and then their differences:

Images resemble sense impressions in their dependence upon the physiological organism and the fact that they always represent specific objects of sensory experience. They differ from sensations in being less complete as to details, less vivid, less stable, and more subject to voluntary control in the way of

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{7}Ibid.
production, variation, and dismissal. Sensations, in fact, cannot be altered in any degree at will, except insofar as we direct our attention from one part of the sense object to another.

Some images, on the contrary, are susceptible to a high degree of voluntary manipulation. Ordinarily they may be called up at one's pleasure; made to change their position, shape, or color; even be combined into new patterns if desired; and, eventually, be banished altogether from consciousness. Finally, images are internal phenomena, since their existence is purely subjective and their physiological basis, intraorganic.°

The chief psychological difference lies in the fact that sense-perception, as a rule, is much more vivid than an image. But this difference is far from being universal, hence there is the possibility of mistaking one for the other.  

Because vivid images can easily be mistaken for sense-perceptions, the possibility of error in the intellect occurs, since the active intellect is presented with a phantasm which inadequately represents reality. This mistake occurs regularly in ordinary dreams and not infrequently in the twilight states between waking and dreaming. St. Thomas comments on these phenomena and how falsity can be attributed to the imagination:

Falsity is attributed to the imagination, as it represents the likeness of something even in its absence. Hence, when anyone perceives the likeness of something as if it were the thing itself,

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falsity results from such an apprehension; and for this reason the Philosopher says that shadows, pictures, and dreams are said to be false insofar as they convey the likeness of things that are not present in substance.\textsuperscript{10}

The likeness of something can prove most deceptive in itself when it is accepted by the intellect in too literal or too objective a light.

St. Thomas presents the example of Adam, who, even in the state of innocence, viewed the sun other than what it really was. That is to say, the sun seemed smaller than its actual or natural size. Because imagination naturally follows the senses, "reason had necessarily to intervene in order to correct these impressions."\textsuperscript{11}

This paper will now briefly consider three particular types of mental phenomena that denote erroneous convictions: illusion, delusion, and fallacy. The first, the more pertinent phenomenon of illusion, will be discussed more thoroughly. The activity of the imagination is the chief source of these mental phenomena.\textsuperscript{12} And according to the type and intensity of the pressures exerted on the imagination, these mental phenomena range from the normal to the pathological.

Fallacy means a vicious reasoning, an intellectual inference of a fallacious character, whilst illusion signifies a deceptive or spurious act of apprehension, and delusion implies a false belief of a somewhat permanent nature and of a more or less extensive range.\textsuperscript{13}

A common factor to all these states of consciousness is their note of

\textsuperscript{10} Summa Theologica, I, q. 17, a. 2, ad. 2.

\textsuperscript{11} Pierre Rousselot, The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas, translated by James E. O'Mahony, (New York, 1933), p. 76.

\textsuperscript{12} Maher, op. cit., p. 170.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
falsity. From a psychological standpoint, then, a mental act "which disagrees from its object as that object is known by the normal human mind" is said to be false or untrue.\(^{14}\) An illusion, for instance, is a deceptive cognition which proports to be immediately evident, and it can be due to erroneous expectations and mistaken memories, just as well as to false perceptions of the external senses. Thus the causes of illusion may be either subjective or objective, i.e., mistakes may arise either from mental influences, or from irregular conditions which includes the state of the human organism.

It is important to note that in the process of knowledge, the amount of material directly presented to the external senses is extremely small. By far the greater part of the information gained through each act of apprehension is due to inference, memory, and "associations of other faculties faintly revived in imagination."\(^{15}\) Accordingly the disposition of the mind immediately preceding the impression of any particular object has a crucial determining in what manner this object will be perceived.

For example, if the imagination is vigorously excitable, and if one has a lively expectation of beholding some special occurrence, it is probable that anything bearing even a faint resemblance to this desired occurrence will be mistaken for this anticipated experience:

Even in normal perception a large part of the mental product is furnished by the phantasy from the resources of previous experiences, it

\(^{14}\)Ibid.

\(^{15}\)Ibid.
is not surprising that where anticipation of an event is very strong, and its representation very vivid, the mind may perceive an occurrence before it happens, or apprehend an object where none exists.16

Rickaby, approaching this problem from an organic point of view, states that "whenever in the brain extraordinary causes which are internal excite those phenomena which ordinarily are excited by familiarly known objects, there is a tendency erroneously to judge those objects to be present, though in reality they are not."17 Sometimes it is the vehemence of an idea which arouses the sensible image; at other times the abnormally excited sense-images can reverse the process and call up their corresponding ideas.

This particular species of deception, in which a mental state is aroused without any external cause, is termed a subjective sensation. In the case of subjective sensation, such simulated cognitions may result in very serious effects on the organism. This image may seem so real, that pleasure or pain, depending on the nature of the illusion, may be fully as intense and vivid as if the appearance were a reality. The mental states of expectation, desire, and fear have the largest share in the production of illusion. The immediate effect of these sentiments is "intense excitation of the imagination, a lively picture of the desired or dreaded event is conjured up by the fancy and the vivid image is taken for the reality."18

It is necessary now to investigate other factors which tend to make

16 Ibid., p. 172.
17 Harmon, op. cit., p.181-82.
18 Maher, op. cit., p. 173.
judgments go beyond the real datum which should be the exclusive norm of one's affirmations. The complexity, obscurity or temporal distance of the object as reproduced by the phantasm can "doubtless be the occasion of an error in judgment." According to how far one is removed from the actual experience of an object, one's knowledge will become the less certain, and so much the more risk of error creeping in. But, as mentioned before, the true causes of error are to be found in the intellect performing the act of judgment, i.e., in the subject himself. Van Steenberghen lists the following sources of error of the subject's misinterpretation of the image:

(a) The subject's haste and inattention: One neglects to study the object carefully and to distinguish its proper characteristics; thus one confuses a deer and an elk.

(b) The subject's temerity: One makes judgments which exceed his actual perception; one relies imprudently on his memory instead of checking its trustworthiness—e.g., by consulting a book to find a date.

(c) The subject's confusion: One's feelings and passions interfere with his judgment; thus hate, fear, love and anger etc. cloud one's thinking and acting.

(d) The subject's prejudices: Convictions acquired previously through tradition or the influence of the environment, and not checked, affect the evolution of knowledge by introducing false judgments or false principles; hence the image of a black-skinned man can symbolize or is equated with hate.

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and distrust.

(e) The subject's mistakes in the logical connection of his judgments; here belong the faults of reasoning illogically, but these factors are not immediately connected with the phantasm as such.\footnote{Ibid., p. 175-76.}

Under the influence of such motives, one often forms hasty judgments and attributes to a subject predicates which do not belong to it at all; these judgments of the intellect will then be erroneous, i.e., will not conform to the real.\footnote{Ibid., p. 174.}

Thus in the flow of normal living a person can fall into error through the workings of the imagination. But the imagination can also contribute to certain pathological conditions in the individual. In certain situations the powers of the imagination are utilized as escape mechanisms from reality. In these states, persons live in an erroneous and distorted world of make-believe:

In pathological instances, because of the harassing recollection of ill-resolved early conflicts, the individual feels the need to escape from a sense of frustration which crushes him. This frustration manifests itself in fear, anxiety, worry, and inferiority complexes. The individual frequently learns to secure temporary oblivion from his worries by going into the realms of creative imagination.\footnote{Cavanagh and McGoldrick, op. cit., p. 112.}

Van Steenberghen points to such conditions as the morbid states of elation, delirium, and hallucination as very obscure conscious states. In these cases the knowing subject cannot distinguish or analyze the elements...
making up his actual conscious state.\textsuperscript{23} Such cases can not distinguish between the products of their imagination and what actually corresponds to objective reality. Thus the misinterpretation of the images of the imagination can result in pathological situations.

In summation, therefore, this thesis has discussed the nature of error, noting that the cause of error rests formally in the act of judgment. When judgment is passed without sufficient evidence so that there is no certitude and the mind approves what is actually false, then the result is error formally. However, the composition of one's judgment is so intimately bound up with the ideas based on phantasms that the phantasms have proved to be sources of error at times. The phantasm which proves inadequate in representing reality can become the weak link in the cognitive chain which can distort the idea and ultimately the judgment based on this idea.

The imagination produces images from the perceptions of the external senses, linking the intellect with external reality. The senses can only report the way in which they are affected by reality. But there can be a disproportion between what the senses themselves report and what actually exists. This disproportion is the reason why the imagination is the principle or source of error. If the intellect accepts this inadequate image as reflecting reality, then error results from this judgment. Imagination can thus be the root of error, but the cause of error always rests in the intellectual judgment.

\textsuperscript{23}Van Steenberghen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 124.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


