

Objection 1. It would seem that there is no active intellect. For as the senses are to things sensible, so is our intellect to things intelligible. But because sense is in potentiality to things sensible, the sense is not said to be active, but only passive. Therefore, since our intellect is in potentiality to things intelligible, it seems that we cannot say that the intellect is active, but only that it is passive.

Objection 2. Further, if we say that also in the senses there is something active, such as light: on the contrary, light is required for sight, inasmuch as it makes the medium to be actually luminous; for color of its own nature moves the luminous medium. But in the operation of the intellect there is no appointed medium that has to be brought into act. Therefore there is no necessity for an active intellect.

Objection 3. Further, the likeness of the agent is received into the patient according to the nature of the patient. But the passive intellect is an immaterial power. Therefore its immaterial nature suffices for forms to be received into it immaterially. Now a form is intelligible in act from the very fact that it is immaterial. Therefore there is no need for an active intellect to make the species actually intelligible.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (*De Anima* iii, 5), “As in every nature, so in the soul is there something by which it becomes all things, and something by which it makes all things.” Therefore we must admit an active intellect.

I answer that, According to the opinion of Plato, there is no need for an active intellect in order to make things actually intelligible; but perhaps in order to provide intellectual light to the intellect, as will be explained farther on (a. 4). For Plato supposed that the forms of natural things subsisted apart from matter, and consequently that they are intelligible: since a thing is actually intelligible from the very fact that it is immaterial. And he called such forms “species or ideas”; from a participation of which, he said that even corporeal matter was formed, in order that individuals might be naturally established in their proper genera and species: and that our intellect was formed by such participation in order to have knowledge of the genera and species

of things. But since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible; it follows that the natures of forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible. Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses as made actual by what is actually sensible. 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.

Reply to Objection 1. Sensible things are found in act outside the soul; and hence there is no need for an active sense. Wherefore it is clear that in the nutritive part all the powers are active, whereas in the sensitive part all are passive: but in the intellectual part, there is something active and something passive.

Reply to Objection 2. There are two opinions as to the effect of light. For some say that light is required for sight, in order to make colors actually visible. And according to this the active intellect is required for understanding, in like manner and for the same reason as light is required for seeing. But in the opinion of others, light is required for sight; not for the colors to become actually visible; but in order that the medium may become actually luminous, as the Commentator says on *De Anima* ii. And according to this, Aristotle’s comparison of the active intellect to light is verified in this, that as it is required for understanding, so is light required for seeing; but not for the same reason.

Reply to Objection 3. If the agent pre-exist, it may well happen that its likeness is received variously into various things, on account of their dispositions. But if the agent does not pre-exist, the disposition of the recipient has nothing to do with the matter. Now the intelligible in act is not something existing in nature; if we consider the nature of things sensible, which do not subsist apart from matter. And therefore in order to understand them, the immaterial nature of the passive intellect would not suffice but for the presence of the active intellect which makes things actually intelligible by way of abstraction.