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THOMAS AQUINAS’S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE. THE FIRST OPERATION OF THE INTELLECT

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make an analysis of Thomas Aquinas’s theory of knowledge. The approach will be one based mostly on textual analysis. For the medieval thinker all human knowledge starts from the senses where the properties of extra mental objects are received in a natural or in an intentional way. Afterwards, the sensory data is being sorted by common sense, one of the four internal senses. In this paper I shall emphasize the operations of cogitative power because I think that it is in virtue of it that we have the ability to know the singulars. The first operation of the intellect ends up with the work of the agent and possible intellect and with the forming of the mental word.

Key words: Thomas Aquinas, agent and possible intellect, cogitative power, agent and possible intellect, intelligible species, sensation, sensible species, singular

Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, understands the human soul as being triadic: the vegetative part of the soul¹ – responsible for nourishment, growth, and reproduction –, the sensitive part² – concerning movement and sensation – and the intellective part of the soul³ – which contains thought and will. The vegetative part of the soul, being of no interest for this paper, will not be taken into account. Now, about the other two of them, they both have potencies or powers⁴ which can be either apprehensive/cogitative or appetitive. By combining the specific potencies with each part of the soul, we can obtain a partial depiction of the human soul:

¹ See *De unitate intellectus*, cap. 1 co., cap. 3 co., *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 3 ad 13.

² See *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 57 n. 9, n. 16; cap. 58 n. 1, n. 6-8; cap. 73 n. 6, cap. 89 n. 6, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 75 a. 3 co; I q. 76 a. 3.

³ See *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 58 n. 3, n. 7; lib. 2 cap. 68 n. 12; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76-79.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas uses three terms for potencies: *potentia*, *potestas* and *vis*.

- The apprehensive power in the intellectual soul – the intellect
- The appetitive power in the intellectual soul – the will
- The apprehensive power in the sensitive soul – sensing (sensation and perception)
- The apprehensive power in the sensitive soul – passions (five irascible and six concupiscible).

Because for Thomas Aquinas all knowledge starts from the senses, first, I shall take into account the sensation. Aquinas thinks that in the process of sensation five external senses and four internal senses are involved. The external senses⁵ or *virtus*, which are the principles of action, are: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The senses are passive powers whose nature is to receive the action of sensible external objects – *sensibilia*. What makes them to be diverse is the diversity of external causes and the way each of them receives the *sensibilia*. Now, the external objects can be perceived *per se* or *per accidens*:

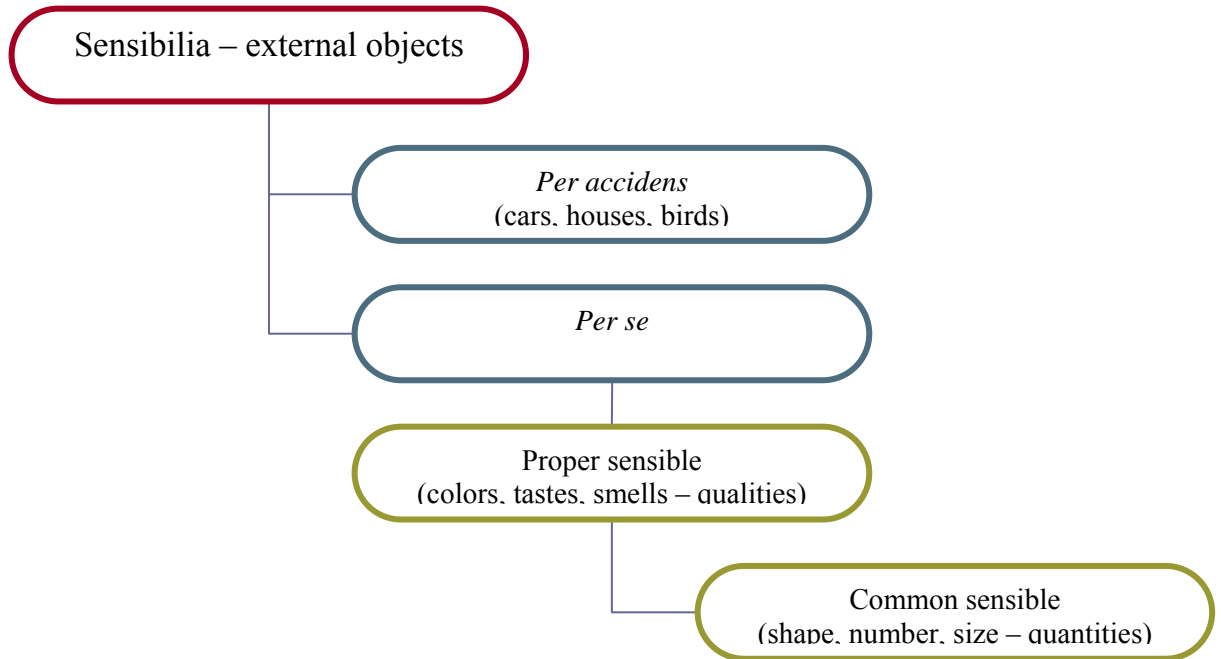
“quae dicuntur communia sensibilia, sunt media inter sensibilia per accidens et sensibilia propria, quae sunt obiecta sensuum” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78 a. 3 ad 2)⁶.

If it were to make a diagram of the various kinds of *sensibilia* it would look like this⁷:

⁵ See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78. a.3.

⁶ “Size, shape, and the like, which are called "common sensibles," are midway between *accidental sensibles* and *proper sensibles*, which are the objects of the senses”.

⁷ Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 183, presents a similar diagram, but he chooses to place in a coordinative relation the proper sensible and the common sensible. I do not agree with this arrangement because in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78 a. 3 ad 2 Aquinas says that “*sensibilia communia non movent sensum primo et per se, sed ratione sensibilis qualitatis*” – “the common sensible do not move the senses first and of their own nature, but by reason of the sensible quality”.



When the senses are active they receive the *sensible species* – the form from the matter-form compound of *sensibilia*. Forms are a sort of configurational state of what is sensed⁸, depending on which the matter is arranged. A very important aspect of the species is that they are not what is sensed, but that *by which, id quod*, the means by which the senses participate to the process of knowledge. The forms can be received either in a natural or in a spiritual way:

“Est autem duplex immutatio, una naturalis, et alia spiritualis. Naturalis quidem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse naturale, sicut calor in calefacto. Spiritualis autem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse spirituale; ut forma coloris in pupilla, quae non fit per hoc colorata. Ad operationem autem sensus requiritur immutatio spiritualis, per quam intentio formae sensibilis fiat in organo sensus. Alioquin, si sola immutatio naturalis

⁸ Cf. Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas*, Routledge, 2007, p. 249.

sufficeret ad sentiendum, omnia corpora naturalia sentirent dum alterantur.” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78 a. 3 co)⁹.

The change received in the senses can be of two kinds: natural or intentional. A natural change occurs when the skin touches something hot and it becomes hot, and a spiritual change happens when we see a colored object – we perceive its color, but the color of our eye does not change. The color of the external object exists only in an intentional manner in the pupil. Sight is for Aquinas, following Aristotle, the most spiritual and perfect sense, while touch and taste are the most material senses:

“Visus autem, quia est absque immutatione naturali et organi et obiecti, est maxime spiritualis, et perfectior inter omnes sensus, et communior. Et post hoc auditus, et deinde olfactus, qui habent immutationem naturalem ex parte obiecti. Motus tamen localis est perfectior et naturaliter prior quam motus alterationis, ut probatur in VIII Physic. Tactus autem et gustus sunt maxime materiales, de quorum distinctione post dicetur. Et inde est quod alii tres sensus non fiunt per medium coniunctum, ne aliqua naturalis transmutatio pertingat ad organum, ut accidit in his duobus sensibus.” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78 a. 3 co)¹⁰.

After the activity of the external senses, the next step in the process of cognition involves the activity of the internal senses. These senses have, unlike the

⁹ “Now, immutation is of two kinds, one natural, the other spiritual. Natural immutation takes place by the form of the immuter being received according to its natural existence, into the thing immuted, as heat is received into the thing heated. Whereas spiritual immutation takes place by the form of the immuter being received, according to a spiritual mode of existence, into the thing immuted, 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 immutation is required, whereby an intention of the sensible form is effected in the sensible organ. Otherwise, if a natural immutation alone sufficed for the sense's action, all natural bodies would feel

when they undergo alteration”.

¹⁰ „Now, the sight, which is without natural immutation either in its organ or in its object, is the most spiritual, the most perfect, and the most universal of all the senses. After this comes the hearing and then the smell, which require a natural immutation on the part of the object; while local motion is more perfect than, and naturally prior to, the motion of alteration, as the Philosopher proves (Phys. viii, 7). Touch and taste are the most material of all: of the distinction of which we shall speak later on (ad 3,4). Hence it is that the three other senses are not exercised through a medium united to them, to obviate any natural immutation in their organ; as happens as regards these two senses”.

external senses, a bodily organ situated in the brain and are not five, but four: common sense, imagination, memory and cogitative or estimative power:

“Sic ergo ad receptionem formarum sensibilium ordinatur sensus proprius et communis, de quorum distinctione post dicetur. Ad harum autem formarum retentionem aut conservationem ordinatur phantasia, sive imaginatio, quae idem sunt, est enim phantasia sive imaginatio quasi thesaurus quidam formarum per sensum acceptarum. Ad apprehendendum autem intentiones quae per sensum non accipiuntur, ordinatur vis aestimativa. Ad conservandum autem eas, vis memorativa, quae est thesaurus quidam huiusmodi intentionum. Cuius signum est, quod principium memorandi fit in animalibus ex aliqua huiusmodi intentione, puta quod est nocivum vel conveniens. Et ipsa ratio praeteriti, quam attendit memoria, inter huiusmodi intentiones computatur.” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78 a. 4 co)¹¹.

First in the order of internal senses is the *common sense*, which acts like the root of the external senses. In other words, it is the terminus point of the impressions received from the external senses, the end of sensation. Besides the fact that it receives the sensible impressions, it sorts them each according to the sense of their origin.

Responsible for the preparation of images – phantasmata – and for our phobias is the *cogitative power*¹². This internal sense is also responsible for comparing different individual intentions (*collatio*, *collationis*), in a manner similar with how the universal reason compares universal intentions. For this reason the

¹¹ “Thus, therefore, for the reception of sensible forms, the "proper sense" and the "common sense" are appointed, and of their distinction we shall speak farther on (ad 1,2). But for the retention and preservation of these forms, the "phantasy" or "imagination" is appointed; which are the same, for phantasy or imagination is as it were a storehouse of forms received through the senses. Furthermore, for the apprehension of intentions which are not received through the senses, the "estimative" power is appointed:

and for the preservation thereof, the "memorative" power, which is a storehouse of such-like intentions. A sign of which we have in the fact that the principle of memory in animals is found in some such intention, for instance, that something is harmful or otherwise. And the very formality of the past, which memory observes, is to be reckoned among these intentions.”

¹² About *vis cogitativa*: *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 50 q. 1 a. 1 ad 3; *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 60 n. 1; *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 78; Ia q. 79; Ia, q. 81 a. 3 co; Ia q. 85; Ia q. 89; I-II, q. 51 a. 3 co; *De veritate*, q. 1 a. 11 co; q. 14 a. 1 ad 9; q. 15 a. 1 co; *Q. d. de anima*, a. 13 co; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 9 co; *De malo*, q. 3 a. 3 arg. 7; *Sententia De anima*, lib. 2 l. 13 n. 13; *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 6 l. 1 n. 15; lib. 6 l. 9 n. 21.

cogitative power is also named *practical reason*¹³. Being an internal sense, it also has a bodily organ, which is situated in the middle part of the brain – „*mediam cellulam capitis*”¹⁴.

Aquinas makes a clear distinction between matter and form, between sensory and intellectual level. The first level deals with particulars, and it has the senses which have corporeal organs, and the second level deals with universals, is immaterial, and does not have an organ in the body. In these conditions, to know means to have, besides your form, the form of another object which has an intentional existence in the mind. Thomas Aquinas says in *Summa Theologica* Ia q. 14 a. 1 co:

“Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscens natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente.”¹⁵

But how is it possible to have cognition about individual objects and how is it possible to act, when our acts concern concrete objects and people, if our intellect is immaterial and has cognition only about universals? Henrik Lagerlund¹⁶ would say something like: how is it possible for our thoughts and actions to be about particulars and not about universals? For an adequate answer, I think, we must look at the type of relation between senses and the intellect, and, especially, in the mediating role played in this equation by the cogitative power. A more appropriate term than relation is *order*, because it implies reference to a principle, intellect or origin, etc:

“Respondeo dicendum quod ordo semper dicitur per comparationem ad aliquod principium. Unde sicut dicitur principium multipliciter, scilicet secundum situm, ut punctus, secundum intellectum, ut principium demonstrationis, et secundum

¹³ See *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2 co., lib. 4 d. 50 q. 1 a. 1 ad 3, *S.Th.* Ia, q. 46 a. 2 ad 8; Ia, q. 78 a. 4 co; Ia, q. 79 a. 2 ad 2; Ia, q. 81 a. 3 co; *Sentencia De anima*, lib. 2 l. 13 n. 14.

¹⁴ See *Super Sent.*, lib. 4 d. 50 q. 1 a. 1 ad 3; De veritate, q. 10 a. 5 co.

¹⁵ “To prove this, we must note that intelligent beings are distinguished from non-intelligent beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the idea of the thing known is in the knower.”

¹⁶ Cf. Henrik Lagerlund, *Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/representation-medieval>, 10.06.2009, 22:17.

causas singulas; ita etiam dicitur ordo. In divinis autem dicitur principium secundum originem, absque prioritate, ut supra dictum est. Unde oportet ibi esse ordinem secundum originem, absque prioritate.” (*Summa Theologica* I^a q. 42 a. 3 co.)¹⁷.

George Klubertanz is also in favor of using this term, because it allows synthesis and, at the same time, it does not annihilate the differences¹⁸. He identifies four types of order: order of formal causality or of participation, order of final causality, order of efficient causality and dynamic order¹⁹. From all these, of interest for this paper are the first and the last.

When we speak of formal causality we recognize the principle of hierarchy. This principle was formulated by Dionysius the Areopagite in *De divinis nominibus* and was taken by Thomas Aquinas who used it in his writings, as we can see from the following excerpt:

“Cum enim, ut Dionysius dicit, natura inferior sui supremo, attingat infimum superioris naturae, natura sensitiva in aliquo sui quodammodo rationi conjungitur; unde et quaedam pars sensitiva, scilicet cognitiva, alio nomine ratio dicitur, propter confinium ejus ad rationem.” (Super Sent., lib. 2 d. 24 q. 2 a. 1 ad 3)²⁰.

The higher element of the sensory power, the cogitative power, touches the inferior part of the intellect, the reason. Accordingly, says Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* Ia q. 78. a. 4, that the cogitative power obtains, by participation, the power to compare individual intentions, in the same way that universal reason is able to compare universal intentions. For this reason it is also named *ratio*

¹⁷ “I answer that, order always has reference to some principle. Wherefore since there are many kinds of principle - namely, according to site, as a point; according to intellect, as the principle of demonstration; and according to each individual cause - so are there many kinds of order. Now principle, according to origin, without priority, exists in God as we have stated (q. 33 a. 1): so there must likewise be order according to origin, without priority”

¹⁸ George Klubertanz, *Discursive Power sources and the Doctrine of Vis Cogitativa According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, The Messenger Press, Carthage, Ohio, 1952, p. 170.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 171-173.

²⁰ “As Dionysius says inferior nature in its higher level touches the lower level of the superior nature, according as it participates something of the superior nature, although deficiently; therefore, as well in apprehension as in sensitive appetite there is to be found something in which the sensitive part touches reason.” Translation extracted from George Klubertanz, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

particularis – particular reason²¹. In *Sententia libri De anima* (Lib. II, Lectio. 13. n. 14) we find the reasons for which this power can also be named in this way:

“Si vero apprehendatur in singulari, utputa cum video coloratum, percipio hunc hominem vel hoc animal, huiusmodi quidem apprehensio in homine fit per vim cogitativam, quae dicitur etiam ratio particularis, eo quod est collativa intentionum individualium, sicut ratio universalis est collativa rationum universalium”²².

Due to this union of intellect with cogitative power, the latter has the ability to perceive individuals or singulars as existing under a common nature, and this thing makes possible the cognition of this particular man as this man and not another or the cognition of this piece of wood instead of another²³. In another place Aquinas says that the cogitative power receives something from the conceptual framework of the intellect, due to a sort of flow:

“Ad quintum dicendum quod illam eminentiam habet cogitativa et memorativa in homine, non per id quod est proprium sensitivae partis; sed per aliquam affinitatem et propinquitatem ad rationem universalem, secundum quandam refluentiam. Et ideo non sunt aliae vires, sed eadem, perfectiores quam sint in aliis animalibus.” (*summa Theologica* I^a q. 78 a. 4 ad 5)²⁴.

Basically, what Aquinas is saying can be explained if we take a simple example. Our thoughts can be like: “Socrates is human”. In order to be able to form this kind of thought, the subject must know, through the work of the intellect, the universal “humanity” and through cogitative power the singular “Socrates” as existing under a common nature – human. More, due to the cogitative power our attention is directed towards this singular and not another and its time and space are being

²¹ See also *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 26 q. 1 a. 2 co; lib. 4 d. 50 q. 1 a. 1 ad 3; *S.Th.* I, q. 46 a. 2 ad 8; I, q. 78 a. 4 co; I, q. 79 a. 2 ad 2; I, q. 81 a. 3 co; I-II, q. 30 a. 3 ad 3; I-II, q. 51 a. 3 co; *De veritate*, q. 2 a. 6 ad 2; q. 14 a. 1 ad 9; *Q. d. de anima*, a. 13 co.

²² “When it perceives singulars, for example when it sees something colored, it perceives it as being a certain human or a certain animal, and sees this because it has the capacity of putting together individual intentions, in the same way that universal reason puts together universal concepts”.

²³ Robert Pasnau, *op. cit.*, p. 254 și *Sententia De anima*, lib. 2 l. 13 n. 16 “unde cognoscit hunc hominem prout est hic homo, et hoc lignum prout est hoc lignum”.

²⁴ “The cogitative and memorative powers in man owe their excellence not to that which is proper to the sensitive part; but to a certain affinity and proximity to the universal reason, which, so to speak, overflows into them. Therefore they are not distinct powers, but the same, yet more perfect than in other animals.”

established, and so our sensible memory is also active. Still, it must not be forgotten that even if the cogitative power is the one which sends the intellect information about particular objects, it is not the one which thinks about them, but the intellect does that. Still, in order to be able to make the difference between particular and universal, the intellect must have access to cognition of both, of one directly by intelligible species and of another indirectly by reflection:

“non possemus cognoscere comparationem universalis ad particulare, nisi esset una potentia quae cognosceret utrumque. Intellectus igitur utrumque cognoscit, sed alio et alio modo.”
(*Sententia De anima*, lib. 3 l. 8 n. 13)²⁵.

To sum up, under this type of order, the order of formal causality or participation, the cogitative power is analyzed by its capacities of comparing individual intentions as the universal reason does, and by its ability to recognize individuals as existing under a common nature, due to the fact that it participates to the intellective part, and it is united with it.

The dynamic order is the second type of order important for the aim of this paper. Practically we are, in this case, in the presence of a situation where the activities of a human being are understood as a whole. But not as a uniform whole, a linear one, but a dynamic one which besides synthesis allows also differences. The term by which the dynamic order is designated in the thomistic writings is *continuatio, continuationis* – continuity, interconnection. If we understand this type of order we can understand how it is possible to have thoughts about individuals or singulars. The process which takes place is the process of a quasi-reflection, a sort of recursion of the intellect towards the sensible images created by the cogitative power, images without which our cognition would be impossible:

“Unde intellectus noster directe non est cognoscitivus nisi universalium. Indirecte autem, et quasi per quandam reflexionem, potest cognoscere singulare, quia, sicut supra dictum est, etiam postquam species intelligibiles abstraxit, non potest secundum eas actu intelligere nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata, in quibus species intelligibiles intelligit, ut dicitur in III de anima. Sic igitur ipsum universale per speciem intelligibilem directe intelligit; indirecte autem singularia, quorum sunt phantasmata. Et hoc modo

²⁵ “Just as it was said earlier that we would be unable to sense the difference between white and sweet if there were no common sensory power that had cognition of both, so we would also be unable to cognize the relationship of the universal to the individual if there were not one power that had cognition of both. Therefore the intellect has cognition of both, but in different ways” and see Robert Pasnau, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

format hanc propositionem, Socrates est homo.” (*Summa Theologica* I^o q. 86 a. 1 co.)²⁶.

In the process of speculative knowledge the cogitative power acts by directing the attention, by setting the grounds of memory because any perception of the particular implies a temporal coordinate²⁷.

With regard to speculative knowledge the intellect knows the singulars, not directly, as they are perceived by the senses, but indirectly, by a process of quasi-reflection²⁸, a turn towards the sensible images which were created by the cogitative power. From these images it extracts certain knowledge of the particulars or of the singulars.

Cogitative power plays an important role also in practical knowledge because it implies reference to action, so the forming of some judgments with regard to particular objects and their actions or the actions which are build up around them. The intellect cannot know the singulars alone, without a mediator. And the mediator is the cogitative power. Hence it appears that a forming of a syllogism is needed, a syllogism named by Thomas Aquinas *practical syllogism*. The specific form of this kind of syllogism is this: the major is the result of the intellect, so it will be a universal proposition, and the minor is the consequence of the cogitative power, the highest sensible power. Such a syllogism can take the following form:

No sin should ever be done./Good must be always done.

This is a sin./This is a good thing.

So: this action should not be done./ This action should be done.

The conclusion of such a syllogism is an act of choice which can be applied in practice²⁹, and it is the result of cooperation between practical intellect and cogitative power or practical reason. The role of the latter is to offer information about the singulars, to receive and to transmit the degree of operability involved in action³⁰ and to form similar intentions³¹.

²⁶ “Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular, because, as we have said above (Question 85, Article 7), even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, as is said De Anima iii, 7. Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular represented by the phantasm. And thus it forms the proposition “Socrates is a man”. Wherefore the reply to the first objection is clear”.

²⁷ Cf. George Klubetranz, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

²⁸ See *De Veritate*, q. 10 a. 5 co.

²⁹ See *S.Th.* I-II q. 13 a. 1 ad. 2; q. 13 a. 3 co; q. 76 a1 co.; *De Veritate* X 5.

³⁰ The term used by Aquinas is *operabilia*.

³¹ George Klubetranz, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

The perceptions of the cogitative power about the individual objects of cognition are retained by the memory, the internal sense which has, among its functions, the recognition of some past experiences and the accomplishment of some associations between different memories, action called, in the case of human beings, reminiscence³². The *imagination* or *phantasy* is the sense which retains the species received from the common sense and combines them in order to form non-existent objects.

Until this point, cognition is more a passive process of in-formation of the senses which translate the received sensory data into more and more abstract terms. But the direction changes, because the senses can ascend no longer, so the intellect takes the initiative and abstracts from the *phantasmata*, which were prepared by *vis cogitativa*, the *intelligible species* – *species intelligibile*. In other words, from the information received via the senses, the universal information is extracted, one belonging to the quiddity of the cognized object. The intelligible species are then received intentionally or spiritually by the passive intellect and transformed into *mental concepts* or *mental verbs*, which basically are correspondents of the words which designate the cognized external object.

Thomas Aquinas talks about three operations of the intellect. What it has been presented until now can be subsumed to the first operation of the intellect. The cognition, until now has followed these steps: the extra mental object affected the senses which received the *sensible species* either in a material or in an intentional way, and then, with the help of *vis cogitativa* the *phantasmata* were formed. Then, what happens is that the *agent intellect* acts upon them by abstracting the *intelligible species* – the quidditative form of the material thing – which are then stored into the *passive intellect* and transformed into *mental concepts* or *intelligible intentions* which, basically, are correspondents of the word which designates the extramental object. This constitutes the first operation of the intellect.

The second operation of the intellect is the forming of propositions by the process of dividing and composing.

And, finally, the third and last operation of the human intellect is reasoning, it is by its help that we are able to form complex thought inferences.

“Respondeo dicendum quod intellectus humanus necesse habet intelligere componendo et dividendo. Cum enim intellectus humanus exeat de potentia in actum, similitudinem quandam habet cum rebus generabilibus, quae non statim perfectionem suam habent, sed eam successive acquirunt. Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei

³² See *S.Th.* Ia q. 78 a 4 and for details and explanations see Eleanor Stump, *op. cit.*, p. 248, 260; Robert Pasnau, *op. cit.*, cap. 9.3.

cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam. Et secundum hoc, necesse habet unum apprehensum alii componere vel dividere; et ex una compositione vel divisione ad aliam procedere, quod est ratiocinari.” (*Summa Theologica* I^a q. 85 a. 5 co.)³³.

There is only one thing I wish to say, and it is related with the problem of intentionality. This is linked with a certain aspect of intellect's first operation, namely the conversion of *phantasmata* into *intelligible species*. The agent intellect is active precisely because it acts by converting the images into *intelligible species* and storing them in the possible intellect:

“Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu. Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem.” (*Summa Theologica* I^a q. 79 a. 3 co.)³⁴.

The action of our intellect of turning towards the images is a constant action, due to the fact that between it and the body exists a union, in virtue of which we are constantly receiving sensory inputs from the senses³⁵:

“Ad quintum dicendum quod intellectus noster et abstrahit species intelligibiles a phantasmatis, in quantum considerat naturas rerum in universali; et tamen intelligit eas in phantasmatis, quia non potest

³³ “I answer that, the human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division. For since the intellect passes from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to things which are generated, which do not attain to perfection all at once but acquire it by degrees: so likewise the human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; and then it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essence. Thus it necessarily compares one thing with another by composition or division; and from one composition and division it proceeds to another, which is the process of reasoning”.

³⁴ „We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect”.

³⁵ See also Robert Pasnau, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

intelligere etiam ea quorum species abstrahit, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata, ut supra dictum est.” (*Summa Theologica I^a q. 85 a. 1 ad 5*)³⁶.

The sensory and the rational powers are powers of one and the same human being and they belong to the rational soul. Due to the fact that both of them are cognitive powers, they form a sort of unity³⁷. In other words, they stand to one another in different dynamic relations – Klubertanz identifies three relations³⁸:

- the intellect receives from the internal senses the forms, and puts them in act; can be understood as a causal relationship:

“Non tamen ita quod intellectualis operatio causetur in nobis ex sola impressione aliquarum rerum superiorum, ut Plato posuit, sed illud superius et nobilius agens quod vocat intellectum agentem, de quo iam supra diximus, facit phantasmata a sensibus accepta intelligibilia in actu, per modum abstractionis cuiusdam. Secundum hoc ergo, ex parte phantasmatum intellectualis operatio a sensu causatur. Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae.” (*Summa Theologica, I^a q. 84 a. 6 co.*)³⁹.

- the operative relation in which the intellect is the principle cause and the formal component and the interior sense is an instrument and the material component:

³⁶ “Our intellect both abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasms, inasmuch as it considers the natures of things in universal, and, nevertheless, understands these natures in the phantasms since it cannot understand even the things of which it abstracts the species, without turning to the phantasms, as we have said above (Question 84, Article 7)”.

³⁷ George Klubertanz, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ “Not, indeed, in the sense that the intellectual operation is effected in us by the mere intellectual operation is effected in us by the mere impression of some superior beings, as Plato held; but that the higher and more noble agent which he calls the active intellect, of which we have spoken above (Question 79, Articles 3,4) causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction. According to this opinion, then, on the part of the phantasms, intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses. But since the phantasms cannot of themselves affect the passive intellect, and require to be made actually intelligible by the active intellect, it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather that it is in a way the material cause”.

“Ad tertium dicendum, quod secundum hoc intellectus potest ex universali et singulari propositionem componere, quod singulare per reflexionem quamdam cognoscit, ut dictum est.”(*De veritate*, q. 10 a. 5 ad 3)⁴⁰.

- the intellect is the mover and the sense is the moved:

“Ad tertium dicendum quod appetitus sensitivus natus est moveri ab appetitu rationali, ut dicitur in III de anima, sed vires rationales apprehensivae natae sunt accipere a viribus sensitivis.”(*Summa Theologiae* I^a-II^ae q. 50 a. 3 ad 3)⁴¹.

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⁴⁰ “The intellect makes a proposition of a singular and a universal term since it knows the singular through a certain reflection, as was said”.

⁴¹ “The sensitive appetite has an inborn aptitude to be moved by the rational appetite, as stated in *De Anima* iii, text. 57: but the rational powers of apprehension have an inborn aptitude to receive from the sensitive powers”.