

Analogy and Metaphysics: Joseph Maréchal's Agent Intellect¹

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Joseph Maréchal's (1878-1944) transcendental Thomism is a peculiar sort of philosophy: an attempt to adapt traditional Scholastic thinking to Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) critical method, its fullest expression in Maréchal's five-volume work *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique*² asks the question, "what can serve as a ground for objective knowledge?" While Kant addressed this question by situating the unity of a knowing subject and its object in consciousness, Maréchal's approach finds this unity in *Being*, making it into a philosophy that grounds religious experience. To experience, for Maréchal, is to think, and to think is to *be*.

It is this need for a ground for religious experience that led Maréchal to make a fundamental methodological claim based on the unifying character of Being: both metaphysical and transcendental philosophy, he says, cover the same subject matter, while moving in different directions.³ The result is a highly individual vocabulary indebted to both traditions, and which can only be read as something altogether new.

This paper is a systematic exposition of Maréchal's theory of the Agent Intellect, as found in *Cahier V* of the *Point de départ*. It will show that for

1. This article is based on parts of my MA thesis "Analogy as the Foundation of a Transcendental Thomism in the Works of Joseph Maréchal" (McGill, 2015). I would like to note, however, that my interpretation of Maréchal has evolved since then, and this article is a reflection of that evolution.

2. Joseph Maréchal, *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique, leçons sur le développement historique et théorique du problème de la connaissance* [5 vols.] (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1922-1964) [1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th editions]. From here on, the *Point de départ* will be cited using a Roman numeral for the volume, followed by the page number in Arabic numerals. All translations are my own.

3. "These two critical methods, which engage from different but complementary angles the same object, must, when pushed to their logical conclusions, arrive at the same end; for the Critique of antiquity [i.e., the ontological critique] begins with an ontological object and ends with a transcendental subject; and the modern [Kantian] Critique begins with a transcendental subject and postulates an ontological object" (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 68).

Maréchal, the Agent Intellect reveals that any particular act of knowing must be subsumed under *Being* as a general concept. The entirety of that which is potentially intelligible is the scope of Being.

A number of steps are taken in order to arrive at this conclusion. (1) Maréchal establishes that knowing has active and passive sides (Agent and Possible Intellect), and that these form an absolute unity; whatever is known must be introduced into the mind as *mind itself*, albeit as its malleable, passive side. I consider this relation to be one of analogy, and what follows, an elaboration of an “analogical” epistemology. (2) The thing that must be received into the mind is the *phantasm*, a representation of sense data which the Agent Intellect must seek out or “illuminate.” (3) The mind’s relationship to the phantasm consists in a double movement: it must first become its object (conversion to the phantasm) and integrate that object into itself (return to self). (4) The mutual intelligibility of subject and object is made possible by a subjective faculty, the imagination. (5) The Agent Intellect constitutes an object of knowledge out of the *phantasm* by means of a “specifying form” or *species*. (6) The *species* is fundamentally an ontological rather than epistemological construct, belonging to being rather than the mind. What it shows is the *a priori* form of the concept, or “intelligible unity of Being.” In other words, if the *species* is a kind of genus that allows for knowledge to be recognized as intelligible or “objectifiable,” its reference point cannot be a mere function of the mind itself, but rather one of the whole field of intelligibility.

From this, I conclude that in establishing knowing as something ontological – that is, becoming what one knows and assimilating it into oneself against the backdrop of the whole field of possible knowledge – Maréchal is fundamentally presenting knowledge as an *analogy*: knower and known relate according to a logic of similar and dissimilar, the language of analogy. Because this analogy is ontological, referring to Being, Maréchal alludes to the possibility of a second analogy, one between discursive (assimilative or human) knowing, and intuitive (creative or divine) knowing.

1. Reconciling the Active and the Passive

Maréchal’s transcendental theory of the Agent Intellect begins by following the fundamentals of Kantian epistemology. Sensation is introduced into the mind according to the forms of space and time, and made into a

representation. At this point, it is not yet “constituted as a *concept*,”⁴ an object of thought. Such a concept implies universal and necessary conditions that the senses alone cannot furnish; it is only when sense encounters these *a priori* conditions that an image of what is thought can be constituted within the mind. And while sense experience is purely receptive, the conceptual faculties of the mind that organize sensibility are active.

The traditional Thomist conception of knowing, remarks Maréchal, is not so different from this.⁵ For Thomas, sensible intuition is made possible by the “mingled parts”⁶ that are the soul (the active principle) and the body (the material passive principle).⁷ Sensation is a hylomorphic activity, but within this activity, the soul affects matter of its own free will, as the *spontaneous activity* of the unified knower.⁸ Insofar as it constitutes the object within the mind, this spontaneous aspect of knowing is called the Agent Intellect.

The theory of the Agent Intellect “rests entirely on the need to find a rational means of reconciliation between the diverse elements that participate in the production of the concept,”⁹ or as Kant would say, the objectification of representations. First, the intellect must have something to work with, a material sense object out of which it can forge a concept. This is a *representation*, the fruit of sense data being filtered through the faculty that Kant calls intuition.¹⁰ Maréchal calls the representation a *phantasm*,¹¹ or image. The phantasm, which is already a formal unit, must be received into the mind in order for conceptual knowledge to occur – the mind is a blank slate that passively receives its content.¹² And yet, the understanding, the soul, is an active faculty – it can only know through activity, through its

4. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 185.

5. “St. Thomas, in his day, exposed an analogous conception of intellectual spontaneity” (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 185). Maréchal is of course thinking of St. Thomas’s epistemology as a whole (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, Q. 75-109).

6. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 185.

7. Aquinas, *Sum* Ia Q. 81.

8. “Ipsum intellectuale principium, quod dicitur mens vel intellectus, habet operationem per se, cui non communicat corpus” (Aquinas, *Sum* Ia Q. 75, Art. 3, Co.).

9. *Point de départ*, V, 187. “Concept” here means “object” for Kant.

10. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 51 / B 75.

11. This is the traditional Scholastic term for “the appearance of the thing.” Cf. Otto Muck, *The Transcendental Method*, trans. William D. Seidensticker (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 90.

12. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 187-8; Aquinas, *Sum* Ia Q. 79, Art. 2, Co.

spontaneity. The phantasm cannot jump into the mind, but must be actively constituted within it. The only solution to this conundrum is to concede that the mind is at once passive and active: “it is easy to see at least one result: the intellectual faculty is at once active and passive, but passive under one aspect, and active under another.”¹³ The mind’s passive aspect is called the Possible Intellect (*intellectus possibilis*) and the active aspect the Agent Intellect (*intellectus agens*).¹⁴

Already, then, we see that the relation of the active to the passive (and the subject to its object thereby) is not one of separation, but of a scale, one that is intrinsic to the subject itself. This scale is actually a complex form of analogy, one that the Thomist commentator Cajetan called analogy of proportionality: in order to know, the mind must become its own object, and yet at the same time be able to “return to itself.”¹⁵ The philosophical style employed from here on is markedly analogical. More than a way of describing the relationship of opposites and the movement that takes place between them, Maréchal considers analogy to be a veritable remedy to Kantian “static thought.”¹⁶ The Agent Intellect is thus elaborated as a kind of epistemological analogy.

1.1 Agent Intellect as Activity: The Phantasm

As the active part of the mind, the Agent Intellect is inseparable from what it

13. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 189. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 10, 6.

14. Aquinas, *Sum Ia Q. 79, Art. 4, Ad. 4.*

15. Thomas de Vio cardinalis Caietanus, *De Nominum Analogia: De Conceptu Entis* [1498], ed. P. N. Zammit (Rome: Institutum Angelicum, 1934), §21-30. Maréchal cites Cajetan 52 times in *Cahier V*, more than any other secondary source (barring Kant and Aquinas, of course). Cajetan’s most poignant example is that of the Good: moral qualities (rather like knowledge) are intrinsic, or possessed by the individual. But one cannot be wholly good – only God can be said to be so. Hence one participates, to a greater or lesser extent, in God’s goodness, which is “imbibed” as it were by the subject. Goodness exists on a scale, requiring the subject to be open to an external determination (passive side) and yet self-determined (active, not-God, the other) (Caietanus, *De Nominum*, §30).

16. “[Kant] seems to be unaware of the true meaning of the scholastic theories of analogy, which deserve further exploration because, like Kant, they find the heart of the problem of knowledge in the relationship between sensible intuition and meta-sensible *a priori* conditions that themselves are not strictly intuitive” (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, IV, 82).

accomplishes – it is what it does. This action is called the *intelligibile in actu*, the “intelligible [thing] in act.” It is “the objective form of the actuation of the ‘intellectual potentiality’.”¹⁷ The Agent Intellect is itself the *intelligibile in actu*. The thing itself, to which this form corresponds, is appropriately called the *intelligibile in potentia*. Through a process of actuation, or “becoming active,” this movement yields objective knowledge.¹⁸ The Agent Intellect actively “seeks out” phantasms in the world, and abstracts them from their physical/material element, creating a representation within the Possible Intellect and investing it with a deeper level of objectivity, creating “specifying determinations” or *species*: “The necessary role of the Agent Intellect therefore consists in creating through the abstraction of phantasms *intelligibles in actu* in the Possible Intellect, that is to say, to supply the [Possible Intellect] with ‘specifying determinations’ (*species*) that are intrinsically free from any material restriction.”¹⁹ This description of the function of the Agent Intellect encompasses the cognitive act in its entirety: Maréchal insists on the absolute unity of knowledge. Hence describing the Agent Intellect requires a description of each element of the cognitive act, including the *species*, the phantasm, the Possible Intellect, and the agent itself.

In a general way, the Agent Intellect is always in act, and without a preceding cause: it is both *a priori* and spontaneous. And although it is inseparable from what it causes, the *intelligibile in actu*, the actuality of the former is not the actuality of the latter; the *intelligibile* is an object of the Possible Intellect, while the Agent Intellect is purely efficient, pure act. It therefore does not contain anything, but rather makes active the

17. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 190.

18. While the coincidence of form and function in the Agent Intellect is indeed a Thomist principle, Jan Verhoeven is right to point out the similarities between what Maréchal expresses and certain ideas found in Fichte. Cf. Jan Verhoeven, “L’inspiration fichtéenne de Maréchal,” in *Au Point de départ: Joseph Maréchal entre la critique kantienne et l’ontologie thomiste*, ed. P. Gilbert (Brussels: Lessius, 2001): 75-92. For Verhoeven, the relation of Agent and Possible Intellect in Maréchal is similar Fichte’s I and not-I (80). From 1806 onward, Fichte uses the term “Love” in an analogical way that is similar to Maréchal’s “dynamisme” (83). Both Fichte and Maréchal believe in what Maréchal calls “l’intuition intellectuelle de l’acte, ou l’acte dynamique” (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, IV, 348; Verhoeven, “L’inspiration fichtéenne de Maréchal,” 76-78).

19. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 191.

Possible Intellect, wherein representations reside.²⁰ The Agent Intellect is the becoming of the Possible Intellect.²¹ Its action is therefore limited by what it must represent in the Possible Intellect: this action is “curbed” by the phantasm. There is nothing about this theory, remarks Maréchal, that cannot be reconciled with Kant: “Kant expressed the same thing in critical terms: the concept is neither totally *a priori*, nor totally spontaneous: it is *a posteriori* (or empirical) in terms of its matter (its heterogeneous content [*contenu divers*]), and *a priori* and spontaneous in terms of its synthetic form (its universal form).”²²

Indeed, the purpose of the Agent Intellect is the active transformation of the phantasm. The phantasm can therefore only be described in conjunction with the act that is the Agent Intellect. Maréchal points out that all the words Aquinas uses to describe the relationship between the Agent Intellect and the phantasm – transformation, elevation, spiritualisation, universalisation, illumination – are participative.²³ Perhaps the most evocative of these is illumination. Abstraction, which is the act of setting in motion possible objects (*intelligibile in potentia*) towards becoming formal objects (*intelligibile in actu*) is called the “illumination” of the phantasm. The Agent Intellect is like a light that illuminates what it knows.²⁴ Taking the light metaphor one step further, if the Agent Intellect *is* the *intelligibile in actu*, then the light and that which is illuminated are the same. The malleable Agent Intellect must become the phantasm in order to know it, and represent it in the Possible Intellect. Yet, this conformity can only be one of *act* and not of form, since the Agent Intellect is pure act. The phantasm therefore “inheres” in the Agent Intellect, which takes on the contours of the phantasm:²⁵ “Its conformity with the phantasm can only be

20. “Intellectus agens non est substantia separata, sed virtus quaedam animae, ad eadem active se extends, ad quae se extendit intellectus possibilis receptive” (Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 88, Art. 1, Co.). When actuated, the Possible Intellect becomes the Agent Intellect.

21. “Sicut omnia natura ita et in anima est aliquid quo est omnia fieri, et aliquid quo est omnia facere” (Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 79, Art. 3, Co.).

22. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 194.

23. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 195.

24. Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 85, Art. 1, Ad. 4.

25. For the concept of “inhering” see Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, Q. 3, Art. 7 Ad. 7; *Sum Ia*, Art. 1, Ad. 1. The phantasm is not a predicate of the Agent Intellect, but “inheres” within it. Moreover, one can interchangeably say that phantasm inheres in the Agent

an “act” [of conformity] – an “attitude” – regulated by the formal character of the phantasm in virtue of its natural coordination [towards the Agent Intellect].”²⁶

2. The Emanation of Powers: Conversion to the Phantasm and Return to Self

With the light metaphor, Maréchal has effectively broken down the barriers between what Kant would call separate faculties. The Agent Intellect’s conformity to the phantasm in the act of knowing is a radical assertion of the oneness of spirit.²⁷ Maréchal brings this even further: not only must Agent and Possible Intellect share a scale of actuation and passivity (the Agent Intellect seen from the passive side is the Possible Intellect; the Possible Intellect seen from the point of view of activity is the Agent Intellect), but the phantasm and the Agent Intellect must also share this proportional scale of activity. In other words, sensibility’s act is the understanding, and understanding’s passivity is sensibility. This is extrapolated by means of a “general theory of powers.” For Thomas, powers *emanate* from an essence. In a composed essence wherein “the perfection of the form goes beyond the purely material level,”²⁸ as is the case with human knowers, the difference in levels (*dénivellation*) of essence produces a hierarchy of powers. Taken literally, this means that the passive sensible powers of the mind are subordinated to its active intellectual powers. Maréchal, however, describes this relationship dynamically, affording more place to function than form. On this reading, the intellectual powers are themselves the active principle of sensibility. Insofar as sensible representation is always “becoming” intelligible, sense and understanding

Intellect, or that the Agent Intellect inheres in the phantasm: they achieve identity in act (cf. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 199).

26. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 197.

27. Maréchal thus accuses Neo-Kantianism of “lacking imagination.” This “*problème d’imagination*” always limits terms to their literal meaning: “In spite of ourselves, beholden as we are to the too-strict separation that language operates between elements that in fact are not entirely distinct, we treat the faculties of a unified subject – sense, imagination, intelligence, will – as isolated unities, reacting to each other externally. The Scholastics, whose terminology nevertheless encourages this illusion, were all the same intensely aware of the unity of the subject” (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 197-198). Cf. Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 75, Art. 2.

28. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 202.

emerge from the same cause – the spontaneity of the subject:

This is what the old formula “*phantasma est intelligibile in potentia*” means to say; for a real subject’s potentiality never only designates the negative side or the pure possibility of an act, but also the positive suitability [*convenance positive*], or as it were, the mute desire of this act: “*potentia appetit actum; materia est appetitus formae.*”²⁹

Two points can be deduced from this analysis: first, intellectual dynamism has finally revealed its formal definition: it is the process of actuation according to a principle of causality common to its poles. Second, what Maréchal means by intellectual finality has been elucidated to a certain point: it is the internal cause that guides the active movement of knowing, leading sensibility towards a “concept”, towards the soul. Simply put, the proper end of representation is the completion of the subject. Hence the term *emanation*, despite evoking a “moving out” from essence, implies the constitution of the source, the subject. Ultimately, emanation is analogy of proportionality put to work – it is a kind of sliding along the scale of proportionality between subject and object.

3. A Scholastic Theory of the Imagination

This means that there is a true form of proportionality established between sense and understanding, and that *intelligence*, or intellectual synthesis, is present at all levels of knowing: “human nature is filled with pervasive intelligibility all the way down to its inferior levels, even in the body and its [lowest] vegetative functions.”³⁰ Intelligibility reaches the lowest levels of sense through the mediation of *imaginative synthesis*. This synthesis, like everything else encountered so far, is divided into passive and active sides: the *passive* imagination is “associative,” or in Kantian terms, reproductive. The *active* imagination is constructive, or “productive.” It is the imaginative synthesis that produces the phantasm. Although constructive, the imagination is never creative; it is a function of the understanding, the intellectual faculty, and is directed towards the intellectual synthesis. Imagination, for Maréchal, is nothing more than the name for a glimpse

29. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 205.

30. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 206.

of the Agent Intellect's movement at a privileged moment, the synthetic constitution of the phantasm. The imagination would perhaps be better defined, then, as the principle of the intelligibility of matter. As Maréchal writes, "the finality of imaginative activity and the internal unity of the phantasm is *lifted up* beyond the level of the senses – not because the image itself ceases to be concrete and material, but because its constitutive unity (at the heart of matter itself) is derived from its intelligible unity."³¹

Maréchal's view of imagination fundamentally splits what Kant calls "apperceptive unity" or the unity of consciousness, into two moments or aspects: the Agent and Possible Intellect. The apprehensive or sensible synthesis has become the act of the Agent Intellect moulding itself to sense. Now, the constitution of the Agent Intellect's "final cause" into an image is carried out by the imagination. This representative act of imagining has a passive side imitating the Possible Intellect's ability to contain information, and an active side that organizes this information, as does the Agent Intellect. In its movement from possibility to actuation, which is inscribed within the larger movement of the Agent Intellect, the imagination begins with sense, which it can reproduce. As it moves towards actuation under the guidance of the Agent Intellect, it is able to actively construct the phantasm. This determination of the phantasm by the imagination is that which grants it causal conformity with the phantasm. It is not itself a faculty, but rather, to use scholastic language, virtual intrinsic cause of itself (insofar as it is enveloped by the Agent Intellect, which is its own cause) and the phantasm. For Maréchal, then, the imagination is the principle of proportionality of the Agent Intellect (subject) and the phantasm (object).

Imagination leaves us at the summit of materiality. Once the image has been constructed, a positive determination exists in the mind, and immanent operations continue. Imagination therefore stands at the limit of the first phase of the Agent Intellect's activity, the constitution of the phantasm – the first synthesis, to use Kant's language.³² The intelligibility of the phantasm as a material synthesis is not derived from the image itself, nor from the

31. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 207. Maréchal makes this point in scholastic terms, reconciling the illuminative power of the Agent Intellect with the synthetic power of the imagination at *Point de départ*, V, 211-212.

32. This "first phase" roughly corresponds to the "apprehensive synthesis" in Kant (cf. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 103 ff.).

sensible faculty that is in conformity with the external matter that is known. Intelligibility, says Maréchal, arrives at that point where imagination and understanding meet.³³ Imagination therefore belongs to both faculties. As principle of the proportionality of subject and object, it belongs to the essential emanation of a hylomorphic being: put simply, only a being that is a matter-spirit composite is capable of a constructively imaginative act.³⁴ Human beings are material, and so are bound to supplement their intellectual spontaneity with sense experience. Metaphysically, this materiality represents the passive side of knowing; the Agent Intellect, the act of the understanding, is then able to “activate” or render intelligible its own passive side, which, having been pressed into the mould of sensible intuition, has taken on the form of what has been encountered in sense – it has become the phantasm. If the proper end of representation is the completion of the subject, then it is matter that provides what is lacking.³⁵ The active intellectual faculty is found entirely within the subject. The subject has a material element, sensibility, but this faculty ultimately belongs to the active part, the Agent Intellect, in its movement towards actualization. If knowing is *becoming* or actualization, then an exterior passive element must exist. Endowed with both passive (material) and active (intellectual) sides, the knowing subject can identify with an external material source as Possible Intellect, and then actualize that source of knowledge as Agent Intellect.

33. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 208.

34. For Xavier Tilliette, this “Spirit” is inherently linked to the supernatural: “Le Père Maréchal cherche néanmoins dans le mysticisme chrétien sinon une confirmation du moins un gage de l’aptitude surnaturelle inscrite au moins en creux dans l’intellect. C’est pourquoi l’intuition intellectuelle est au centre de ses savants travaux” (X. Tilliette, “Maréchal et la connaissance mystique,” in *Au Point de départ: Joseph Maréchal entre la critique kantienne et l’ontologie thomiste*, ed. P. Gilbert [Brussels: Lessius, 2001], 116).

35. “In the case of intelligence setting in motion sense, the pre-existing physical link is nothing other than the substantial union of soul and body; the natural and immediate domain of influence of the spiritual soul over matter is the body [insofar as it is] united to the soul in the same matter. Because the soul is the formal cause of the body, the higher powers that emanate from the soul as spirit have an essential relationship to and solidarity of action with the lower intentional powers, which emanate from composite [being] as such. Also, as soon as the sense elements come within the orbit of the imagination, they reach, by the very fact, the immediate zone of influence of the intellect: vis-à-vis the [intellect], these [sense elements] are in a very real way ‘*materia circa quam operatur*’” (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 210). This paragraph is essentially a summary of the function Maréchal attributes to the “emanation of powers.”

For while objective knowledge is something that must be “actualized,” a purely active mind, robbed of the movement from active to passive, would not know everything, as one might initially think, but rather nothing at all. If Aristotle’s moral philosophy says that virtue lies in the mean, Maréchal’s epistemology exists according to the same principle of proportionality: knowledge lies in the “mean” between activity and passivity.³⁶

This movement away from self to correspond with matter, and then back to the Self as Intellect is described by the use of the word *emanate*, which is sprinkled throughout Maréchal’s text,³⁷ and the term “emanation of powers from an essence,” encountered near the beginning of the theory of the Agent Intellect. The intellectual powers of the knower “emanate” from the essence of the knower towards matter. Emanation describes a dual movement away from spirit towards matter, and then of the inverse movement of matter towards spirit. These two moments constitute one movement.³⁸ Since this movement implies mutual intelligibility between

36. This is part of Maréchal’s broader strategy of avoiding a steep divide between the discursive and the intuitive. Tilliette affirms this – albeit in an exaggerated fashion – when he writes that for Maréchal “l’intuition est remplacée par l’affirmation du jugement ou la synthèse judicative” (Tilliette, “Maréchal et la connaissance mystique,” 120).

37. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 201, 209, 256 (as “*excessum*”), 400, 493; cf. *Point de départ*, V, 155-6, 230, 335-38.

38. For Cajetan, emanation is a unified movement away from the intellect towards sense consisting of active and passive parts (Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 79, Art. 2 [in the Leonine Edition]). The Thomist tradition after Cajetan maintained the unity of this emanation (cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* [The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan] [Toronto: The Robert Mollot Collection, 2007], 187). Within this movement of emanation, *illumination* is the Agent Intellect’s objectifying act. As Daniel Heider writes, “the intelligible species originates by means of the effective causal concurrence of the principle cause (the Agent Intellect) and the instrumental cause (phantasms). The Agent Intellect is unified with the phantasms by the so-called virtual contact. By this contact the Agent Intellect elevates the phantasms much like an artist uses and elevates a paintbrush when painting a picture” (Daniel Heider, *Universals in Second Scholasticism* [John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam: 2014], 65). Illumination is therefore the “upward” or active part emanation. But what of its “downward” or passive moment? This question is complicated by Cajetan’s obscure remarks about a “pre-illuminative” function that precedes the illumination of the Agent Intellect in his examination of *Sum Ia*, Q. 79, Art. 3. Writes Cajetan, “Singularis autem dicendi modus occurrit mihi non despicendus. Et consistit in hoc quod lumen intellectus agentis facit intelligibile in actu in phantasmate per modum abstractionis prius natura quam fiat species intelligibilis intellectu.” Heider refers to this pre-illuminative function as an “intelligible kernel...already present in

matter and mind, imagination is the hinge on which it turns.

4. The *Species*

Thus far, the first part of emanation's movement – from spirit to matter – has been described. But what happens after the Agent Intellect has encountered the phantasm? The beginning of an answer has already been offered: the Agent Intellect is “converted” to the phantasm, taking on its form, and transforming the image of something exterior into a positive determination of the subject. This positive determination of the subject is no longer a mere representation, but an *object*. Its name has already been mentioned in passing: the “specifying form,” “intelligible *species*,” or more frequently, *species*, is “the last secret of sense-intellect knowledge [*connaissance sensitivo-intellectuelle*.]”³⁹ A *species* is neither a phantasm nor an object. Rather, it is an actively constructed “subjective determination of the faculty of knowledge”⁴⁰; a “potential intelligibility derived directly from the object”⁴¹; a “representation or specifying form of human knowledge.”⁴² It is the *species* that brings the passive intellect from potential to actual knowledge – or if one prefers, that completes the activity of the Agent Intellect; hence the intellect must actively produce the *species*.

Thinking in Kantian terms, if a phantasm is akin to a representation, and the object of knowledge is the intellect itself insofar as it has been

the phantasms” (Heider, *Universals*, 64). See also, Yves René Marie Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 110 n. 27. This passive moment corresponds to the movement towards the phantasm in Maréchal's system. If a twofold movement of emanation can be found in Cajetan, it can be difficult to reconcile this with Aquinas's texts. Writing on Cajetan's interpretation of activity and passivity in an epistemological context (*Sum* Ia, Q. 54 and 79), Etienne Gilson accuses him of glossing Thomas' texts, implying that he is more interested in reading Aristotle through Aquinas than Aquinas himself (E. Gilson, “Cajetan et l'existence,” in *Tidjschrift voor Philosophie*, 15 [1953], 283-286). If Aquinas and Cajetan are in conflict, Maréchal undoubtedly stands with Cajetan.

39. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 215.

40. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 88.

41. Stephen Fields, *Being as Symbol: On the Origins and Development of Karl Rahner's Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 31.

42. Thomas Sheehan, *Karl Rahner: The Philosophical Foundations* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987), 79.

transformed by experience, the question of the *species* becomes: how does the (Agent) Intellect carry out its self-actuation? For Maréchal, a mental image is always necessary for this self-activation: “The concept [i.e., the object], insofar as I am conscious of it, is not a self-sufficient representation, and remains therefore *in a necessary relationship* with the concrete image.”⁴³ This is what Thomas means when he insists on the necessity of the knower to *convertendo se ad phantasmata*⁴⁴ – in order to move upwards to objectivity and activity, the Agent Intellect must first move downwards towards an image given in experience. A *species* is thus a rule of application,⁴⁵ to borrow a term from Kant, for applying sense images, or phantasms, to the Possible Intellect by means of the Agent Intellect. The *species* is analogous to a *habitus*, though it differs from the latter insofar as it is a dynamic disposition of the mind.

4.1 *Species* as Abstracted Image

The *species* can only function within the twofold movement of emanation. When an object is known, the Agent Intellect must identify with the thing given in sense, with the passive, downward movement that is the conversion to the phantasm. The opposite upward movement, the actualisation of the phantasm (at this point, *sensibile in potentia*) is called *abstraction*. The *species* is inextricably joined to the movement of abstraction, carrying that which is essential in the phantasm up to a higher level of intellection. But what is this essential material that must be abstracted from the phantasm? If the phantasm and Agent Intellect must conform to one another in their upward movement, and the phantasm becomes increasingly active, increasingly determined, then its matter must be left behind. What is achieved, then, is a deeper level of *universality*, or as Kant would say, a greater level of synthetic unity.⁴⁶ The intelligible qualities of the thing are abstracted from its matter in order to come into consciousness. Abstraction’s movement goes from individuals to the successively broader categories of species and

43. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 216.

44. Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 84, Art. 7, Co.

45. The *species* is the dynamic equivalent of the Kantian schema, cf. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, III, 176-179; V, 113, 215-17, 235 n. 1, 352.

46. Cf. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 215, 227.

genus⁴⁷: to identify a thing as belonging to a *species*, the “specific nature” must be identified and abstracted by the Agent Intellect. Because each level of identification is broader than the first, and relates the individual to these successive levels, abstraction is synthetic, relating the One to the Many: “A relation like the one between the phantasm and the concept, characterized by the progressive abstraction of universal characteristics contained within a concrete manifold, is therefore necessarily a relation of multiplicity with unity: ‘*unum in multis*’.”⁴⁸

4.2 Knowing and Being: The *Species* and the Objective Unity of Knowledge

The fruit of the *conversio*, the capacity to abstract a universal from a particular, refers to the *a priori* form of the object-concept. This is a retrieval of the Kantian notion of *a priori* begun in *Cahier III*. There, the notion of the *a priori* both in Kant and Aquinas refers to the correspondence of an actualized particular with the host of possibilities from which it sprang. The *a priori* is antecedent to concrete experience, to the actualization of any of these. Here, Maréchal reminds us that operative potentialities are oriented towards abstract characteristics, a kind of backward movement from the realized particular to the host of possibilities that grounds it. A *potentiae* is applied to a formal object, and never to a thing itself.⁴⁹ Emanation, when taken as the process that moves from the subject’s capacities out to the phenomena, and then the subject’s activity as conformed to the object back to the subject, is grounded in an *a priori* foundation. The concept is therefore *a posteriori* in content, and *a priori* in form. The more universal an object becomes, the more unified it is with an *a priori* form.

47. Maréchal will eventually identify three degrees of abstraction: direct abstraction of the universal, mathematical abstraction, and abstraction of transcendental concepts (Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 260-279). The goal of this description is to show that there are “degrees” of abstraction according to the formal object, meaning that it is the “act” that corresponds to foundational *a priori* syntheses, cf. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, III, 93-107.

48. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 220. On these grounds, Vergilio Melchiorre portrays Maréchal as an Idealist, but in a qualified way: the ideal limit of the phenomenal world is something real, and the intelligible and the real therefore coincide (Vergilio Melchiorre, “Maréchal, critique de Kant” in *Au Point de départ: Joseph Maréchal entre la critique kantienne et l’ontologie thomiste*, ed. P. Gilbert [Brussels: Lessius, 2001], 59).

49. Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 77, Art. 6; Maréchal, *Point de départ*, III, 114-122.

This *a priori* form of the concept, “the last universal unity,” can only be thought in-itself if one supposes an imaginative object in general and then analyzes the concept in this general state. What results is what Kant calls “the categorical unity of the real,”⁵⁰ the transcendental relationship between sense and intelligence in an empty state, containing only the pure intuitions of space and time. If Kant arrives at transcendental apperception through this method, the same can be done for Thomas. At the highest level of abstraction resides “the quantitative unity of being,”⁵¹ what has already been shown to be the *sensibile commune* that consistently applies categories to objects. The most basic form of sense, for Thomas, is quantity, the indeterminate unity of number, for all quiddities are quantitative.

Bracketing diversity within consciousness leaves an immediate rapport between Being, “the most general quality of intelligence,” and concrete quantity, “the most fundamental property of any phantasm.”⁵² Consciousness itself is, for Maréchal, the relationship that is maintained between the two. The phantasm, being transformed or “objectified” into a concept by means of a *species*, provides the representative pole of this dynamic relationship, while the connection to Being provides a participative pole. When isolated from Being, the abstractive, representative pole is not only robbed of its dynamism, which leads it to the broadest level of universality, its deepest *a priori* formal foundations, but moreover, “one must conclude that the spontaneity of the Agent Intellect in the creation of the intelligible *species* is only a formal power of numeric synthesis. Intelligible unity is nothing other than the abstract unity of number.”⁵³ Translated into the language of Aquinas, Kant’s metaphysics of representation limits the act of emanation to the abstraction of numerical unity. This is inherently problematic, since it cannot make use of the broadest level of *a priori* synthesis: the framing of objects of knowledge within the context of all that can potentially be known. This contextualization belongs to the meta-empirical realm, and can only be gleaned through the process of the emanation of *potentiae* in a particular instance. In other words, knowing something in particular is grounded in all that can possibly be known. Writes Maréchal:

50. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 220.

51. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 221; cf. Aquinas, *Sum Ia*, Q. 84, Art. 7, Co.

52. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 221.

53. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 221.

If the Agent Intellect really “abstracts,” and if it produces in this way the universal and discernible elements of the concept, [this occurs] by virtue of a *principle of unification*, commensurate not with quantitative being, but, in one way or another, with the entire breadth of the “knowable.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

Maréchal’s analysis of the Agent Intellect therefore ends not with the unity of consciousness, as does Kant’s analysis of the intellect, but rather with the intelligible unity of being, of everything that can be known. Just as the subject’s knowledge is completed outside itself in the object, its very character as an intellectual being is grounded in an infinity of intelligible objects that can be potentially known. For Maréchal, epistemology necessarily becomes metaphysics insofar as Being, the universal principle of intelligibility, grounds all particular acts of knowledge.

Being, in the scholastic tradition, is not homogenous, but rather “oscillates between a maximum of actuality and a maximum of possibility.”⁵⁵ Between the pure indeterminacy of prime matter (pure possibility) and pure actuality (a fully-actualized Being, which could only be divine, the *esse divinum* or *purum esse*), lie all other beings, which are a passive-active combination: “Between pure actuality and indeterminate possibility are intervoven the things we call ‘beings’ – graded participants between these two extremes.”⁵⁶ The path towards knowledge of beings – that is to say, the process of their self-assimilation – is one that moves from possibility to actuality. Matter, or possibility, is disparate, separated, “the many,” as the Greeks would say. Actuality is supreme unity, the One. Knowledge, as it moves towards actuality, requires a supreme logical unity in the pure activity that is its own understanding (Agent Intellect). Within the mind, then, lies a logical postulate of supreme unity, of Being. One might be tempted to say that from this, Maréchal is implicitly establishing the claim that the supreme objective unity of intelligence is identical with the divine essence. Indeed, if the phantasm’s actuality participates in the actuality of the Agent Intellect, then might the Agent Intellect itself participate in the Pure Activity that is

54. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 223.

55. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 249.

56. Maréchal, *Point de départ*, V, 250.

the Divine Essence?

This is perhaps too great a leap to make, but it does confirm something about Maréchal's epistemology: knowledge is an analogy between subject and object, knower and known, and this analogy, insofar as it is ontological, hearkens to a further one, functioning in much the same manner: that between discursive (assimilative) knowing, and intuitive (creative) knowing. While human minds do not create objects of knowledge *ex nihilo*, the Maréchal system affirms that they assimilate what is already there *as if* it were an intuitive object. This is ultimately the point of the concept of imagination. Maréchal may not prove the existence of a divine mind, but his analogical style of philosophy certainly shows what is divine about the human mind.