INTELLECT AND IMAGINATION IN AQUINAS

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In the first article of question 85 of the First Part of the *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas affirms that the human intellect understands material things by abstracting from phantasms (*intellectus noster intelligit materialia abstrahendo a phantasmatibus*). My purpose in this paper is to air certain problems in the interpretation of this theory.

Every word in the formula quoted raises a difficulty, not excluding the preposition "from". The verb, for instance, is traditionally translated "understands", but this translation is not beyond question. "*Intelligere*" often does seem to correspond to "understand", but sometimes it appears a more general verb, like the English "think".

In some places Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing two kinds of understanding, two types of intellectual operation. On the one hand there is the understanding of simples (*intelligentia indivisibilium*), and on the other hand there is compounding and dividing (*compositio et divisio*). (See *De Veritate* I, 3; IV, 2; *S.Th.* Ia, 17, 3).

To compound and to divide is to make affirmative and negative judgements (*In I Perihermeneias,* 3). Faced with the content of any proposition, one may either make or withhold a judgement about it; if one makes a judgement one may do so truly or falsely, one may do so with or without hesitation, and one may do so on the basis of argument or on grounds of self-evidence. According to various combinations of

In writing this paper I have been influenced by the work of Bernard Lonergan S.J. (*Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*); but I have not adopted the whole of his subtle reconstruction of Aquinas' theory of abstraction.

these possibilities, one's state of mind in relation to the propositional content will be an instance of belief, opinion, doubt, knowledge, or understanding. Whereas forming a belief, accepting an opinion, entertaining a doubt, coming to a conclusion, and seeing a self-evident truth are all exercises of the intellectual faculty or understanding, the seeing of self-evident truths is understanding *par excellence* (*De Veritate* XIV, 1). Since Aquinas uses the same verb to refer to the specific activity of grasping self-evidence and as a generic term for various kinds of thought, we cannot tell from the occurrence of the verb alone whether his theory of abstraction is meant as an account of thought in general, or as an account of the grasp of self-evident truths in particular.

St. Thomas observes that any judgement which can be made can be expressed by a sentence (*De Veritate* II, 4). This does not mean that thought is impossible without verbalisation, for it does not follow that every judgement that *is* made *is* put into words, either orally or in imagination. It does mean, however, that compounding and dividing is the mental analogue of the utterance of affirmative and negative sentences.

The understanding of simples is related to the entertaining of judgements as the use of individual words is related to the construction of sentences. An example of the understanding of simples would be knowledge of what gold is—knowledge of the *quid est* of gold. Such knowledge can be exercised in judgements about gold, and without some such knowledge no judgement about gold would be possible. Some such judgements, such as "gold is valuable" or "gold is yellow" require no great understanding of the nature of gold; they presuppose little more than an awareness of what the word "gold" means. A chemist, on the other hand, knows in a much richer way what gold is. Not only can he list many more of the properties of gold, but he can relate and present those properties in a systematic way, linking them, for instance with

gold's atomic number and its place in the periodic table of the elements. The chemist's account of gold would seem to approximate to the ideal described by St. Thomas as knowledge of the quiddity or essence of a material substance (e.g. Ia 3, 3 and 4; 17, 3). In many places St. Thomas observes that one can know what a word "A" means without knowing the quiddity or essence of A. We know, for instance, what the word "God" means, but we do not and cannot know God's essence (e.g. *S.Th.* Ia, 2, 2 ad 2). Learning the meaning of a word and acquiring a scientific mastery of the essence of a substance are both exercises of intelligence; but the grasp of essences is understanding *par excellence*. In the case of the understanding of simples, then, no less than in compounding and dividing, we meet a distinction between a broad and a narrow sense of "understand". In the broad sense, the acquisition and application of any concept, the formation and expression of any belief count as exercises of the understanding; in the narrow sense, understanding is restricted to insight into essences and the intuition of self-evident truths. Clearly, it is desirable to know whether St. Thomas' theory of abstraction is presented as an account of understanding in the broad sense or of understanding in the narrow sense. If the former, it is a general account of the operation of the intelligence by which language-using human beings surpass dumb animals; if the latter, it is an account of the methodology of *a priori* science. In what follows I shall try to keep both interpretations in mind.

The ambiguity we have noted carries over from the verb "*intelligere*" to the noun "*intellectus*". The intellect is a capacity, and capacities, as Aquinas frequently observes, are specified by their exercises: to explain the nature of the capacity to ϕ you must explain what ϕing is (*S.Th.* Ia 77, 3; 87, 3). The intellect or understanding, being precisely the capacity to understand, cannot be explained without an explanation of what

it is to understand. So if "understand" presents problems, "intellect" will present analogous problems too. But they are not the only problems presented by Aquinas' theory of abstraction by the intellect.

The intellect, according to St. Thomas, is not one faculty but two: or rather it is a single faculty with two powers: the agent intellect (*intellectus agens*) and the receptive intellect (*intellectus possibilis*). Ia, 79, 3 of the *Summa* explains why it is necessary to posit an agent intellect, taking a cue from Aristotle's cryptic dictum in the *De Anima* that there is in the soul one mind for becoming all things and one mind for making all things (III, 430a15).

Plato, St. Thomas says, had no need to posit an agent intellect to make the objects of understanding actually intelligible, because he believed that the forms of material things subsisted without matter and were thus fit objects of understanding, being immaterial *species* or Ideas. But according to Aristotle, there are no forms of things in nature subsisting without matter, and forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible. Consequently, says Aquinas, the natures or forms of perceptible things which we understand need to be made actually intelligible, fit objects of understanding, by some power on the side of the intellect. This is the agent intellect which makes actually intelligible objects of understanding by abstracting *species* from material conditions (*S.Th.* Ia 79, 3).

There is much in this that is difficult to understand: a crucial term is the word transliterated "*species*". In the passage just summarised it is first used as an expression for Platonic Forms, synonymous with the Latin word "Idea". Indeed no English word seems to correspond better to the Latin word "*species*" than the word "idea". If the English word is dangerously ambiguous, that is all to the good, since the Latin word is ambiguous in closelly parallel ways.

Ideas may be ideas *of* or ideas *that*: the idea of

gold, the idea that the world is about to end. Similarly, species may correspond either to the understanding of simples, or to affirmation and negation. (See, for example, *S.Th.* Ia IIae, 55, 1). For *species*, in one sense, are dispositions of the human intellect (Ia IIae, 50, 4), and to the two types of intellectual activity correspond two types of dispositional properties of the intellect. If the two types of activity are interpreted in the broad sense, as the acquisition and application of concepts, and as the formation and expression of beliefs, then the two types of dispositions, the two types of *species*, will be the concepts and beliefs themselves. To have the *species* corresponding to the proposition that *p* will be to have the belief that *p*; to have the *species* of A will be to have the concept of A, to have the ability to think of A.

In summary fashion, we might say that for Aquinas ideas include both concepts and beliefs. But here we meet a further ambiguity: for in contemporary philosophy "concept" has two contrasting uses. In one sense, which we might call the Wittgensteinian sense, a concept is something subjective: to possess a concept is to possess a certain skill, for instance to have mastered the use of a word (e.g. *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 384). It was in this sense that the word was used in the preceding paragraph. But in another sense, which we might call the Fregean, concepts are something objective. For Frege a concept is the reference of a predicate. In the sentence "Eclipse is a horse", according to Frege, just as the name "Eclipse" stands for a horse, so the predicate ". . . is a horse" stands for a concept—and a concept is not something in anyone's mind, but a particular type of function, a function whose value for every argument is a truth-value (*Philosophical Writings*, trs. Geach-Black, 43, 59). To this objective use of "concept" there corresponds an objective use of "*species*", to refer not only to Platonic ideas, which Aquinas rejected, but also to Aris-

totelian forms, which he accepted.[1] It is in this sense that Aquinas can say that *species* are the objects of the intellect's activity (Cf. *ScG*, II, 73).

More commonly, however, Aquinas says—as in the quotation from which we began—that what the intellect understands, the object of the intellect, is (the nature of) material things. A material thing, according to Aristotelian hylemorphism, is composed of matter and form; an individual man such as Peter is a parcel of matter bearing the form of humanity. Aquinas, in opposition to Plato, often insists that there is not in the world any humanity as such, or Ideal Man; there is only the humanity of Peter, the humanity of Paul, and so on (*S.Th.* Ia. 84, 4). The humanity, or human nature, of Peter would be an instance of what Aquinas calls "a form existing in matter"—something in his terminology "intelligible" (because a form), but not "actually intelligible" (because existing in matter). Humanity in the abstract is actually intelligible, but humanity in the abstract is nowhere to be found; humanity in matter is found wherever there are men, but humanity in matter is as such no fit object for the mind. It is to bridge this gap that the agent intellect is necessary. Presented with humanity in matter, the agent intellect creates the intellectual object, humanity as such. In what way is it presented with humanity in matter? "In phantasms" Aquinas replies; and for the moment we may paraphrase this as "in experience".

Let us try to present this doctrine in non-hylemorphic terms. In order to possess a concept of something which can be an object of an experience, it is not sufficient simply to have the appropriate experience. Young children see coloured objects before they painfully acquire colour-concepts; dumb animals can see and taste a substance such as salt but they cannot

[1] On the analogy between Fregean functions and forms, see Geach's paper *Form and Existence*, p. 29 above in this volume.

acquire the concepts which language-users can exercise in general judgements about salt. A special ability unshared by animals is necessary if human beings are to acquire concepts from the experience which they share with animals. Animals share with human beings the experience of pain, and human beings *feel* pains from birth if not before; but as Wittgenstein observed we acquire the *concept* "pain" when we learn language (*loc. cit.*). Again, rats can see, and discriminate between circles and triangles; but no amount of gazing at diagrams will make a rat a student of geometry. The specifically human ability to acquire complicated concepts from experience, and to grasp geometrical truths presented in diagrams, will perhaps be what Aquinas has in mind when he speaks of the agent intellect.

Contrasted with the agent intellect, there is the receptive intellect (*intellectus possibilis*). The receptive intellect is the power to exercise the dispositions acquired by the use of the agent intellect. "One and the same soul" we are told "in so far as it is actually immaterial, has a power called the agent intellect which is a power to make other things actually immaterial by abstracting from the conditions of individual matter, and another power to receive ideas of this kind, which is called the receptive intellect as having the power to receive such ideas" (*S.Th.* Ia 79, 4 ad 4). The receptive intellect is, St. Thomas says, the *locus* of *species*, the storehouse of ideas (*S.Th.* Ia 79, 6, esp. ad 1.). Varying the metaphor, the receptive intellect is the unwritten tablet, the *tabula rasa*, of which Aristotle wrote (*De Anima* III, 430a1). As concepts and beliefs are acquired through the operation of the agent intellect upon experience, the tablet becomes covered with writing, the empty storehouse fills up with ideas. To find out the contents of a man's receptive intellect at a given time you must find out what he understands, what he knows, what he believes at that moment. In fact the *intellectus possibilis* of a man

may be thought of as the collection of concepts and beliefs that he possesses: it is his mind in the sense in which we speak of the contents of a mind.

Frequently Aquinas speaks of the receptive intellect in hylemorphic terms. As prime matter is to the forms of sense-perceptible objects, so the receptive intellect is to all ideas. Prime matter is matter which as such is not any particular kind of stuff; not that there is any matter which is stuff of no particular kind, but that matter, *qua* matter, is not stuff of any particular kind, and can be stuff of any kind whatever. Similarly, the receptive intellect does not, as such, contain any particular ideas, but can contain any idea whatever: "to begin with it is in potentiality to all such ideas" (*S.Th.* Ia 84, 3). True to his hylemorphism, Aquinas prefers the language of *informing* to that of *containing:* the intellect is *informed* with various *species* (*S.Th.* Ia 79, 6). We use the same metaphor, oblivious of its hylemorphic background, when we speak of being informed upon a topic, or acquiring information about it.

According to hylemorphic theory, to acquire the form of F-ness is to become F: thus, to acquire the form of redness is to become red, just as to possess the form of humanity is to be a man. If we treat an idea, then, as a form informing the intellect, it seems that we must say that the intellect becomes F when it is informed by the idea of F-ness. This, then, will be why Aristotle said that there was in the soul a mind for becoming everything, and that the mind when it understands becomes different things in turn (*De An.* III, 430a15; cf. *S.Th.* Ia 79, 6).

What can we make of this strange conclusion? St. Thomas says that as physical matter has potentialities which are realised by perceptible *esse,* so the receptive intellect has potentialities which are realised by mental *esse* (Ia IIae, 50, 4). Commenting on this passage, I once wrote as follows.

> A leaf may be now green and now brown; when it was green it had a potentiality of being brown which is realised when it is brown; the "is" in "is brown" stands for an *esse* which is perceptible *esse,* the *esse* of *being brown.* Now it is clear that a man's capacity to think is realised when he thinks a particular thought; but it is not as if we could say that a man thinking of a horse *is* a horse, or even *is* intelligibly a horse, so why does St. Thomas speak of *esse* here? Perhaps the answer is to be sought on these lines. The history of a man's intellect is the history of the thoughts he has, and at any given moment there is nothing actual which makes a man a thinking being other than the thought he is thinking. In this sense, my intellect is my present thought of a horse, a thought which is capable of changing into a thought of anything else whatever. Now if we think of "a thought of a horse" as meaning the same as "a horse in thought" we can say that the intellect of a man, who is thinking of a horse, is a horse in thought. Generalizing, then, we can say that if a man is thinking of X, his intellect is X-in-thought; and further, that no matter what X may be, a human intellect *can* be X-in-thought. This last conclusion, reached in a roundabout fashion, I take to be a more or less literal translation of '*Intellectus habet potentiam ad esse intelligibile*' (*Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, XXII, 40–41).

I now think that this is misleading in several ways. In the first place, what St. Thomas means by the information of the receptive intellect by an idea is not the episodic exercise of a concept in the thinking of a particular, dated, thought; but rather the acquisition of the lifetime or at least long-term capacity to think thoughts of a certain kind. The exercise of such a capacity is not itself a form but is an activity proceeding from the form: to adapt St. Thomas' standard illustration, it is related to the form as the activity of

heating the kettle is related to the form of heat possessed by the stove. For a stove to be hot is, *inter alia,* for it to be able to heat the kettle; for me to possess the concept *round* is for me to be able, *inter alia,* to reflect that the earth is round (Ia IIae, 50, 4; 51, 3).

Secondly, it is not part of St. Thomas' theory that the intellect, when it acquires the concept *horse,* becomes a real horse, or even, strictly speaking, becomes an immaterial horse. The concept *horse,* being applicable to any horse, is not the concept of any particular horse. It is not the concept of an immaterial horse either, for it is part of the concept of a horse that a horse should be a material object. A horse, being a material object, must have a certain size and mass; and this, too, is part of the concept *horse,* that a horse should have a certain size and mass. But there is no particular size or mass which a horse *qua* horse must have, and so no particular size or mass belongs to the concept. St. Thomas makes a similar point.

> There are two kinds of matter: common matter, on the one hand, and designated or individual matter on the other. Common matter is e.g. flesh and bone; individual matter is e.g. this flesh and these bones. Now the intellect abstracts the idea of a natural thing from individual perceptible matter, but not from common perceptible matter: it abstracts, for instance, the idea of *man* from this flesh and these bones, which do not belong to the concept but are parts of the individual . . . but the idea of *man* cannot be abstracted by the intellect from flesh and bone as such (*S.Th.* Ia 85, 1 ad 1).

If, then, the receptive intellect when informed by the species of F-ness becomes F, the receptive intellect does not become a real horse, but an abstract horse; and an abstract horse is not something, on Aquinas' theory, which exists anywhere outside the mind.

Thirdly, my observation that one thought may turn into another thought was not to the point. For the

analogy between prime matter and the receptive intellect stands in need of a qualification which St. Thomas himself makes at Ia, 84, 3 ad 2. Prime matter, he says, has its substantial *esse* through form—for matter to exist is for it to be F—and there cannot be existent matter which has no form.

But the receptive intellect does not have its substantial *esse* through its ideas: the intellect of a newborn baby exists though it has no ideas; consequently the ideas which inform the intellect are accidental forms (like the form of heat in water) rather than substantial forms (like the form of horse or man). And when St. Thomas follows Aristotle in describing the mind as *becoming* its object, the becoming must be thought of as the acquisition of a new characteristic (like *becoming red*) rather than as the turning into a new kind of thing (like *becoming a butterfly*).

The restriction on the analogy between prime matter and the receptive intellect occurs in the course of an attack on the doctrine of innate ideas: and it is in contrast to that doctrine that Aquinas' own theory of abstraction is worked out. Plato had maintained, Aquinas says, that the human intellect naturally contained all intelligible ideas, but was prevented from using them because of its union with the body. Against this Aquinas marshals both empirical and metaphysical arguments.

> If the soul has a natural knowledge of all these things it does not seem possible that it should so far forget this natural knowledge as to be ignorant that it has it at all. For nobody forgets what he naturally knows, as that the whole is greater than its parts and so on. Plato's theory seems especially unacceptable if the soul is, as maintained above, naturally united to the body; for it is unacceptable that the natural operation of a thing should be altogether impeded by something else which is also natural to it. Secondly, the falsity of this theory ap-

> pears obvious from the fact that when a certain sense is lacking, there is lacking also the scientific knowledge of things perceived by that sense. A blind man, for instance, cannot have any knowledge of colours. This would not be the case if the soul's intellect were naturally endowed with the concepts of all intelligible objects (*S.Th.* Ia, 84, 3).

Later, Aquinas praises Aristotle for taking a middle course between the innate idealism of Plato and the crude empiricism of Democritus.

> Aristotle maintained that the intellect had an activity in which the body had no share. Now nothing corporeal can cause an impression on an incorporeal thing, and so, according to Aristotle, the mere stimulus of sensible bodies is not sufficient to cause intellectual activity. Something nobler and higher is needed, which he called the agent intellect: it makes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible by means of a certain abstraction (*S.Th.* Ia 84, 6).

In what sense, on Aquinas' account, are concepts *abstracted from* phantasms? Principally, there appear to be two separable doctrines united in the theory. The first is that concepts and experiences stand in a certain causal relation; the second is that they stand in a certain formal relation.

The causal relation is spelt out in the continuation of the passage just cited.

> In this way, then, intellectual activity is caused by the senses on the side of the phantasm. But since phantasms are not sufficient to affect the receptive intellect unless they are made actually intelligible by the agent intellect, sense-knowledge cannot be said to be the total and complete cause of intellectual knowledge, but only the material element of its cause.

To say, then, that concepts are abstracted from experience is to say at least that experience is a necessary causal condition for the acquisition of concepts. How far this is true seems to be partly an empirical matter and partly a philosophical question. It is an empirical matter, for instance, to discover how much a blind man might learn of a textbook on optics. It is a philosophical question how far mastery of such a textbook could count as "possession of the science of colour" without e.g. the ability to match colours against colour samples.

Besides having a causal relation to experience, Aquinas' ideas have a formal relation to them: that is, concepts on his theory are abstract *in comparison with* experiences. Sense-experience, he believed, is always of a particular individual; intellectual knowledge is primarily of the universal (Ia, 86, 1). Consequently, intellectual concepts can be said to abstract from much that is included in sense-experience. This is the sense of "abstraction" that is spelt out in the passage from which this paper began (*S.Th.* Ia, 85, 1).

> It is peculiar to (the human intellect) to know form existing individually in corporeal matter but not *as* existing in such matter. But to know that which is in individual matter but not *as* in such matter is to abstract the form from the individual matter which the phantasms represent.

In answer to an objector, Thomas goes on to clarify.

> What belongs to the specific concept (*pertinet ad rationem speciei*) of any material thing such as a stone, or a man, or a horse, can be considered without the individual characteristics which are not part of the specific concept. This is what it is to abstract the universal from the particular, or the intelligible idea from the phantasms, namely, to consider the specific nature without considering the

> individual characteristics which are represented by the phantasm (*Ibid.* ad 1).

This formal relation is distinct from the causal relation, for what Aquinas says here would be true even if universal concepts were not acquired from experience. Even innate ideas would still be more abstract than representations of individuals, whether these latter were themselves acquired or innate. For to have the concept of man is not to be able to recognise or think of a particular man with particular characteristics. It is *inter alia* to be able to recognise any man no matter what his particular characteristics, to think about men without necessarily attributing particular characteristics to them, and to know general truths about man as such. And this is true no matter how the concept has been acquired.

In modern philosophy there is a familiar, if no longer popular, theory that the acquisition of universal concepts can be explained by selective attention to features of particular experience. One version of the theory was ridiculed by Berkeley in *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (8ff), another was treated by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations.* Wittgenstein writes:

> When someone defines the names of colours for me by pointing to samples and saying 'This colour is called "blue", this "green" . . .' this case can be compared in many respects to putting a table in my hands, with the words written under the colour-samples.—Though this comparison may mislead in many ways.—One is now inclined to extend the comparison: to have understood the definition means to have in one's mind an idea of the thing defined, and that is a sample or picture. So if I am shewn various different leaves and told 'This is called a "leaf"', I get an idea of the shape of a leaf, a picture of it in my mind.—'But what does the picture of a leaf look like when it does not shew us any particular shape, but "what is common to all shapes of leaf"? Which shade is the "sample" in my "mind" of the colour green—the sample of what is common to all shades of green?
>
> But might there not be such "general" samples? Say a schematic leaf, or a sample of pure green?' Certainly there might. But for such a schema to be understood as a *schema,* and not as the shape of a particular leaf, and for a slip of pure green to be understood as a sample of all that is greenish and not as a sample of pure green,—this in turn resides in the way the samples are used (I, 74).

Aquinas' language in his last quoted passage might make it look as if he held a theory such as Berkeley and Wittgenstein criticised. But in fact this appears unlikely. First of all, the theory described by Wittgenstein demands that an idea be treated quite seriously as a mental *picture.* St. Thomas speaks of ideas as being likenesses of the things which are thought of by their aid, and this has sometimes led people to think that he was talking of mental images. But according to his terminology mental images seem rather to be phantasms; and phantasms are sharply distinguished from ideas. Phantasms, he says, come and go from day to day, but ideas remain for life; the image of one man differs from the image of another, but both are recognised as men by one and the same idea or *species* (*ScG,* II, 73 and 78).

Moreover, the "mental sample" view of abstraction leaves no room for the task Aquinas assigns to the agent intellect. When Aquinas talks of the need for the agent intellect to make the phantasms actually intelligible, he seems to be making the same point as Wittgenstein is making when he says that even a schematic sample has to be understood *as a schema* if it is to help us to understand what a leaf is. Indeed Aquinas expressly rejects the idea that a concept is just a mental image shorn of inessential features.

> Through the power of the agent intellect and through its attention (*conversio*) to the phantasms, there results in the receptive intellect a certain likeness which is a representation of the things whose phantasms they are, but only in respect of their specific nature. It is thus that the intelligible concept is said to be abstracted from the phantasms; it is not that numerically the same form, which was at one time in the phantasms, later comes into the receptive intellect, in the way in which a body may be taken from one place and transferred to another.

This is confirmed when Aquinas contrasts the abstraction made by the intellect with that made by the senses. For even the senses, he explains, do abstract in a way.

> A sense-perceptible form is not in the same manner in the thing outside the soul as it is in the sense-faculty. The sense-faculty receives the forms of sense-perceptible things without their matter, as it receives the colour of gold without the gold; and similarly the intellect receives the ideas of bodies, which are material and changeable, in an immaterial and unchangeable fashion of its own (*S.Th.* Ia 84, 1).

The less materially a faculty possesses the form of the object it knows, Aquinas explains, the more perfectly it knows: thus the intellect, which abstracts the ideas not only from matter but also from material individuating characteristics, is a more perfect cognitive power than the senses, which receive the form of what they know without matter but not without material conditions (Ia, 84, 2). Perceptible qualities outside the soul are already actually perceptible; but since there are no Platonic ideas, there is nothing outside the soul actually intelligible corresponding to material objects (Ia 79, 3 ad 1).

Aquinas frequently insists that phantasms play a necessary part not only in the acquisition of concepts, but also in their application. During our mortal life, he says, "it is impossible for our intellect to perform any actual exercise of understanding (*aliquid intelligere in actu*) except by attending to phantasms." He offers two proofs of this thesis. First, although the intellect has no organ of its own, the exercise of the intellect may be impeded by injury to the organs of imagination (as in frenzy) or of memory (as in amnesia). Such brain damage prevents not only the acquisition of new knowledge, but also the utilization of previously acquired knowledge. This shows that the intellectual exercise of habitual knowledge requires the cooperation of imagination and other powers. Secondly, he says, "everyone can experience in his own case that when he tries to understand something, he forms some phantasms for himself by way of examples in which he can so to speak take a look at what he is trying to understand." Similarly "when we want to make someone understand something, we suggest examples to him from which he can form his own phantasms in order to understand" (Ia 84, 7).

A metaphysical reason is offered to explain this. The proper object of the human intellect in the human body is "the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter". The quiddities of corporeal things must exist in corporeal individuals.

> Thus, it is part of the concept of a stone, that it should be instantiated in a particular stone, and part of the concept of a horse, that it should be instantiated in a particular horse, and so on; so the nature of a stone or of any material thing cannot be completely and truly known unless it is known as existing in the particular; but the particular is apprehended by the senses and the imagination. Consequently, in order to have actual understanding of its proper object, the intellect must turn to

phantasms to study the universal nature existing in the particular (Ia, 84, 7).[2]

Several things are noteworthy about this whole argument. First, it starts from the premise that there is no bodily organ of the intellect. One might be inclined to ask: how does St. Thomas know that brain activity is not necessary for thought, even for the most abstract and intellectual thought? Second, these two possible lines of answers suggest themselves. The first is that St. Thomas would agree that there is not in fact, in this life, any thought, however exalted, which is not accompanied by brain activity. But he would say that this was precisely because there was no thought, however exalted, which is not accompanied by the activity of the imagination or the senses. The second is that even if brain activity is a necessary condition for thought, this does not make the brain an organ of thought in the way that the eyes are the organ of sight and the tongue and palate are organs of taste. An organ is, as its etymology suggests, something like a tool, a part of the body which can be voluntarily moved and used in characteristic ways which affect the efficiency of the discriminatory activity which it serves. The difficulty is that these two answers seem to cancel out. In the sense of "organ" in which there is no organ of thought, there is no organ of imagination either—I cannot move my brain in order to imagine better in the way that I can turn my eyes to see better—and in the sense in which the

[2] As it is more than usually difficult to provide an untendentious translation of this passage, I give the original. *De ratione naturae lapidis est, quod sit in hoc lapide; et de ratione naturae equi est, quod sit in hoc equo: et sic de aliis. Unde natura lapidis, vel cuiuscumque materialis rei cognosci non potest complete, et vere, nisi secundum quod cognoscitur ut in particulari existens: particulare autem apprehendimus per sensum et imaginationem. Et ideo, necesse est, ad hoc quod intellectus actu intelligat suum obiectum proprium, quod convertat se ad phantasmata, ut speculetur naturam universalem in particulari existentem.*

brain is an organ of the imagination there seems no good reason to deny that it is an organ also of the intellect.

Again, the second argument seems to concern rather the first acquisition of understanding than its later utilisation. This is so whether we think of St. Thomas as having in mind the production of diagrams (as when in the *Meno* Socrates taught the slave-boy geometry) or the construction of fictional illustrations (as when Wittgenstein imagines primitive language-games in order to throw light on the workings of language). It does not seem to be true that whenever concepts are exercised there must be something going on, even mentally, which is rather like the drawing of a diagram or the telling of a detailed story.

Despite all this, it does seem true in one sense that there must be some exercise of sense or imagination, some application to a sensory context, if one is to talk at all of the exercise of concepts or the application of the knowledge of necessary truths. For a man to be exercising the concept, say, of red, it seems that he must be either discriminating red from other colours around him, or having a mental image of redness, or a mental echo of the word "red", or be talking, reading, or writing about redness, or something of the kind. He may indeed be able to *possess* the concept *red* without this showing in his experience or behaviour on a given occasion, but it seems that without some vehicle of sensory activity there could be no *exercise* of the concept on that occasion. Similarly with the knowledge of a general truth, such as that two things that are equal to a third are equal to each other. For this knowledge to be exercised it seems that its possessor must either enunciate it, or apply it say in the measurement of objects, or utilise it in some other way even if only in the artful manipulation of symbols.

This seems both true and important, but the nature of Aquinas' arguments for his thesis makes it doubt-

ful whether he understood it in this sense. It is true that he does say that the phantasm employed in the exercise of the concept of A need not be the phantasm of A itself. But when he says this he has in mind particular cases where A is something immaterial and to that extent unpictureable (*S.Th.* Ia 74, 7 ad 3). Whereas it seems that for it to be the case that every exercise of a concept involved attention to a phantasm, it would rarely be the case that the phantasm attended to was a representation of the object of the concept.

Attention to phantasms (*conversio ad phantasmata*) is, according to Aquinas, something which is necessary for every exercise of every concept, whether in general or particular judgements. But uses of general concepts in judgements about perceptible particulars presented him with a special problem: the judgement, for instance, that this tomato is red, that these particular objects matching a single standard match each other. Aquinas thought that it was the sensory context which gave the judgement its particular reference; and this view has recently been defended by Geach (*Mental Acts,* 65ff.). In expounding Aquinas, however, Geach appears to misrepresent his position. "Aquinas' expression", he writes, "for the relation of the 'intellectual' act of judgement to the context of sense-perception that gives it a particular reference was *conversio ad phantasmata*". But *conversio ad phantasmata,* as we have seen, is needed for all judgements, and not just for judgements about particulars; and for the special relation to sensory context involved in judgements about particulars Aquinas uses a different metaphor and speaks of reflection on sense-appearances, *reflexio supra phantasmata.*[3] This is introduced at *S.Th.* 86, 1, in answer to the question whether our intellect knows particulars. The answer reads as follows.

[3] On the distinction between *conversio* and *reflexio,* see Lonergan, *Verbum,* 159 ff.

> Our intellect cannot directly and primarily know particular material things. The reason is that the principle of individuation in material things is individual matter: but as was said above, our intellect understands by abstracting intelligible ideas from such matter. What is abstracted from individual matter is universal, and so our intellect is directly capable of knowing only universals. But indirectly and by a kind of reflection it can know individuals, because as was said above even after it has abstracted intelligible ideas, it cannot exercise them in acts of understanding without turning to phantasms. . . . Thus, by means of its ideas it directly understands the universal, and indirectly the particulars of which the phantasms are phantasms; and thus it forms this proposition, *Socrates is a man* (Ia 86, 1).

Exactly what is meant by "reflection" is and remains obscure in Aquinas' writings, and I shall not attempt to investigate it here. But I must turn to the overdue task of interpreting the notion of *phantasm.* There are many passages in Aquinas, some of which have been quoted, where translations such as "sense-appearances" or "sense-impressions" suggest themselves (e.g. *S.Th.* Ia, 74, 6). But in other places it seems, as one would expect, that phantasms are produced by the *phantasia* or imagination. This, we are told, is the locus of forms which have been received from the senses as the receptive intellect is the locus of ideas (*S.Th.* Ia 78, 4). These forms, we are told, may be reshuffled at will to produce phantasms of anything we care to think about: we can for example combine the form which represents Jerusalem and the form which represents fire to make the phantasm of Jerusalem burning (*De Veritate,* XII, 7). This makes a phantasm appear to be something like a mental image. But if we accept this interpretation, then it seems that St. Thomas is wrong in saying that phan-

tasms are particular in the way sense-impressions are. I cannot see a man who is no particular colour, but I may have a mental image of a man without having a mental image of a man of a particular colour, and I may imagine a man without being able to answer such questions as whether the man I am imagining is dark or fair. Imagination differs from sensation in another way which makes it misleading to combine the two under a single rubric such as "phantasm". It is not possible to be mistaken about what one is imagining in the various ways in which it is possible to be mistaken about what one is seeing: a man's description of what he imagines enjoys a privileged status not shared by his description of what he sees. There are some passages in which St. Thomas seems to suggest that whenever we see something we have at the same time a phantasm of what we see; and sensory illusions are explained by saying that the senses themselves are not deceived, but only the *phantasia* on which they act (*In IV Met*, lect. 14). It seems implausible to suggest that whenever we see a horse we have at the same time a mental image of a horse. Perhaps the theory is that if we see accurately our phantasm of a horse is a sense-impression; if we are mistaken about what we see, and there is no horse there at all, then our phantasm is a mental image. This theory seems to be confused in several ways, but it is hard to be sure whether St. Thomas held it or not.

Certainly St. Thomas is prepared to call the imagination a *sense*: sight, hearing, etc. are outer senses, the memory and the imagination are inner senses. This suggests an unacceptable assimilation. We can see some reason for calling the imagination a sense if we reflect that the power to have visual imagery depends on the ability to see. But this was not St. Thomas' reason for calling the imagination a sense, because he thought that this dependence was not a matter of logic but a contingent fact (*De Veritate*, XII, 7). In fact he thought that the inner senses resembled the

outer senses in having particular objects and bodily organs. As we have seen, both these points of resemblance seem in fact to be lacking. Consequently it is difficult to accept Aquinas' theory of the inner senses, and in particular of the imagination, without modification.

This has important consequences not only for his theory of abstraction but also for the whole problem of the relations between mind and body. In the course of a polemic against Averroes, Aquinas had occasion to raise the question: what makes an individual's ideas *his* ideas (Ia, 76, 1 and 2)? Clearly, there need be nothing in the content of a belief held by one man to distinguish it from a belief held by others. Innumerable people besides myself believe that 2 + 2 = 4: when I believe this, what makes the belief *my* belief? Aquinas' answer, in effect, is that my beliefs are beliefs of the soul which is individuated by my body, and because they are acquired and employed with the aid of phantasms generated by my brain (Ia IIae, 50, 4). This answer seems to lead to an account of the relationship between mind in body which is fundamentally as dualistic as that of Descartes. For it follows, and St. Thomas himself drew the conclusion, that the body is necessary for intellectual activity not in order to provide the mind with an instrument, but only to provide the mind with an object—phantasms being, in one sense of the word "object", the object of the intellect's activity. (See Aristotle, *De Anima* 1, 403a8ff, and St. Thomas' commentary). If this is a correct account then my body is no more essentially concerned in my thought than Leonardo is concerned in my looking at the Mona Lisa. This is what enables St. Thomas to say that thought is an activity of the soul alone, and thus that the soul, having an independent activity, is capable also of independent existence, as an incorruptible substance in its own right (*S.Th.* Ia 75, 6).

The question "What makes my thoughts *my*

thoughts?" has an oddly contemporary ring. It would perhaps be rash to think that contemporary studies have provided an answer to the question; but they have certainly shown one direction in which to look for an answer. My thoughts, surely, are the thoughts which find expression in the words and actions of *my body*. If we are to make progress with such perennial problems as "can my thoughts outlast my body?" it seems that we must investigate the relation between thought and its expression in linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. It is a weakness of St. Thomas' philosophy of mind that he has very little to say about this relation.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The Traditional Argument

HERBERT MC CABE

I have been asked to present once more the traditional thomist argument that the soul must be immortal because by the soul we think and understand. I intend simply to restate the argument which St. Thomas develops in *Q.D. de Anima* a.14, and in Ia, 75, 2 and 6.

First I should like to make it clear that the argument with which I am dealing is intended to be a demonstration; that is, it is intended to make it quite certain that the soul is immortal. I should not be surprised to find that the argument is full of unsuspected flaws, but I should be very surprised to find that it rendered the immortality of the soul probable or highly likely. A man of proper modesty might say, "I find this argument entirely convincing, but I have been wrong so many times before; for this reason I only find it very probable that the soul is immortal." My point is that there cannot be an *argument* to show that it is probable that the soul is immortal. I shall not argue this point: I only mention it because one sometimes hears modern scholastics saying that no argument for the immortality of the soul can be absolutely convincing. I think that such an argument cannot claim to be anything less.

First of all, then, why do we speak of a soul at all? We say that Fido sees and barks and wags his tail and so on. He sees with his eyes and without them he

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