

## Concepts and Acts of Conceptualization in Aquinas

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Since facility in articulating a grasped, understood meaning only comes with understanding or from a prior act of understanding (the articulating requires some kind of apprehension which exists as our understanding), the necessity of our prior acts of understanding explains not only why its characteristic product or term is the apprehension of an understood form or meaning which exists as an apprehended idea or intelligibility but also why this same apprehension, as it is given to us, is, at the same time, an apprehension or an experience of meaning which exists as a distinct kind of other: as an other which exists as an inwardly experienced word or concept which exists within the order of our human consciousness before it can then be converted and used as a basis for constructing an outer word of some kind (or possibly the terms and relations of a communicable definition) which can then be passed on to other persons through the means that typically exist for us as human beings, whether through our spoken words of speech or through the mediation of inscribed, written words in texts.<sup>1</sup> Generically speaking, a word exists as more than an idea; it points to the being of an understood idea but to an idea which has now been separated from how it has initially existed as the term of a direct act of understanding (in Aquinas, an act of simple apprehension). An inner word or concept allows us to think about that which we have just understood. We can ask questions about it and think more about its goodness and its possible reasonableness. A word exists as a word because it carries a meaning.<sup>2</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 9, a. 4. This point about the relation between inner and external words is illustrated by the reported experiences of persons who have suffered from incapacitating strokes from which, later, they have recovered. When normal communication has been restored, these persons say that, throughout their ordeals, while they could not speak or communicate in any way to anyone around them, they continued to understand what was happening to them. They continued to experience meanings but, for health reasons, they could not express the meanings which they were experiencing within themselves; they could not put these meanings into words for purposes of communication. In the transition which occurs as a person moves from inner words to outer words, in the *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, Aquinas speaks about three phases: one begins with an inner word; then one searches for a suitable sensible form or sign that can be used to adequately express the meaning of an inner word; and then, lastly, one employs the sign that one has found or formed by articulating a word that can be heard or read or, alternatively, one employs some other kind of sensible sign that can function as a carrier of meaning for meanings that can be apprehended by human beings who exist as a union of sense and intellect (sensing and understanding). Whenever anything is defined, a meaning is expressed. Cf. *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 4, 16, 733.

<sup>2</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 1. An “exterior vocal sound is called a word from the fact that it signifies the interior concept of the mind.” Outer word points to inner word. As Gerard Watson explains this in his “St Augustine and the inner word: the philosophical background,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 54 (1988), pp. 84-85, in St. Augustine’s understanding as this is principally given to us in his work on the Trinity (the *De Trinitate*), an “inner word” exists within the human mind or heart in a way which clearly distinguishes it from a later word that is put into sound or which can be imagined to have a sound that can be then communicated to another since an “inner word” or “inner words” primarily refer to something that is meant. It is a meaning which exists within a mind and which is understood and known by a given human mind (as opposed to a datum which is grasped by an act of sensing and which lacks the kind of meaning that is only understood and grasped by an understanding mind). Admittedly, as St. Augustine speaks about it (*trin*, 8, 9), in some situations, the meaning of an inner

meaning infuses its existence. Hence, a word exists as more than some kind of sound or a mark, whether a sound or mark that is imagined or whether, in some way, it is perceived or sensed.

Hence, for these reasons, an interior word (*verbum interius; verbum cordis*) is to be distinguished from an exterior or outer word (as in speech and writing) although outer words are related to our inner words since they exist in order to express meanings which already exist within us as human subjects: existing within us as inner words or as conceptions which refer to what our minds have just grasped and understood.<sup>3</sup> Citing Aquinas: “conceptions of heart and mind come forth in silence and without sound, but by audible words the silence of the heart is manifested.”<sup>4</sup> Outer words immediately refer to our inner words through our experience and acts of meaning and as a definition of meaning where, in this context, meaning exists as a predicate or verb),<sup>5</sup> and inner words refer to things that are understood through our acts of understanding or meaning which also lead us toward an experience of inner words.<sup>6</sup>

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word can be pictured or imagined. But, usually, an inner word is experienced and known only through an act of understanding which can transcend whatever can be known through any acts of sensing. An “inner word” can refer to either a definition or a judgment (which, as a judgment, would be known to exist as a “true word” or *verbum verum*). These inner words exist in a way which cuts across cultural boundaries. As Watson proffers an explanation in his exegesis of St. Augustine’s analysis as this exists in the *De Trinitate*:

This [inner] word is neither Greek nor Latin nor does it belong to any other language (ib. 9, 19), and it has a better claim to the title ‘word’ than that which is heard aloud (ib. 9, 19). It is a faithful representative of the knowledge we possess, sense or intellectual (ib. 9, 22).

<sup>3</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1 & ad 7; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 6; *Peri Hermeneias*, 1, 2, 15; *Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 37; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 13, a. 1; q. 16, a. 7; 3a, q. 6, a. 6, ad 3. In his *Caring About Meaning: patterns in the life of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Pierrot Lambert, Charlotte Tansey, and Cathleen Going (Montreal: Thomas More Institute Papers, 1982), p. 101, Lonergan argues that Aquinas did not initially distinguish very clearly between understanding and conception. In his commentary on the four books of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, the first major theological synthesis that Aquinas wrote (approximately in 1252-1256) before composing the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*, Lonergan argues that the distinction cannot be explicitly found. It only first appears in the *De Veritate*. The *prima forma* or first form refers to the mind’s grasp about how things fit together; the *secunda forma*, or second form, designates the product of this understanding. According to Lonergan, this is what Aquinas refers to when he speaks about a *conceptio* or *conceptus*. He compares it to the planning which an architect does after he first grasps how things fit together. See a more detailed discussion of this issue in Bernard Lonergan’s *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 25, n. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Aquinas, Opusc. xiv, Exposition, *de Divinis Nominibus*, iv, lect. 1, as quoted by Thomas Gilby, *St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. by Thomas Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 221, n. 602. See also *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 12, a. 3, ad 2, where Aquinas speaks about how audible words function as signs that refer to “intelligible concepts.”

<sup>5</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 1; Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Peri Hermeneias*, 1, 2, 19 and 21, quoted by Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 16, n. 17. Cf. *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 6, 4, 1230: “White and black are outside the mind; but what is

While outer words vary from person to person because of the different languages which people speak, inner words as direct expressions of understood understanding possess a stability and a fixity that is initially grounded in the abstracting power of our human acts of understanding that, as a species of first operation, is able to grasp a universal significance which is now freed from any form of particular instantiation and which can be applied to the understanding of many other similar particulars.<sup>7</sup> The conceptions which are first revealed in inner words always ultimately come or proceed from our prior acts of understanding (our acts of direct understanding).<sup>8</sup> From the reception of an act of understanding comes the production of an inner word which, as an act, exists as a second type of intellectual act: it exists as an act of conceptualization.<sup>9</sup> Prior acts of understanding differ from later acts of conceptualization.<sup>10</sup> In a conception, that which is understood and which exists as a concept can be

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meant by these terms exists only in the mind,” my translation. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran & H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 591. According to Aquinas, Aristotle “intends to assert that conceptions of the soul have their identity in correspondence to things.”

<sup>7</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 86, a. 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 27, a. 1; 1a2ae, q. 90, a. 1, ad 2. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 1: “it is of the nature of a mental concept to proceed from something else, namely from the knowledge of the person conceiving”; *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2: “conception is an effect of the act of understanding . . . something expressed by intellectual knowledge”; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 14, 3: “a word does not arise from our intellect except in so far as it is in act; but as soon as it is in act, a word is conceived in it”; and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 14: “for this intelligible reality (God) is identical with the understanding intellect, whose emanation is the conceived Word.”

<sup>9</sup>J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 246. As Lonergan so succinctly expresses this point in his *The Incarnate Word*, unpublished manuscript translated 1989 by Charles C. Hefling, Jr. from the Latin of the *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press *ad usum auditorum*, 1964), p. 75, “it is in so far as our intelligence is in act that we are able to conceive, and it is in so far as we are conceiving in act that we can accurately bring forth exterior words.”

<sup>10</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 5; *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 34, a. 1, ad 2; ad 3. See also Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 207; and Patrick H. Byrne, “The Thomist Sources of Lonergan’s Dynamic World-view,” *The Thomist* 46 (1982): 133. In his “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Theory of the Act of Understanding,” *The Thomist* 37 (1973), a paper based on an unpublished dissertation entitled, *The Meaning of Act in Understanding: A Study of the Thomistic Notion of Vital Act and Thomas Aquinas’s Original Teaching* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1969), William Murnion clearly distinguishes between a common Neo-Thomist interpretation of understanding (espoused by a number of prominent neo-Thomists such as Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson) which correlates understanding with the formation of concepts and how Aquinas understood understanding as an event that occurs prior to conceptualization as its necessary ground and basis.

referred to as a “conception of the intellect,”<sup>11</sup> or as an “understood intention,”<sup>12</sup> which is to be distinguished from that which has just been understood,<sup>13</sup> although, from the generation and the experience of an inner word as a product of our understanding, an external thing or other object is being understood in a way which points to the self-transcendence of our human cognition.<sup>14</sup> It is for the purpose of our possibly understanding and knowing the truth of other, exterior things that an inner word is formed within ourselves, within our consciousness, within our minds or our intellects.<sup>15</sup> What is firstly and primarily understood now exists as the inner word of our understanding as the operation of our understanding always eventually terminates in a word or concept that is interiorly grasped and understood by us in our consciousness of self.<sup>16</sup> To experience and apprehend the meaning of a concept points to an apprehension which knows about the meaning of an idea which, as grasped and understood, knows something about that which is other than itself.

To understand the procession or the generation of a word in a way which avoids confusion,<sup>17</sup> it is true that the forming of conceptions through our acts of conceptualization occurs immediately or simultaneously with the experience that we have of our initial, prior acts of understanding<sup>18</sup> where, in a prior, initial act of understanding, its term is experienced within ourselves, within the data of our human consciousness, as something which exists as an idea.<sup>19</sup> The experience of an idea does not

<sup>11</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2. In his exegesis of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book 7, in his *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on Insight*, eds. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli; rev and aug. by Frederick E. Crowe with the collaboration of Elizabeth A. Morelli, Mark D. Morelli, Robert M. Doran, and Thomas V. Daly (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 51, Bernard Lonergan argues that Aristotle clearly distinguishes between form and definition: *to ti ēn einar* refers to form; *to ti estin*, definition. The first refers to the “content of an insight”; the second, a “conception” or “general definition.” As Lonergan notes, “the *to ti ēn einar* is what you understand before you are able to formulate it; it is the form, *intelligibile in sensibilibus* (the intelligible in the sensible).”

<sup>12</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 53, 4.

<sup>13</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 6; *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>14</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2; *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>15</sup>*De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1. See also *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 5, a. 9, ad 1 and *Lectura super Ioannem*, c. 1, lect. 1,, as cited by Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 590. See Lonergan’s discussion in the *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 599-601, Appendix 2: The Act of Understanding, for an explanation about how Aquinas understood the role and purpose of inner words in our human cognition. Lonergan speaks of a “fourfold necessity” for inner words in our human understanding. Inner words exist to try and bridge a gap or an initial lack of identity between the proper object of our human understanding which is an agent nature or form that exists within corporeal matter and *being* or the being of all things which exists as the natural or the formal object of our human understanding since, in our human inquiry, nothing exists about which questions cannot be asked.

<sup>16</sup>*De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 5; *De Veritate*, q. 4, aa. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 14, 3; *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9. Aquinas refers to this process of intellectual generation usually in terms of *dicere* or *verbum* as in the *dicere* of the *verbum*: the speaking or uttering of the word (cf. Frederick E. Crowe, “The Issue in the General Context of Thomist Writings,” *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 102; William A. Mathews, *Lonergan’s Quest: A Study of Desire in the Authoring of Insight*, p. 144 ).

<sup>18</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 14, 3; *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9.

<sup>19</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, aa. 1-2; p. 86, 88; Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 18. See Frederick

prevent us from distinguishing between a responsible act of understanding and the experience or the apprehension of a grasped, understood idea. The experience of difference points to a distinction which can be drawn between that which exists as the principle of a given act of direct understanding and how ideas differ from that which could be causing a given act of understanding. An externally existing form exists as a species of outer cognitional cause while, on the other hand, an idea is something which comes to exist and to emerge within the kind of intellectual consciousness which refers to us in our acts of understanding.<sup>20</sup> Through the mediation of both form and idea, although in different ways, something which is other is now known by us in a more fully conscious way (perhaps consciously for the first time). Species or form as a principle of our understanding differs from the species or form of an idea although, in each case and in conjunction with the species or the form of a concept, each of these exists as a likeness (or as a *similitudo*) of that other which is being grasped and understood by us through the mediation of an act of understanding which exists as a direct act of understanding.<sup>21</sup>

To distinguish more carefully between an act of understanding and an act of conceptualization, in an

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E. Crowe, “For Inserting a New Question (26A) in the *Pars prima*,” *Developing the Lonergan Legacy: Historical, Theoretical, and Existential Themes*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 337-339, for a discussion which emphasizes the self-consciousness (or the inner awareness) which every person experiences as he or she apprehends an idea through the proceeding of an inner word which, in conceptualization, attends and proceeds from a prior, grounding act of understanding. The intelligibility of a purely natural process is to be distinguished from an intelligibility that is also itself intelligent and which refers to a condition of possibility that explains why the mind is able “to cause something of its own.” Cf. Leo Vincent Serroul, “*Sapientis est Ordinare*”: An Interpretation of the *Pars Systematica* of Bernard Lonergan’s *De Deo Trino* from the Viewpoint of Order,” unpublished dissertation (Toronto: Toronto School of Theology, 2004), p. 98. An intelligibility that is also itself intelligent is a cause which does not produce effects in a purely spontaneous or mechanical manner since, here, what is being spoken about is a species of causality which exists not from without but from within, a species of causality which is governed by a form of reflective activity that is strictly rational and which knows what it is doing as it moves from a received act of understanding toward the apprehension of an idea which is the term of an act of understanding. Cf. Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 47-48.

20 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 15, a. 2. Quoting from a. 2, Aquinas distinguishes between an idea in the intellect and the form or species through or by which something is known: “the idea of a work is in the mind of the operator as that which is understood, and not as the species [or intelligible likeness] whereby one understands, which is a form that makes the intellect in act” (my translation). In an unpublished paper, “Scotus on the object of understanding,” p. 10, Giorgio Pini also cites *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1 to the same effect. As Aquinas notes in the *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, a concept or conception always exists within a mind (within our intellectual consciousness) as the term of an act of understanding; it exists as a means for speaking about a species or an intelligible likeness which exists in an exterior or other thing and which, as a formal cause or principle (and not as an image or phantasm), effects an act of understanding within the created kind of understanding which belongs to us as created beings. In the same way, similarly, as Aquinas distinguishes between a concept and a form in the *De Potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, in “Aquinas’s Philosophy of Mind,” p. 29, Murnion also distinguishes between a species or a form and a concept or an idea: as a formal cause, a species or form is that *by* which the intellect understands while a concept or idea is that *in* which an intellect grasps and understands.

21 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 53, 4.

act of understanding occurring *purely as an act*, an operation proceeds within the consciousness that we have of ourselves as prospective knowers but, as the procession of an operation (as a *processio operationis*), it proceeds as the emergence of an act from a condition of potency,<sup>22</sup> and so by this means, it perfects us who receive and experience it.<sup>23</sup> In some way, we are changed for the better through a change in us in our consciousness which occurs whenever an act of understanding comes to us and is received by us. But, on the other hand however, as producing an effect (through a form of efficient causality that is exercised by this same act), as a *processio operati* (as an act which comes or arises from another act), this same act of understanding becomes an act of conceptualization or *dicere* which produces an inner concept or word which is grasped by us in a meaning that is received by us as an inner concept or word within our possible intellects as a new actualization which has moved from a condition of potency to a condition of act.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 226, n. 39.

<sup>23</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 7. See also Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 107. In his *Verbum*, p. 150, Lonergan employs two different but related meanings for operation in order to distinguish a meaning for *intelligere* as understanding apart from a distinct meaning which pertains to *dicere* as an act of conceptualization. Purely as act, *intelligere* is an operation which is complete in and of itself. When something is understood, no gap exists between what is understood and the act of understanding. A perfect coincidence exists. But, when this same act is examined in terms of its producing an effect in a knower, when it is understood as an efficient type of cause, as an active or efficient potency which communicates an effect that is received by a given knower, then this same act exists as an act of conceptualization which has been traditionally referred to as *dicere*. Inner words as the terms of acts of understanding accordingly rank as terminal objects, either as an inner word or concept that is grasped by us in an act of understanding, or as an inner word or judgment that is grasped by us in an act of reflective understanding which affirms a truth through which something of reality is known. Where, at the beginning of things, agent objects trigger acts of abstractive understanding and then later acts of judgment (through phantasms which suggest intelligible relations within data and, later, through accumulations of evidence which suggest the sufficiency of a prospective rational judgment), terminal objects as inner words bring inquiries to closure in terms respectively of either an understood meant or a rationally affirmed judgment of truth.

<sup>24</sup>Byrne, “Thomist Sources,” *Thomist*: 133. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 103, a. 2, ad 2. As Lonergan explains it in *Verbum*, p. 207, an act of understanding as a *processio operati* produces an effect. Here an act of understanding is viewed as an efficient cause. It produces something which is somehow lesser than itself if we think about how causes differ from effects. But, when we attend to the meaning of an act of understanding in terms of a *processio operationis*, we find that the procession of an inner word as a product is in turn explained by a grounding act of understanding which remains within the understanding or the intellect of a given prospective knower. Quoting Lonergan’s own words, “the inner word of defining not only is *caused by* but also is *because of* the act of understanding.” This experience of rationality thus explains why, in an act of understanding, our human consciousness experiences a heightening of its own awareness which sets it apart from the kind of consciousness which belongs to us in the feel of our sensible, sensing experience. Our sensible consciousness of things is transcended by an intelligible, rational form of consciousness and an awareness of things that is to be sharply distinguished from the experience of data that is present to us within the data of our consciousness and the data of sense which belongs to us in the context of our sensing experience.

The same act exists in two ways or it is conceived to exist in two different ways. As *intelligere*, one act receives an intelligible *species* but, as *dicere*, this same act grasps an interior word as a new meaning that is now being grasped and understood by us.<sup>25</sup> A meaning or meaning, as an activity, is distinguished from a meant, an object of some kind that we have been seeking to grasp and understand. In conceiving, our understanding produces another act. Act comes from act (*actus ex actu*) as one thing emerges from another in a process which is to be sharply contrasted however with any form of emergence which speaks about how something comes from potentiality (from that which is not already in a condition of act).<sup>26</sup> In conception or *dicere*, concepts as inner words or ideas proceed and emerge as correlative byproducts, as also terms which are to be associated and which belong to our prior acts of understanding. They emerge not just as effects but as emanations, as intelligible or intellectual emanations as concepts or as, initially, ideas immediately proceed from our prior acts of understanding.<sup>27</sup> Hence, in our acts of conceptualization and as a prolongation of our prior acts of understanding, a meaning is grasped and formulated in a way which sets it apart from the being of any material conditions.<sup>28</sup> Meanings are universalized and, at the same time, they are distinguished from each other in their universal significance. In expressing forms, the concepts of *dicere* transcend the forms of *intelligere* which ideas express.<sup>29</sup> In this context, term cannot be divorced from act (proper term from proper act), and when an act of understanding achieves the goal that properly belongs to it and which is internal to it, it grasps a meaning that is now achieved and which is no longer intended. A desired or intended meaning has been transformed into meant meaning as the term now of an act of conceptualization that is grounded in a prior act of understanding. The acts of meaning which exist in our understanding and conceptualization have led us to the emergence of a distinct object which is distinguishable as an interior or inner word even if it cannot be fully separated from the act which had originally produced it.<sup>30</sup> And so, as a result, this object as an idea then becomes an object of thought and speculation and, as an object of thought and speculation, it comes to have a life of its own. It becomes something that can be thought about and pondered and about which further questions can be asked.

As we have been indicating, in our acts of conceptualization, a meaning is grasped and formulated in a way which, to a greater or a fuller extent, sets it apart from the being and the influence of any material conditions.<sup>31</sup> Meanings are universalized more fully as concepts and, at the same time too, they can be distinguished from each other in terms of what could be their universal significance. In expressing the intelligibility of forms and on the basis of our understood ideas, we can understand why the *dicere* of

25 Byrne, “Thomist Sources,” *Thomist*: 120.

26 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 14, 3. See also Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 107.

27 *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 27, a. 1, as quoted by Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 133 and p. 183: “whenever we understand, by the mere fact that we do understand, something proceeds within us, which is the conception of the thing understood, issuing from our intellectual power and proceeding from its knowledge.”

28 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 53, 3.

29 *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2; 1, p. 178. According to the English translation, “the intellectual conception [*conceptio intellectus*] is a medium between the intellect and the thing known, because through its mediation the intellectual operation attains the thing [*rem*.]”

30 When discussing how Lonergan understood how Aquinas had understood the first operation of the human intellect, in the *Divine Initiative*, p. 12, Stebbins briefly notes that “ideas parroted without understanding are devoid of their proper meaning.”

31 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 53, 3.

our knowing transcends the *intelligere* of our understanding.<sup>32</sup> In this context, no term can be divorced from its act (a proper term from its proper act), and when an act of understanding achieves the goal that properly belongs to it and which is internal to it, it grasps a meaning that is newly achieved and which has ceased to be intended. A desired or intended meaning has been turned into a meant meaning as the term now of an act of conceptualization that is grounded in a prior act of understanding. The acts of meaning which exist in our understanding and conceptualization have led to the emergence of a new, distinct object which is distinguishable as an interior or inner word even if it cannot be fully separated from the act which had initially produced it.<sup>33</sup> And so, as this object becomes an object of thought and speculation, in its detachment and separation, it can begin to have a life of its own when we refer to an order of concepts which becomes the stuff of human speech and the kind of dialogue which belongs to the ordering of this speech as this exists among different human persons.

In the *De Veritate*, Aquinas supplies an analogy for relating how exterior and interior words are related to each other. As an exterior word refers to that which is understood, an interior word also refers to that which is understood.<sup>34</sup> Hence, through an interior or inner word (an inner word meaning “that which is understood” or “that which is interiorly understood”<sup>35</sup>), an apprehended, understood meaning receives a form that registers it with us in our understanding and our acts of remembering and this form presents itself to us as an intelligibility which defines a concept. It is “that which is actually considered by an intellect.”<sup>36</sup> Something external (initially belonging to the data of our sense experience) is understood through a form (which is apprehended by us through an act of understanding) but, as grasped or apprehended, in our self-understanding and in the order of conceptualization which belongs to us in our understanding, this form is conceived by us to exist as a cause which leads to the issue or the generation of an idea and then this idea which exists as a concept whose parts are related to each other in a way which constitutes the being of a new meaning and the kind of whole which exists as a given meaning. An abstracted concept, as the expression of a previously grasped idea, begins to live within us, within our understanding of it, although, through a kind of distancing which can begin to occur as our concepts are considered in a way which separates them from originating acts of understanding, they can begin to exist within us in a way which points to our need for understanding and which points to why our acts of understanding precede the being of all of our ideas and concepts. Conceptualization comes with and from our understanding. It cannot be said to precede it unless we were to try and argue that, at times, our use of concepts in their comparison and combination can generate questions that can lead us toward the possible reception of new acts of understanding. To avoid any contradictions which can exist within our understanding of different things, a conceptual kind of knowledge which knows about words and concepts is to be distinguished from a kind of knowledge which is more closely joined to the good which exists in the pre-conceptual kind of act which belongs to our acts of understanding.

<sup>32</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 2. According to the English translation, “the intellectual conception [*conceptio intellectus*] is a medium between the intellect and the thing known, because through its mediation the intellectual operation attains the thing [*rem*].”

<sup>33</sup>When discussing how Lonergan understood how Aquinas had understood the first operation of the human intellect, in the *Divine Initiative*, p. 12, Stebbins briefly notes that “ideas parroted without understanding are devoid of their proper meaning.”

<sup>34</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1.

<sup>35</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, quoted by Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 19, n. 30.

<sup>36</sup>*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, quoted by Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 19, n. 30.