

A CONCEPT IS NOT AN IMAGE: AN IMAGE IS NOT A CONCEPT

Before we explore the thought expressed in the title to this lesson, we need to do a little revision. Let's recall our elaboration of the senses, internal and external. Four years ago, in Lessons 13 & 14, we set out the senses enjoyed by the higher animals, including ourselves, the rational animals. There are five *external* senses as follows:

| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------|
| FIVE EXTERNAL | [Sight | |
| SENSES | [Hearing | |
| | [Smell | |
| | [Taste | |
| | [Touch | — [hard & soft |
| | | [& |
| | | [hot & cold |

(Touch, the most basic of the senses, has two modalities.)

And there are four *internal* senses which we exposed, you may recall, with the following schema:

| | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | [Present, received | COMMON |
| | [& coordinated | |
| [APPREHENDED | [| |
| [by the five senses | [| |
| [| [Absent & retained | IMAGINATION |
| SENSIBLE | [| |
| INTENTIONS | [| |
| | [Present, known | ESTIMATIVE POWER |
| [NOT | [| |
| [APPREHENDED | [| |
| [by the five senses | [Absent, retained | |
| | [& reproduced | MEMORY |

The internal senses are not called 'internal' because they are within us so much as because they do not, as the external senses do, operate immediately. They operate *mediately*: they work on what the external senses provide to complete their functions and so serve the good of the animal and its species.

We all know what is meant by an image and the power we use to generate images, called *imagination*. We are also quite aware that we store images of what we have heard and seen in our *sense memory*. Now, each external sense is tied to the thing it senses. It does not reflect on itself. The eye knows only what it sees; the ear what it hears; the sense of smell, the odour it detects. There has to be some sense power which ties the different sensations together and coordinates them. The cat hears the mouse scratching. Immediately, it uses its eyes to try and see what its hearing tells it,

and perhaps also its nose to try and smell it. The hearing, seeing and the smelling all have to be coordinated. The sense that does this we call the **common** sense, or sense consciousness. The fourth is somewhat curious; it is a power the animal must have in order for it to flourish, the power by which it knows instinctively what is for its good. It enables it to assess danger, as the rabbit knows to flee the fox. It is the sense that moves the bird to gather straw as necessary for its nest. In the animal it is called the *estimative* sense. It has a slightly different name for men because we have other powers that work with the senses to weigh the necessity of some action for our good.

All of this is by way of preliminary for a closer consideration of the internal sense called **imagination** and its product, which is the image, and to contrast with it the concept which is the product, not of any sense, but of the human intellect.

We have dealt in recent lessons with the concept, the immaterial reality generated by the mind in which it knows, in its universality, the thing that it knows. Inevitably, when we think of some reality, say 'bridge', we visualise it with an image taken from our imagination or from our memory of bridges we have known. The two, concept and image must not be confused. A concept is not an image; an image is not a concept.

That we may see clearly how the two differ let us contrast the characteristics that each of them manifests.

| Concept | Image |
|--|--|
| Concept is of what the thing is. | Image is of appearances to the senses |
| Concept contains no sense qualities | Image is only of sensed qualities. |
| Concept is of the universal. | Image is of singular. |
| Concept cannot be drawn or painted. | Image can be reproduced externally. |
| Concept is of the abstract formally or totally. | Image is always of the concrete. |
| Concepts provide a stratum to knowledge which is permanent necessary, intrinsic & essential. | Images are a variable, contingent, sporadic, foreign & accessory accompaniment to thought. |
| Varying concept interrupts thought. | Varying image does not interrupt thought |
| Distinctness of concept means distinctness of thought. | Distinctness of image does not mean distinctness of thought |

When we are young, we tend to run image and concept together. When Teddy Higginson, now three years old, was younger, he used to refer to every dog he saw as *Shep*, because *Shep* was the only dog he had met. In the same way he referred to every cat as *Bob*, the only cat he knew. Now, of course, he understands the business more clearly. *Shep* is a dog; *Bob* is a cat.

So it ought to be with all of us, as we mature, that we recognize each singular as simply another instance of the universal.



Let's look at the distinctions set out above. Take the example 'bridge'. We know what 'bridge' is via its concept. We can define it: 'a structure enabling passage across a gap in the terrain'. We can recall differing images of 'bridge'; the Sydney Harbour bridge, the Tarlo bridge, the Gladesville bridge. Each is an instance of the reality expressed in the concept.



The Iron Bridge over the River Severn, Shropshire, England

Each of the images we call to mind has its own particular characteristics; the overarching structure of the Sydney Harbour one, the underpinning of the Tarlo, the under-arch of the Gladesville bridge and of the Iron Bridge in the illustration above. These differences do not alter the reality expressed by the concept. Each is an expression of the reality 'structure enabling passage across a gap in the terrain'.

You can draw images of the different bridges you know. You cannot draw the concept 'bridge'. You can only signify it by the written word *bridge*.

Let's take an accident rather than a substance (a bridge is an artificial substance). 'White', the colour, expresses a concept. You can imagine it separate from some substance, with difficulty. You can paint it. But the reality 'white' expressed in the concept cannot be imagined, cannot be painted. It can only be expressed by the spoken or written word.

Concepts provide a stratum to knowledge. We think in concepts; we speak in concepts. A dictionary is a great collection of concepts; not images, but concepts, however strongly we may feel that we are focused on the image. As we speak we may have recourse to images—in our own minds, or shared with those to whom we speak—but they are useless without the underlying immaterial reality expressed by the concept.

We can vary the image without varying the thought expressed by the concept, but if we vary the concept, the whole direction of our thought changes. 'Bridge' might bring us by association of thought to 'bed', for a bed is a sort of bridge, one that keeps the sleeper off the floor. But a bed is a different reality to a bridge and our thought changes direction when it moves from bridges to beds.
