Simplicius and James of Viterbo on *Idoneitates*

**INTRODUCTION**

In a series of quodlibets disputed between 1293 and 1296, James of Viterbo who succeeded Giles of Rome as regent master of theology for the order of the Hermits of Saint Augustine at the University of Paris, defended the view that the intellect, the will and matter are endowed with natural, that is, innate, potencies he called propensities (*idoneitates*) or aptitudes (*aptitudines*).\(^1\) Although the thesis that the intellect possesses innate knowledge of some of its objects was not unfamiliar to scholastics, and indeed seemed to enjoy some degree of favor in the Arts Faculty from the 1230s to the mid-60s,\(^2\) major philosophers who accepted the authority of Aristotle were near-unanimous in rejecting it. One of the many reasons was that the view was deemed to be inconsistent with Aristotle’s conception of the intellect as a *tabula rasa*. Writing some thirty to forty years after these authors, James of Viterbo provided a systematic and unapologetic defense of a very similar view. One author who played a key role in the shaping of James’ theory is the 6\(^{th}\) century Neoplatonist Simplicius whose commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* was translated by William of Moerbeke in the last quarter of the 13\(^{th}\) century.\(^3\) Simplicius, of course, would exercise considerable influence in various

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1. The only single complete overview of James’ metaphysics and noetics is still P. Fidel Casado’s ‘El pensamiento filosófico del Beato Santiago de Viterbo’, *La Ciudad de Dios* 163 (1951), 437-54; 164 (1952), 310-331; 165 (1953), 103-144; 282-302; 489-500. Metaphysics: 163 (1951), 437-54; seminal reasons: 164 (1952), 301-14; real distinction: 314-331; analogy 165 (1953), 103-117; psychology 117-144; the will: 283-293; beatitude: 293-302. I will be using almost exclusively James’ four quodlibetal questions edited, as almost all of James of Viterbo’s hitherto edited works, by Eelcko Ypma: *Disputationes de quolibet* (Cassiciacum, Supplementband 1-4), (Würzburg, 1968-1975). Unless otherwise noted, references to James’ quodlibets will provide the quodlibet number first—which corresponds to the volume number—, followed by the number of the question, the page number and lineation in the Ypma edition.


ways on many 13th and 14th century authors, not just on James of Viterbo. His doctrine of qualities, for instance, is discussed at length by Thomas Aquinas in ST I-IIae qq 49-50, who seems to be the first Scholastic to discuss his views at any length; Simplicius is also an important source for medieval discussions on the intension and remission of forms. Late 13th century and 14th century authors also make heavy use of his doctrine of relations. But Simplicius plays a particularly vital role for James of Viterbo, as it is he who provides James with the important notion of idoneitas that is at the center of James’s noetics, his theory of volition and his natural philosophy.

In this paper I examine the way in which James picks up and expands upon ideas culled from Simplicius’s commentary in order to develop an original, though ultimately problematic, doctrine of propensities (idoneitates) that strives to avoid what are in James’s view the pitfalls of both Platonism with its belief in the pre-existence of actualized ideas, and Aristotelianism with its insistence on the passivity of the human soul. The outcome should be a better understanding of James of Viterbo’s unique form of innatism, and a better appreciation of the sometimes unexpected ways in which philosophical doctrines influence each other.

I start out by presenting Simplicius’s discussion of Aristotle’s doctrine of quality in his commentary of Categories, chapter 8. I then examine James’s applications of Simplicius’s doctrine of propensities in what are probably James of Viterbo’s most important philosophical quodlibetal questions, viz., quodlibet I, 7, which deals with the cause of the will’s motion, quodlibet I, 12, which deals with the distinction between active and passive intellect and quodlibet II, 5, devoted to the discussion of seminal

6 For an overview of the influence of Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s Categories on the Scholastics see A. Pattin’s introduction to his edition of William of Moerbeke’s translation: Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke (Corpus Latinum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum, V/1), ed. A. Pattin, (Louvain, Paris, 1971). For a detailed examination of Themistius’s (and Philoponos’s) influence on James, see E. P. Mahoney, ‘Themistius and the Agent Intellect in James of Viterbo and Other Thirteenth Century Philosophers (Saint Thomas, Siger of Brabant and Henry Bate)’, Augustiniana, 23 (1973), 422-467. Finally, for the importance of William of Moerbeke’s translations in the development of later medieval thought see Guillaume de Moerbeke.
reasons. I conclude with general considerations on the philosophical relations between both authors.

SIMPICIUS ON POWERS AND PROPENSITIES

In chapter 8 of the *Categories* Aristotle defines quality, rather unhelpfully, as “that by which men are qualified,” noting that it is “one of the things which are spoken of in several ways.” There are in fact four main kinds or “species” of quality according to Aristotle. The first species comprises states (*hexeis*) and conditions (*diatheseis*). *Hexeis* are stable characteristics, “not easily dislodged” such as knowledge and the moral virtues; *diatheseis* are passing conditions such as health and illness. The second sort of quality refers to something “in virtue of which we say that someone has the makings of a good boxer or a good runner.” Aristotle calls this a natural power (*dunamin phusikēn*) as opposed to a power or capacity that results from conditioning or training. The third sort of quality are “affective qualities and affections,” that is, qualities that “cause affections in our senses.” Examples are tastes and colors, heat and coldness. Finally, the fourth species are the figures and shapes of objects.

Aristotelian Commentators were puzzled by this list. If the four classes of quality are species, must they not fall under a common genus or share a common feature? Finding such a common feature, however, is difficult for a reason stated by Iamblichus whom Simplicius quotes approvingly, namely that we “are seeking a common feature in something that is “enmattered and has parts;” or, put another way, we are “drawn to the determinate characteristics in which the common feature inheres” (and drawn away from the forms). Because qualities are qualities-of-particulars some philosophers went so far

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9 Simplicius, Commentary, ed. Pattin (see note 4), 221, 24. In the following I shall be supplying in parentheses the Greek original according to Kalbfleisch’s edition [= K] (*Simplicii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, ed. C. Kalbfleisch, [Berolini, 1907]), followed by William of Moerbeke’s Latin in Pattin’s edition [=P].

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as to deny that qualities exist outside of particulars.\textsuperscript{10} But for a Neoplatonist such as Simplicius—and Iamblichus—for whom the existence of common features at one level of reality must be explained in terms of prior entities found at a higher level of reality, the suggestion that qualities should be reducible to matter is senseless.\textsuperscript{11} Qualities cannot exist only as “particulars and compounds,” they must also “have prior existence as an effective prior cause.”\textsuperscript{12} This is in fact why, according to Simplicius, chapter 8 of the \textit{Categories} is entitled “Concerning the qualified and quality.” The term “quality” refers to the “incomposite form” or characteristic, whereas “the qualified” is a reference to what “partakes” of the form.\textsuperscript{13}

Yet, although it is necessary to distinguish two levels in order to provide an adequate metaphysical account of quality, quality properly speaking, that is, that to which we refer when we say, e.g., that Socrates is wise or that Peter would make a good boxer, is the character \textit{qua} enmattered.\textsuperscript{14} And it is to quality thus understood that Simplicius turns most of his attention.

To discuss qualities in this second sense Simplicius uses the Neoplatonic concept of \textit{logos} which Barrie Fleet, in the notes to his translation of Simplicius’ commentary, has described as “the principle by which forms receive their expression in matter as qualities.”\textsuperscript{15} Qualities are defined as “logoi that give form to the qualified.”\textsuperscript{16} They co-

\textsuperscript{10} Antisthenes, K 208, 28-31/ P 286, 00-02; 216, 12-14/ P 296, 91-3.
\textsuperscript{11} See K 218, 11-13; P 298, 64 – 299, 1.
\textsuperscript{12} K 216, 28; P 297, 7.
\textsuperscript{13} K 207, 29; P 285, 64-5.
\textsuperscript{14} K 218, 29-31; P 299, 85-7.
\textsuperscript{16} K 218, 9; P 298, 62-3.
exist with the matter of each qualified thing but without forsaking their substantial per se, immaterial existence. They are, however, distinct from the incomposite form. Thus, to use Simplicius’s own example, the logos of whiteness is not the Platonic Form (of whiteness) but something existing within the qualified thing.¹⁷ This leads to the following definition:

Properly speaking a quality is named as that which supervenes second after the form and co-exists in the pre-existing substance as something implanted in composite natures, and everything that participates has the presence of such an account as something one and the same inherent.¹⁸

This general metaphysical explanation of quality as involving the reception of the Form in the matter applies to all species of quality, including natural capacity, the second species of quality, as we shall now see.

Following Porphyry’s lead, Simplicius prefers to talk of natural suitabilities or propensities (epitedeiotēs) which William of Moerbeke translates as idoneitas.¹⁹ Two such propensities may be considered: propensities in general (haplōs) or propensities “in terms of a certain progress (kata prokopēn tina; secundum exordium quoddam) through which the propensity is already evident and at hand (for example, in the person who is said to have an aptitude for boxing).”²⁰ It is this second sort of propensity Aristotle has in mind when he refers to “that in virtue of which we say someone has the makings of a boxer or a runner.” According to Simplicius such propensities correspond to something that is “less,” so to speak, than the fully acquired skill when it exists in its “full realization” (i.e. in the form of a habit or an act), but “more” than the pure potency “that

¹⁷ K 218, 29; P 299 84-5.
¹⁸ K 222, 11-14; P 303, 14-17.
¹⁹ See Porphyry, In Aristotelis Categorias expositio per interrogationem et responsionem, ed. A Busse (Berolini, 1887), 129, 19-23. Another possible translation for epitedeiotēs is “suitability”. However, Fleet’s choice of “propensity” is to be preferred, for Simplicius’s epitedeiotēs are rather more active than the word suitability suggests. For the sake of clarity and unity of exposition we will also use “propensity” to translate the term idoneitas as used by James of Viterbo.
²⁰ K 242, 8-10; P 332 22-24; K 244, 25-27; P 335, 12-15.
is present in more or less everything,”

Hippolytus, Simplicius tells us, was naturally temperate by virtue of his having “many advantages” (polla pleonektēmata) and “natural predispositions” (aphormas apo tēs phuseōs) toward temperance—as opposed to having some general capacity toward temperance that is presumably shared by most humans.

Simplicius recounts that there was some debate amongst the Ancients regarding the number of cases in which one must posit propensities kata prokopēn tina. The Stoics, for instance, admitted such propensities only in the case of the virtues, while allowing only the more general kind (haplōs) in the case of the arts. Simplicius’ own position is that it is necessary to posit them in “all things that reach completion in any way at all,” that is, in all things that go from a state of imperfection to relative perfection. His reason for holding this belief seems to be the assumption that the passage from one extremity or state to another is impossible without something to connect both extremities or states. Propensities are taken to constitute just such a connection. Thus, natural capacities are described as “bridging the gap” between the two extremities, something they are taken to do by producing in the qualified thing a “predisposition and a starting-point on the way to fulfillment.”

This starting-point is described by Simplicius in a variety of ways, as “an advance payment from the actualization,” a “previous warming of the wick before the heat of the flame,” but most importantly perhaps as “a foretaste of the form” (proemphasis eidous; praemissio speciei). Simplicius’s conception of propensities is thus anchored in his metaphysics of participation. Propensities represent “a partial participation (metria metousia; mediocris participatio) in the form divided off proportionately, not present in its entirety.”

Given that propensities are to be posited in things that move from incompleteness to completion, it is in the lower hypostases that they must be found, that is, at the level of

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21 Quoting from Fleet’s translation, On Aristotle, Categories 7-8, 104.

22 K 248, 25-26; P 340, 71-73. See also K 249, 13-16; P 341, 95-8.

23 K 248, 29; P 341, 75-6. “Bridging the gap” is B. Fleet’s clever translation for sunagōgos ou esti tōn akrōn.

24 K 248, 33; P 341, 79.

25 K 246, 18; P 338, 84.

26 K 248, 33-35; P 341 80-81.
Soul and Nature, but most obviously so in Nature. Thus, appealing to the Neoplatonic understanding of intellection as a turning of the soul toward the Forms, Simplicius explains that the intellect (in the soul) requires a natural capacity (*dunamis*; *potentia*) in order to be brought to completion by the forms. When this occurs, it is, he says, the capacity that leads (*proagousa*; *producens*) the intellect in the soul to its completion.\(^{27}\)

Similarly, changes in Nature are possible only through the reception of the *logoi* (*metalēpsei logōn*; *in suscipiendō species*); and this reception can only occur in things that are capable of receiving them, “for not every form comes-to-be-present in anything whatever, but only that which can be instantiated in that which is suited to receive it (*eis to epitēdeiōs dekkesthai*; *in id quod idonee se habet ad susceptionem*).”\(^{28}\)

The way in which capacities reach their completion depends on the sort of being whose capacity they are. In the case of self-moving souls the capacity is able to advance to completion on its own (*di’ heautēs*; *per seipsam*); in other sorts of beings, the capacity is brought to completion by an act, but advances easily (*'radiōs*; *de facili*).

One of the last questions Simplicius raises in his commentary on the second species of quality has to do with the provenance of capacities. He has already stated that they were distinct from matter as well as from form,\(^{29}\) but must they not come from either one or the other? He rules out the first option as absurd, for matter is “impotent,” “lacking in all quality” and “devoid of any disposition.” He also rules out that the form alone could suffice to explain capacities on account of its being “complete and entirely self-subsistent.” He concludes that although the capacity can be considered as “a foretaste of the form,” the capacity owes its existence to a *combination* of matter and form.

*Epitedeioiteis/ idoneitates/ propensities*, then, are capacities which we must suppose to exist in *all* beings that move from imperfection to perfection. They are a half-way state between the general propensity and the corresponding habit or act and, and are described by Simplicius as a sort of pre-possession of the form of which they are an imperfect participation.

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\(^{27}\) See Simplicius (?), *On Aristotle’s on the Soul* 3.1-5 (Ithaca, N. Y., 2000), 236, 16-30, for remarks to the effect that the intellect is perfected by “turning back to the substantial reason-principles in itself”.

\(^{28}\) K 249, 6-7; P 341, 87-89.

\(^{29}\) See K 246, 17; P 337, 83.
For James of Viterbo such a doctrine was to offer two important advantages. First of all, it had more obvious affinities with an Augustinian understanding of cognition, in the sense that it implied a more active role on the soul’s part than did Aristotle’s psychology as expounded in the *De anima*. Secondly, the doctrine was developed by an Aristotelian commentator and could therefore, to a certain extent at least, be passed off as Aristotelian in inspiration. This is an important point: Although James of Viterbo makes no mystery of his preference for the views of Augustine, Boethius and Anselm, the fact is that Aristotelian terminology and concepts still held sway in philosophical discussions in the University of Paris in the 1290s; it was therefore important for masters, and indeed expected of them, to show that their doctrines, whatever they might be, did not conflict with fundamental Aristotelian axioms after all.

**JAMES OF VITERBO ON PROPENSITIES AND APTITUDES**

A) THE WILL AND ITS APTITUDES

James devotes one of his longest and most original disputed questions to the problem of the will and the cause of its motion, one of the most controversial topics in the aftermath of the 1277 condemnation. In this question James argues that the will itself is

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30 On the importance of Augustine in the works of James, see E. Ypma, “introduction”, *Disputatio prima de quolibet…*, xxii.


32 James of Viterbo’s doctrine of will has been studied in great detail by F. Ruello (see ‘La liberté humaine selon Jacques de Viterbe’, *Augustiniana*, 24 [1974], 283-347), who also examines James’s doctrine of propensity. This examination however is incidental to his overall project of providing a general account of human freedom.

33 As is well known, the controversy pitted “voluntarists” who believed the will was the principal causal factor in the production of volitions against “intellectualists” who assigned that role to the intellect. It is customary to cite Henry of Ghent as an example of the first group and Thomas Aquinas as a chief representative of the second. The differences between both schools tend to become more marked starting in the late 1280s. Thus Godfrey of Fontaines espouses a form of intellectualism that is more rigid than that of Aquinas and James a form of voluntarism that is arguably more extreme than Henry’s. See R. Macken, ‘Heinrich von Gent im Gespräch mit seinen Zeitgenossen über die menschliche Freiheit’, *Franziskanische*
the principal natural cause of its own volitions, whereas the object of volition as apprehended through the intellect is necessary only in order to stimulate the will to act.

James is, of course, well aware of the many objections that can be leveled against the thesis that the will moves itself. The most obvious objection is that it runs counter to one of the fundamental axioms of Aristotle’s physics and metaphysics, the proposition that “everything that is moved is moved by another”; this axiom appears to be true both of simple beings, such as heavy and light bodies which are moved by another, and of animals, including humans, who are movers from one point of view and moved from another point of view.

Similarly, to say that something is moved by itself entails that it is in potency and in actuality at the same time, which is impossible. More generally, the Philosopher’s distinction between active and passive potency shows that some one thing cannot move and be moved at the same time. Active potency is the power to mover another qua other; passive potency is the power to be moved by another qua other.

James answers these two related objections by cleverly placing his solution under the authority of Aristotle, quoting the assertion in the De anima that “the soul is in a certain way everything” which he promptly claims is equivalent to the proposition that

Studien 59 (1977), 154. The literature on the subject is vast. Dom Odon Lottin’s Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles, T. 1 (Louvain-Gembloux, 1942), 225-389, is still invaluable. Wippel (The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines, [Washington, 1981], 184-202) offers a brief overview of the doctrinal context in the late Thirteenth century and a detailed examination of Godfrey’s contribution to this debate and his disagreement with James of Viterbo (197 and passim). Finally, Bonnie Kent, in chapter 3 of Virtues of the Will, (Washington, D.C., 1995) offers an interesting account of voluntarism in the thirteenth century without however discussing James of Viterbo.

34 Aristotle, Physics, VII, 1, 241b24.
35 See James of Viterbo Quod. IV, q. 4, for a detailed discussion of the thesis that something can move itself. Whereas some philosophers wanted to argue that the principle was true in the case of natural motion, not in the case of human actions, James believes the principle does not even apply to certain types of natural motion, the free fall of heavy bodies being one example. For a recent discussion on the rejection, by “Augustinians”, of the principle, see R. Teske, ‘Henry of Ghent’s Rejection of the Principle: ‘Omne quod movetur ab alio movetur’’, in Proceedings from the International Colloquium on the Occasion of the 700th Anniversary of his Death (1293), ed. W. Vanhame (Leuven, 1996), 279-308; for Godfrey of Fontaines’ upholding of this position, see J. F. Wippel’s ‘Godfrey of Fontaines and the Act-Potency Axiom’, Journal of the History of Philosophy 11 (1973), 299-317, as well as The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines, 184-202.
“everything is in a certain way in the soul.” The question is: what does it means to say that something is “in” the soul. After discussing four different ways in which things can be said to be “in another”, James comes to the conclusion that the way things are in the soul is in virtue of a certain conformity: everything is contained in the soul by virtue of some conformity of all things in the soul (with things outside the soul).

Now, according to one way of understanding this last statement the soul would be a purely passive power; its conformity would lie in its indeterminacy, its ability to receive all and any forms—and this is arguably what Aristotle meant by the expression “intellect that is everything.” But James thinks this will not do. Although he grants that the soul is partly passive, he disagrees with the view he attributes to the Stoics, that the soul could be characterized exclusively by its capacity to be acted upon by external agents. He lists three reasons for this. The first reason takes as its major premise the proposition that all vital operations proceed from internal active principles, for which James argues as follows: whereas inanimate beings have only a passive principle of motion, animate ones have both passive and active principles. Now, there are certain motions that are common to both animate and inanimate beings but which, in the case of animate beings, proceed from an internal principle; such are generation, alteration and locomotion; a fortiori, motions that are proper to living beings must also proceed from an internal, active principle. A second reason is that actions must be proportioned to the active powers from which they derive, “so that they do not exceed the active power.” A vital action—such as are intellective and volitional acts—must therefore proceed from a vital active principle that is proportionate to the actions that stem from it, in other words, from an intellective or volitional principle: “It follows that the soul must be related to such actions in a way that is not purely passive, but in an active way; indeed, they proceed from the soul more than they do from the objects.”36 Finally, there are two kinds of actions, transient and immanent actions.37 Transient actions result from the action of one being on another; immanent actions remain in the subject which they perfect; it follows that they depend on the subject—the soul—more than they do on the objects. James takes these three

36 Quod. I, 7,166, 308-9.
37 Or between absolute actions and action habens sibi oppositam passionem. The distinction is attributed to Simplicius (Pattin 407, 35 – 408, 38). See Quod. III, q. 4 (56, 23 – 57, 27); also Quod. III, q. 4 (63, 197-201).
arguments to show that the soul cannot be wholly passive, though it must be partially so. The soul’s “potential conformity” to things must therefore somehow be construed as a partially active state; James calls this partially active state an incomplete actuality. He describes it thus:

[This conformity to things] is an inchoation (inchoatio), a beginning (exordium) and preparation (praeparatio) with respect to the ensuing act. For this reason we can call it an aptitude (aptitudo), or a propensity (idoneitas) with respect to the completed act. Such a propensity is connatural to the soul and innate, and therefore remains always in it; (but it remains) sometimes imperfectly, sometimes perfected by the act. This power seems to belong to the second species of quality, for as Simplicius says in the Categories, as the word potency has many meanings, the power which pertains to this species of quality is a natural propensity, not in the absolute sense but considered in terms of a certain progress. As he says, this kind of power belongs to all that is perfected in a certain way. For something does not proceed from what is absolutely imperfect to the perfect, without the presence of some middle power that adds something that is lacking to reach perfection, deriving completion from what is most perfect. Such a power (potentia) is an aptitude (aptitudo), a propensity (idoneitas) and a beginning (exordium) of man’s future completion with respect to the sciences and the virtues. These are the seeds of the sciences and virtues which are said to be in us, that is, those propensities and aptitudes which we have with respect to the sciences and the virtues.  

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38 “... et est inchoatio et exordium et praeparatio quaedam, respectu actus ulterioris. Unde potest dici aptitudo quaedam, et idoneitas ad completum actum. Et est huiusmodi idoneitas animae connaturalis et naturaliter indita, ideoque et semper in ipsa manens; sed quandoque imperfecta, quandoque vero perfecta per actus. Videtur autem haec potentia pertinere ad secundum speciem qualitatis. Sicut enim dicit Simplicius, in Praedicamentis, cum nomen potentiae multa significet, potentia, quae pertinet ad hanc speciem qualitatis, est idoneitas naturalis, non simpliciter sed secundum exordium quoddam considerate, et sicut dicit, hoc genus potentiae conveniens est omnibus quae qualitercumque perficiuntur. Non enim totaliter ab imperfecto ad perfectum procedit aliquid, nisi potentia media affuerit addens quid, quod deficit ad perfectum, susciptiis autem completionem a perfectissimo. Est igitur conductiva extremorum et viam exhibit a deterioribus ad meliora et praeparationem imponit et exordium ad perfectionem.” Quod. I, 7, 92, 419-438; see Quod II, q. 5, 71, 414-425; 74, 521-524; 525-531).
The soul’s conformity is thus constituted by Simplician propensities. James justifies his appeal to them by the fact that something cannot move from potency to act without the presence of a “middle power”. However, as we will now see, he extends the concept. Thus, in the next section of his discussion, he tells us that the aptitudes are numerous and diverse, and this diversity follows that of the things to which the soul conforms (iuxta materiam et diversitatem eorum quibus anima nata est conformari).

Aptitudes fall into two classes: general (generales) and special (speciales) ones. The most general ones are the sense faculty, the intellect and the will. But each general aptitude is then divided into further special propensities. The special propensities of the sense faculty are the different external and internal senses. And in turn, each (external sense) contains further special propensities that correspond to the differentiae of sensible objects. A similar breakdown applies in the case of the intellect and the will: The intellective power is a general propensity with respect to all intelligibles upon which are founded further special propensities corresponding (secundum) to the diversity of all (omnia) intelligibles. Likewise the will can be considered as a general propensity on which special idoneitates are founded that “are as numerous and diverse as are diverse the notions of desirable things.”

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39 This is similar to the principle “de extremo ad extremum non pervenitur nisi per medium” that we find in Aquinas in, e.g., Summa theologiae, I, q, 55, a. 2, ad 2.
40 Quod. I, 7, 173, 442-4.
41 Albert the Great uses similar vocabulary to characterize the position of an unidentified Arts Master who defended the view that the agent intellect possesses innate knowledge of all universals (“habebit penes se specialitates et generalitates omnium rerum…”). This passage is quoted and discussed by R. A. Gauthier, ‘Le cours sur l’ethica nova’, 90.
42 “Et in quolibet sensu vel sensitiva potentia fundantur specialies idoneitates secundum differentias illius sensibilis quod est objectum sensus.” Quod. I, q. 7, 450-2. It is unclear here what James means by “differentiae.” One possibility is that he thinks that each sense contains propensities of all the differentiae of its proper object. Thus, the sense of sight would contain propensities of all the possible colors, the sense of smell all possible smells, etc.
43 Quod. I, 7, 93, 455-6. See P. Fidel Casado’s ‘El pensamiento…’ 165 (1953), 137 for a commentary on this passage.
As the above shows, James clearly holds that there is a very strict correspondence between propensities and their objects; indeed he seems to suggest that the order of propensities maps the order of things. In quodlibet 1, 13, \(^{45}\) he explains that the logical order which obtains between the different propensities corresponds to the order that obtains between objective features of the world. Thus, the intellect moves itself to the knowledge of substance before that of accident. This priority of substance over accident corresponds to the order that obtains in the “entititative order” between substance and accident. \(^{46}\) However, James stops short of telling us how close the correspondence between propensities and extra-mental reality is; the answer to that question, he tells us, cannot be known in the present life:

How far the division of special propensities proceeds in each power; what sort of and how great a diversity in the object requires a (corresponding) division of aptitudes in the power, that is known with certainty by He who creates the soul with its propensities. But we cannot know these things naturally and perfectly in the present life. \(^{47}\)

What emerges clearly from the foregoing is the fact that for James of Viterbo, propensities are not merely very general and indeterminate capacities or abilities: special propensities correspond to individual desirables and individual intelligibles, and special sense propensities correspond to individual sense-objects. This sets them quite distinctly apart from the “natural inclinations” or “inchoations of the virtues” that were commonly accepted by many scholastics. \(^{48}\) Aquinas, for instance, in the De veritate, asserts that the

\(^{45}\) “Si autem ponantur in intellectu similitudines quaedam innatae, per quas anima se movet ad intelligendum actu, ut supra dictum est, non videtur difficile ostendere quomodo intellectus intelligit substantiam per propriam speciem, quamvis in fantasia non sit nisi species accidentis.” Quod. I, q. 13, 189, 212-215.

\(^{46}\) “Sicut enim substantia est prior accidente, secundum naturam entitatis, sic est ipso prior secundum rationem cognoscibilitatis.” Quod., I, q. 13, 189, 218-20.

\(^{47}\) Quod. I, q. 7, 93, 458-63.

intellect contains seeds of the sciences in the form of axioms (*dignitates*) – such as the fact that the whole is greater than the part – or incomplex concepts – such as the concept of being or one;\(^4^9\) similarly, he holds that there exists in the will a natural active principle whereby the will is inclined to its ultimate end and which can be considered as an inchoation of the virtues. Although Thomas does say that such principles “preexist” in us, and that all subsequent principles are “included” in them, he clearly does not think of them as “forms”, say specific or generic forms, present, albeit inchoatively, in the soul. Indeed, in his commentary on the *De anima* and in other texts he explicitly rejects the view that the agent intellect could be a “habitus principiorum”.\(^5^0\) The reason for this of course is that Thomas thinks that this information need not be present inchoatively in the soul because it is supplied by experience.

Yet, although it is clear that James’ *idoneitates* represent something a lot more specific than the sorts of things Aquinas has in mind when he talks of natural inclinations, James also makes it very clear that propensities are not *full-fledged* volitions, intelligibles or sensibles; they are “*incomplete* actualities:” they are actualities with respect to the receptive capacity of the soul, but they are incomplete insofar as they require something additional to turn them into actual volitions, cognitions or sensations, as the case may be. This is why James asserts that the aptitude and the volitional or cognitive operation into

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\(^4^9\) “*S*imiliter etiam secundum ipsius sententiam in VI Ethicorum, virtutum habitus ante earum consummationem praeexistunt in nobis in quibusdam naturalibus inclinationibus, quae sunt quaedam virtutum inchoationes, sed postea per exercitium operum adducuntur in debitam consummationem; similiter etiam dicendum est de scientiae acquisitione quod praeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina, scilicet primae conceptiones intellectus quae statim lumine intellectus agentis cognoscuntur per species a sensibilibus abstractas, sive sit complexa sicut dignitates, sive incomplexa sicut ratio entis et unius et huismodi quae statim intellectus apprehendit; in istis autem principiis universalibus omnia sequentia includuntur, sicut in quibusdam rationibus seminalibus: quando ergo ex istis universalibus cognitionibus mens educitur ut actu cognoscat particularia quae prius in universali et quasi in potentia cognoseebantur, tunc aliquis dicitur scientiam acquirere.” *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, co., ed. Leonina, Opera omnia, tomus XXII, Rome, 1972, 350b, 258 – 351a, 279. See similar texts in *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 8. co. For a discussion see H. Seidel, ‘Über die Erkenntnis erster, allgemeiner Prinzipien nach Thomas von Aquin’, in *Thomas von Aquin. Werk und Wirkung*, ed. A. Zimmermann (Berlin, New York, 1988), 103-16.\(^5^0\) Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia libri de anima*, liber III, cap. IV, ed. Leonina, Opera omnia, tomus XLV, 1, Rome, Paris, 1984, 219, 24-42. See the editor’s *apparatus fontium* for discussion and parallel texts.
which it unfolds belong to two different species of quality.51 We will see further on that these propensities might in fact be more “complete” than James is willing to recognize, but for the time being it is important to stress that James is at least very systematic about stating that propensities are not actualized volitions or cognitions.52 This suffices to distinguish James’s particular brand of innatism from the more extreme form espoused by, say, the Anonymous Master of Arts edited by Gauthier, who wrote that “the agent intellect has intelligible species present to it and actually joined to it.”53

Having examined what James means by propensities in the case of the will, it remains to be seen why the fact that the soul has these propensities entails that it should be able to move itself. One of James’s strategies in arguing for this conclusion is to tie in his doctrine of propensities with saint Anselm’s theory of the will as expounded in the *De Concordia*.54 The will, Anselm explained, can be considered in three ways. It can first be


52 Another clear indication of this is offered by James’s discussion of the notion of intelligible species. James distinguishes between two stages of the species: the aptitude or idoneity that is innate and the operation which perfects it which require the “excitation” of the senses. See Quod. I, q. 13, 186, 120 – 187, 148.


54 James is by no means the only Augustinian to enlist the help of the *De Concordia* in support of the soul’s self-motion. He had been preceded by Henry of Ghent. See Quod. XII, q. 26, ed. J. Decorte (Leuven, 1987), *[Henrici de Gandavo Opera Omnia* 16], 144, 94-95. Henry’s use of Anselm’s *De concordia* is criticized by John of Murro in his Disputed question “quaeritur utrum obiectum voluntatis movet ipsam ad actum volendi finem”, ed. E. Longpré, in *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer*, (Louvain, 1947), 488-492. See Macken, ‘Heinrich von Gent im Gespräch’, 171-2. James also reads his doctrine of idoneitates into Boethius. See Quod. I, q. 12, 173, 540-1.
considered as an instrument (*instrumentum*), that is, as a faculty capable of being deployed in certain ways; it can also be considered from the point of view of its particular aptitudes (*aptitudines*), that is, its actual abilities, which Anselm calls its affections, of which there are two—the *affectio commodi* and the *affectio justitiae*—; finally, we can think of the will insofar as it is actually being used. James announces that what he calls a general propensity is really the same thing as Anselm’s soul-instrument; the special propensities correspond to what Anselm calls the will’s aptitudes, and what Anselm calls the will’s use is simply what James calls the act of willing. The benefits of this strategy become clearer when we read later in the same chapter of the *De Concordia* that it is the will *qua* instrument that moves (*movet*) all other instruments;\(^{55}\) which is just another way of saying that the will *qua* instrument moves itself.

James’s substantive argument in favor of the soul’s self-motion is based on a distinction between two sorts of motion. One sort of motion is that which follows from the presence of the complete form in the efficient cause—heating, for instance, is a movement caused by the presence of the form of heat in the heating body;\(^{56}\) the other sort of motion is that which follows from a cause that possesses the form only in an incomplete way, such as downward motion, which follows from the presence, in an incomplete way, of the form of gravity in the heavy body. Now, what characterizes this second kind of motion is the fact that it naturally tends to its fulfillment (*naturaliter inclinatur ad sui complementum*), and would attain it if nothing impedes it. This contrasts with the first type of motion where the presence of the complete form is sufficient to guarantee the attainment of its fulfillment. The first type of motion is the one which is involved in transitive actions; it involves one substance acting on another and requires a distinction *in re* between mover and thing moved.\(^{57}\) The second type of motion is immanent, or absolute; it is *ab eodem in idem*. James calls the first type of motion efficient motion; the second type he calls formal motion. Now both types of motion play a role in the explanation of human volition: God is the efficient cause of volitions in the

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\(^{55}\) This is a popular passage amongst medieval Augustinians. See A. Pattin, *L’anthropologie de Gérard d’Abbeville* (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De-Wulf Mansion Centre, Series 1, XIV), (Leuven, 1993), xix.

\(^{56}\) Quod. I, q. 7, 95, 518-519.

\(^{57}\) See Quod. IV, q. 4, 19, 158-60.
sense that it is He who endows human beings with the appropriate faculties and propensities; but the soul itself is the formal cause of its own movement to actuality. In other words, the will is to its own volitions as the heavy body is to downward motion:

One can easily see from the foregoing how the will moves itself to willing through its affections. The heavy body moves itself downward through gravity, not efficiently but formally. Just as gravity is something incomplete with respect to being below or being moved downward, so that, provided there is no obstacle, the perfection follows at once from the gravity; so too the will moves itself to will something through its own affections which are incomplete with respect to the act of willing, so that the act (of willing) follows at once from those affections, unless something prevents it.

James appears to take the analogy between the heavy body’s self-motion and the soul’s self-motion quite literally despite what would appear to be an important difference between the two cases, namely that what prevents a heavy body from falling is the

58 God is the efficient cause of volitions in the sense that he efficiently infuses the propensities in the soul, not in the sense that he assists the soul in its self-motion to volition. The point is made most clearly with regard to the intellect. See Quod I, q. 12, 176, 649-50 and Quod. I, q. 7, 98, 641-46, as well as Quod. IV, q. 4, 22, 244 – 23, 260.

59 Quod. I, q. 7, 96, 572-79. Though the terminology differs, James’s discussion here is indebted to Henry of Ghent’s in Quod. X, q. 9 (ed. R. Macken, 230, 62-77). Henry is there responding to the objection that nothing can be the cause of its own being (entitas). This is trivially true if one means that something that in no way exists cannot cause itself to be. But a thing that exists according to substantial form can in a certain way be said to be the cause of its own entity—Henry means that it can move itself from potency to act. Thus through its substantial form which it gets from God a heavy body has the capacity to move downward, and will exercise that capacity in the absence of any obstacle or upon the removal of one: “Sic enim generans grave movet grave, quia ab illo est virtus ad movendum in gravi, et grave se ipsum movet quia continent virtutem quam ad movendum se accepit” (Ibid., 230, 69-71). It is this generating cause that James of Viterbo calls the efficient cause of motion, and the self-motion of the thing owing to its possessing the appropriate capacity, its formal motion. The same analogy of gravity as an illustration of the soul’s self-motion is used by Henry of Ghent in, e.g., Quod. IX, q. 5 and quod. X, q. 9 as by Walter of Bruges, Quaestiones disputatae, q. 4, ad 5m, quoted in R. Macken, ‘Heinrich von Gent im Gespräch’, 153. See Teske for a commentary on the philosophical significance of this analogy, ‘Henry of Ghent’s rejection’, 291 and passim.
presence of an obstacle, whereas what prevents the will from developing into an actual volition is the absence of an object of willing. The two cases are similar only insofar as the relation of the removal of an impediment to downward motion as the presence of an object to the will is one of “extrinsic denomination,” that is, the removal of the obstacle does not contribute anything formal to the nature of the motion (i.e. its direction, velocity etc.) which follows naturally and necessarily from the body’s heaviness; in like fashion, it would seem that the object whose presence is required in order for an actual volition to ensue does not contribute anything to the content of the volitional act, but rather merely facilitates the unfolding of the soul’s preexisting propensity.

That this is indeed what James has in mind can be seen by reading his detailed account of the causal role of the object and the intellect in the production of volitions. James uses the distinction, familiar since the time of Aquinas, between the exercise and the specification of the act of will to answer this question. As regards the exercise of the act, he considers that the will moves itself formally and is moved efficiently by God. As regards the specification of the act, the will is moved both by the external object and by that same object as represented in the intellect, but in both cases it is moved only in a metaphorical way, that is, in the way in which a terminus or a target is a cause of motion. Finally, the will is also moved efficiently by the object as grasped by the intellect. This might sound surprising in view of James’s assertion that it is God who moves efficiently but supplies creatures with the appropriate faculties or powers to act, but the sort of efficient motion he has in mind when he says that the will is moved efficiently by the object is an altogether different sort of causality from God’s efficient causality. For something to be moved in this second way is for it to be moved in virtue of a “certain connection and excess.” What James has in mind is the following: Because the intellect and the will are seated in the same power and are connected with each other,

60 Thomas uses it for the first time in ST Ia-IIae. See O. Lottin, Psychologie et morale ..., I, 254-256, as well as Macken, ‘Heinrich von Gent im Gespräch’, 132.
61 Quod. I, 7 103, 816. On the object as moving “metaphorically” see Gérard of Abbeville, Quod. XIV, q. 4, ed. O. Lottin, Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles (Louvain, Gembloux, 1942), t. 1, 250, l. 52. The idea that the object of knowledge moves “terminatively” was of course not uncommon in the thirteenth century, especially amongst those philosophers who favored a more active role on the part of the intellect. Arguably its best known proponent was Peter John Olivi. See Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum, ed. B. Jansen (Quaracchi, 1926), vol. 2, q. 72.
when the intellect in the soul is actualized an inclination occurs in the soul which prompts the will to actualize itself.\textsuperscript{62} This kind of motion James calls motion by stimulation (\textit{excitatione}). The will is not necessitated by this stimulation; rather, because of the order instituted by God between the intellect and the will, the will cannot set itself in motion without a prior excitation from the intellect.

It is important to be clear about the implications of James’s answer. One reason for resorting to the distinction between the specification and the exercise of the act of will is to provide a clearer picture of the interplay of will and intellect in the production of volitions. The idea is that the will depends on the intellect for the specification or determination of the object but is itself solely responsible for the exercise of the act. The intellect supplies the information; the will decides or not to act on it. Unlike other authors who rejected the distinction altogether, James elects to keep it; however, on his use of the distinction, it is no longer clear in what sense one can say that the intellect specifies the will, that is, supplies it with any information. Indeed, the will is taken as moving itself formally with the help of its own \textit{idoneitates}. God causes the volitions efficiently by supplying the \textit{idoneitates}; the desired object and its mental representative move only insofar as they are the terminus of the act of volition; the “fit” between the volitional act and the object is guaranteed by divine institution alone.

Such, then, in a nutshell is James’s solution to the problem of the will’s self-motion. It is similar in many ways to what one finds in other authors belonging to the “voluntarist” school in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. For instance, by granting formal causality to the soul James is following in the footsteps of Henry of Ghent. But what sets his solution apart from Henry’s is the central place he assigns to propensities. The soul can only move itself because it contains the seeds, in the shape of propensities, of its volitional operations. James as we have seen is careful to add that the soul cannot go it alone entirely, that the object must play some role in the genesis of the volitional act, but the fact remains that the soul is still a cause in a very strong sense of the word. That is because it contains propensities which naturally issue into completed acts.

\textsuperscript{62} “Et hoc modo voluntas movetur ab intellectu facto in actu. Quia voluntas et intellectus in eadem animae essentia radicantur et connectuntur, ideo, cum anima fit in actu secundum intellectum, fit inclinatio quaedam in ipsa ut fiat in actu secundum voluntatem et ut se moveat secundum ipsam. Et propter huiusmodi inclinationem dicitur intellectus movere voluntatem.” Quod. I, q. 7, 105, 849-54.
B) THE INTELLECT AND ITS PROPENSITIES

The title of James’ main question on the intellect is not whether the intellect can move itself, though he eventually deals at length with that issue as well, but rather whether the agent intellect is part of the soul, in other words, whether it is necessary to distinguish between an agent intellect and a possible intellect within the soul. One reason for positing such a real distinction is of course Thomas’ influential account of intellecction. According to Thomas, unlike the senses whose proper objects exist in actuality outside of the soul, the intellect’s objects—the intelligibles—exist only in potency outside the soul; they therefore require some faculty to raise them to the level of actually intelligibles: introit the Agent intellect, whose business it is to make potential intelligibles actually intelligible. But James, who, as he puts it, prefers to follow the opinions of the Blessed Augustine and Boethius does not believe that intelligibles exist in potency outside the soul—at any rate not in the objects of the senses. Consequently, he sees no need for an agent intellect construed in the way Thomas does, though he does not want to dispense with it altogether, once again because the distinction is present in Aristotle and his commentators, and because James thinks it is at least in part justified. If James can make a plausible case for the view that both intellects are not really distinct, whilst showing that that view does not conflict with Aristotle’s, the very raison d’être of a real distinction between the agent intellect and the possible intellect will collapse. Let us see how he proceeds.

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63 For a general overview of James’s theory of cognition, see L. Spruit, Species intelligibilis: from perception to knowledge, (Leiden, 1994), 238-240.
64 The question was a popular one in the last third of the 13th century. James of Viterbo follows Gonzalvus of Spain in arguing against the distinction.
65 Quod. I, q. 12, 267-268.
66 The intelligibles are of course present outside of the soul in God, and although they are contained even potentially by sensibles, phantasms are necessary in order to trigger the process that will ultimately result in the intellect’s actualization: “Deus enim impressit animae et indidit quasdam aptitudines et incompletas similitudines rerum cognoscibilium, per quas movet se ad similitudines completas. Et secundum hoc dicitur moveri a rebus, in quantum se movet ut assimiletur ipsis rebus, vel, ut verius dicamus, ut assimiletur illis aeternis rationibus, a quibus et res ipsae derivatae sunt, et aptitudines animae impressae et inditae.” Quod. I, q. 12, 177, 68-685.
James is cleverly going to present his position as a sensible, moderate solution that eschews the symmetric and equally untenable positions of those who hold that the soul is exclusively active with respect to intellection and those who hold that it is purely passive. As we have seen previously, James believes that while the soul may be partly passive, it is also partly active. He is now going to show that it is the very same faculty within the soul that is both active and passive. Now, although this sounds as if James is once again going to voice his disagreement with Aristotle’s act-potency axiom, he in fact contends that his thesis is not contrary to Aristotle’s for the soul is not active and passive at the same time. Now it is important to note, in order to understand James’s position, that when he says that the soul is passive, he does not mean to suggest that it undergoes any change as a result of some external action being exercised on it; passive, for James, refers to the soul’s capacity to be actualized. Likewise, in talking about an “agent” intellect, James does not mean that the intellect acts on anything outside of itself; what he is referring to rather is the soul’s ability to set itself in motion. His contention, then, is that it is the very same intellect that is both in potency and in act, though diversimode, which turns out to mean “at different times.”

The question is, what kind of a power must the soul be in order for it to be in potency and in act at different times? James answers:

For it is a sort of incomplete actuality belonging to the second species of quality, that is, a natural power, considered in terms of a beginning (exordium) and preparation toward the future act. Thus it can be termed an aptitude (aptitude) and a natural propensity (idoneitas) toward the complete act. Now that which is in potency according to an incomplete act moves itself (movetur ex se) to the complete act, not efficiently perhaps, but formally. Thus it is passive and active with regard to the same thing (secundum idem), though not in the same way (eodem modo) and is neither a transient action nor a transient passion.

67 “…ipsa potentia cum suis aptitudinibus, secundum quod nata est perfici per ulteriores actus, dicitur possibilis, secundum vero quod ad illos actus movet se, non quidem efficierter, sed formaliter, dicitur agens.” Quod. I, q. 12, 167, 355-357.

68 Quod. I, 12, 167, 330-338.
The power that fits the bill is an incomplete actuality. But it is a property of such an incomplete actuality that it can move itself to actuality. James once again refers us to the same passage of Anselm’s *De Concordia* that we saw above to justify this step in his argument, claiming that Anselm’s assertion that the will moves itself applies to the intellect and the senses as well. As in the case of the will, the sort of causation that the intellect uses is formal. And as in the case of the will, the formal causality of the will is subordinated to the efficient causation of God, in the sense that it is God who puts the propensities in the soul.

Thinking, however, is not a purely internal affair, i.e., internal to the soul. James denies that knowledge can occur without external things (*res*) playing any causal role. Things can be considered to move the intellect in two ways: first by exciting the intellect through the sensitive powers, and second, insofar as they are the terminus of knowledge. Let us briefly discuss these two points.

Although the intellect formally moves itself, “nevertheless it is also moved by the phantasms by means of a stimulation or an inclination.” Now for something to move by stimulation or inclination two conditions are required: a) it must be conjoined to that which it moves and b) its actualization must have a relation of conformity, that is, a relation of resemblance, with the actuality of the moved thing. But the imagination is naturally united with and related to the intellect. Moreover, when the imagination is in act, in other words when something is being imagined—say the image ‘dog’—there is a relation of conformity between that image and the concept ‘dog’ towards which the intellect is naturally suited to move itself. That is how one can say that the intellect is stimulated and inclined to move itself to the actual cognition of ‘dog’. James cautions us,

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69 “Sic igitur est dicendum quod, secundum Anselnum, non solum in voluntate, sed etiam in intellectu et sensu, distinguitur instrumentum et aptitude instrumenti et usus instrumenti.” Quod. I, 12, 167, 344-6.

70 James does concede that the soul can be thought of as an efficient cause *large accipiendo* (see Quod. I, 12 176, 652-7). What he has in mind is the intellect’s moving itself from being in a state of actuality with respect to principles (perhaps *dignitates*) to a state of actuality with respect to conclusions. The intellect is an efficient cause insofar as it is able to draw inferences.

71 Quod. I, q. 12, 172, 502-504.

72 I briefly examine this in my [AUTHOR’S ARTICLE]

73 See Quod. I, q. 12, 172, 504-14.
however, against thinking that the operation of stimulation involves the intellect conferring a power to the phantasm that would make it receivable by the intellect.\textsuperscript{74}

The second way in which the object moves the intellect is by being the terminus of knowledge. Knowledge involves the soul conforming itself to things, not things conforming themselves to the soul. Things therefore move the intellect in the way in which a final cause moves, that is, metaphorically; they move the intellect by being objects for the intellect.\textsuperscript{75} James quotes approvingly a passage from Augustine's \textit{De trinitate} to the effect that an object of knowledge generates a likeness of itself in us, so that actual knowledge is both caused by the object and the knower. This is perfectly true, he avers, but one needs to add that although the actual knowledge is caused by the object it is only caused by it in one way, i.e., by the fact that it is a likeness of the object, whereas the actual knowledge is caused by the intellect in two ways: first, insofar as the intellect also contains a likeness of the \textit{actualis notitia}—i.e., the requisite propensity—, and second because it moves itself to the actual knowledge.\textsuperscript{76}

James believes that conceiving the intellect as an incomplete actuality provides a plausible account of intellection along Augustinian lines that does not conflict with any important Aristotelian principle. There are five such principles he realizes his theory of cognition might seem to conflict with. I shall briefly mention three that have a direct bearing on the issue of \textit{idoneitates}.

One proposition is Aristotle’s claim that the soul is like a tablet on which nothing is written.\textsuperscript{77} This is clearly a proposition that is central to Aristotle’s noetics and James is keen to show that his views do not conflict with it. He starts out by agreeing that the soul is not in potency with respect to its aptitudes; it is in potency, however, with respect to the complete act of which these propensities are mere “preimpressions,” that is, with

\textsuperscript{74} Quod. I, q. 12, 174, 575-82. See Quod. II, q. 16, 173, 170-175. Believing otherwise would presuppose that transitive action involves something material or formal “migrating” (James’s word) from the agent to the patient, which James thinks is a mistaken view of what change is. For a discussion of this point, see Quod. III, q. 24, 188-194, which asks: “Utrum agens naturale agat transmutando id in quo agit per aliquid immissum ab eo in passum?”.

\textsuperscript{75} Quod. I, q. 12, 177, 665-70.

\textsuperscript{76} Quod I, q. 12, 177, 674-80.

\textsuperscript{77} Aristotle, \textit{De anima}, III, 4, 430a1-2.
respect to an actual act of cognizing. James is suggesting that it suffices to maintain that
the soul is in potency in this second way in order to bring his position in harmony with
Aristotle. 78 He is adamant, at any rate, that his position does not commit him to
Platonism. 79 According to James’s account, Platonism is the view that the soul possesses
actual cognition prior to its being united with the body; after union with the body, the
soul forgets what it previously knew; all that remains is a sort of “habitual knowledge”
which is then activated (excitatur) by teaching or the senses. James responds that
according to his position the soul does not have “innate knowledge” (scientiam innatam),
and therefore that learning is not remembering, that is, a reactivation of fully constituted
forms; it does however have innate habitual knowledge, which is “incomplete
knowledge.” 80 To posit that kind of knowledge is “not unfitting,” he contends, because it
does not entail that the soul precontains complete cognitions. 81

Another Aristotelian doctrine with which James lengthily tries to harmonize his
theory is the assertion that the images are to the intellect as the sensibles are to the
senses. 82 Now, this view could be potentially problematic for James if he understood
sensation to result from the sensible objects directly acting on the sense-organs. But this
is not how James understands sensation. He applies his now familiar “stimulation theory”
of motion to sensation as he had done to intellection and volition: The objects act on
(immutant) the sense-organ which is conjoined with the power, in accordance with the
first of the two conditions that must be met for something to move something else by
inclination and stimulation. 83 Once the sense-organ has been set in motion (quibus
immutatis) it bears a resemblance or a similarity with the aptitude found in the sense—
according to the second condition—and this, somehow, is sufficient for the sense to move
itself to actual cognition. So James can happily say that he agrees with Aristotle that the
images are to the intellect what the sensibles are to the senses, because in fact he does

78 Quod I, q. 12, 170, 459-69.
79 Quod. I, q. 12, 170, 470-171, 500.
80 Quod. I, q. 12, 171, 494.
81 James’s position is similar in this regard to that of the anonymous commentator on the ethica nova (see,
n. @ above).
82 Quod I, q. 12, 171, 501 – 177, 690.
83 See above, p. @.
believe that intellection and sensation are structurally similar, however it is this very structure that he understands in a way that is clearly at odds with Aristotle’s.

The third doctrine James tries to tie in with his own position is the doctrine of abstraction. James first assures us that he subscribes to abstraction *absolute*. What he rejects, he tells us, is the idea that abstracting involves the intellect illuminating the images or purifying them. Indeed, as we saw previously, James rejects the notion that the intellect in any way acts on the images. To abstract simply means that once the intellect has been prompted by the images it cognizes in a purer fashion than the imagination.

To sum up, it is not necessary according to James to posit two distinct intellects within the soul. The intellective soul can be thought of as one faculty naturally endowed with propensities or aptitudes that represent partially realized cognitive items. This same faculty can be regarded as “possible” insofar as an aptitude in its natural state is incomplete, or it can be regarded as an agent intellect insofar as the aptitude moves itself formally to its own act, in a way similar to that in which a heavy body formally moves itself through its gravity. Although James’s appeal to propensities in his quodlibetal question on the intellect is aimed at achieving a somewhat different goal from that of quodlibet I, question 7, namely rejecting a rigid distinction between two intellects and doing away with abstraction theory, it is, at bottom, the same doctrine that is offered in both cases: *idoneitates*. It now remains to be seen how he proceeds in the case of seminal reasons.

C. Matter and Seminal Reasons

One reason for which scholastics saw a need to posit seminal reasons was the belief that if forms did not exist virtually in matter that meant they either came out of

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84 This seems to have been the belief of Godfrey of Fontaines. See Quodlibet V, question 10, in *Les quodlibets cinq, six et sept de Godefroid de Fontaines*, ed. M. de Wulf & J. Hoffmans, (Louvain, 1914), 37.
85 Quod I, q. 12, 178, 696. James deals with abstraction *ex professo* in quod. I, q. 13.
86 See Quod IV, q. 4, 17, 73-76.
nothing or were infused by an external agent, an operation which scholastics considered to be violent action. One group of authors James mentions at the beginning of Quodlibet 2, question 5, which is entirely devoted to seminal reasons, responded to this challenge by positing an internal formal principle, the *inchoativum formae*, stemming from matter itself and cooperating with an external agent in order to produce the form. According to one group of proponents of this view, the *inchoativum formae* was identical with the completed form and merely required to be uncovered, much as silver is revealed when the rust on it is scraped off. This is of course reminiscent of the Platonic understanding of knowledge as the remembering of innate intelligibles that James is so keen to distance himself from. He therefore predictably rejects this view on the grounds that it fails to account for the fact that forms are *generated*; they are the result of a process of change from non-being to being: if the form, or a part of the form or a common form is already present before the generation proper, then no change has taken place.

James then mentions another group of thinkers who dismiss the view that a seminal reason is an *inchoativum formae*; some proponents of this view claim that it is an “active principle” inherent in matter that is conducive (*activa ut inducatur forma in materia*) to the production of the form; others that it is an external agent productive of the forms and a potential principle capable of undergoing change. The first view is rejected because it makes the seminal reason both a passive and an active principle; the second view is rejected because James thinks that it belongs to the concept of a seminal reason that it be something inherent in matter. Analysis of the concept of seminal reason leads James to the view that for something to be called a seminal reason it must a) embody some progress (*exordium*) and inchoation (*inchoatio*) of whatever it is the seminal reason of and b) be an active principle. Once again we see, applied to the field of natural change, James’s conviction that the subject of change is the principle cause of change.

To establish that seminal reasons are “inchoations” or *exordia*, he turns to Aristotle’s discussion of the potential existence of forms in matter in *Metaphysics* VII and Averroes commentary thereto. Forms, according to James’s reading of Aristotle, pre-

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88 Quod. I, q. 12, 168, 395-7.
exist in matter, not in actuality, but in potency. Following Averroes’s interpretation of this doctrine, James takes this as implying that there is a distinction between the potency of matter and matter as such. What characterizes the potency of matter (potentia materiae) is the fact that it is a relation of matter to form, and this characteristic of matter is itself a consequence of its lacking form. Now, lack is of two sorts: something can lack a particular power or quality which it is not in its nature to possess (e.g., a stone lacks sight); or a thing can lack some power or quality which it is naturally apt to possess. For this to be the case the lack must be accompanied by an aptitude (aptitude) and propensity (idoneitas) for that power or quality. The concept of potency (of matter) thus comprises four things: 1) matter, 2) lack of form, 3) aptitude and 4) relation to form. Of these four characteristics, it is aptitude that will receive the lion’s share of James’ attention in the rest of question 5. The reason is the following: it is not sufficient in order to understand what it means to say that matter is capable of taking on a particular form to simply say that it is so disposed in virtue of its having the right accidents: one needs to posit something else (aliud) in matter; this something else is the progress (exordium) and inchoation (inchoatio).

Great effort is devoted to proving this last point in the next pages of question 5. Just what is exactly this progress and inchoation of the form? To understand this, James assures us, it suffices to keep in mind that a form has two modes of being: potential and actual. It is the same form that is in potency and then in actuality, but just as matter and the actual form are two distinct things (duae res) that make up one actual composite, so too matter and potential form are two distinct things (duae res) that make up one potential composite. James writes:

This potential form is called an aptitude for the actual form, or a preparation, or a capacity (habilitas), or a way (via); it can also be called material appetite.

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89 Quod. II q. 5, 66, 224. The Scholastics, at least those who were in favor of seminal reasons, commonly used Aristotle’s doctrine of potency together with Averroes’s commentary in support of the doctrine. See Nardi, ‘La dottrina’, 79.
90 Quod. II, q. 5, 68, 304.
91 Quod. II, q. 5, 68, 318.
92 Quod II, q. 5, 69, 330.
93 Quod. II, q. 5, 70, 380.
(appetitus materiae). Now because potency is a principle of actuality and relates to actuality, it is correctly termed a potency and it is a natural potency pertaining to the second species of quality. ⁹⁴

The position James has just sketched bears a resemblance to the conception of seminal reasons he had initially rejected, that is, to the view that the form to be produced is already present in matter, in the shape of a seminal reason. But James thinks his position differs from that one on a central point: The proponents of the *inchoativum formae* make the form in matter an *actual* form, whereas James is very clear that it is the form *qua* potential, or imperfect. ⁹⁵

Realizing perhaps that in spite of his many appeals to Aristotle and Averroes he is really providing an account of natural change that is very different from the Stagirite’s, James offers five additional proofs of the necessity of understanding forms-in-potency as “natural potencies,” following Aristotle’s terminology in the *Categories*. Many of these simply rehearse arguments from Aristotle and Averroes to the effect that the passage from potency to act does not result in the production of a different being but results in what was imperfect being perfected. In one of his proofs, however, James turns explicitly to Simplicius.

Simplicius when he talks about this kind of potency that pertains to the second species of quality says that in all of Nature, whenever generation occurs, it is produced in no other way than through a potency for the substance; moreover, it is through potency that matter receives species. Now, because this kind of aptitude (*aptitude*) or potency (*potentia*) is said to be imperfect, and because imperfection connotes privation and lack, it follows that this kind of aptitude or potency includes lack and privation. ⁹⁶

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⁹⁴ Quod. II, q. 5, 71, 408-413. Later on, James refers to the potential form as a *res materiae superaddita* (88, 985).

⁹⁵ Quod. II, q. 5, 72, 426-433.

⁹⁶ Quod. II, q. 5, 71, 414-20.
James appeals to Simplicius again in responding to a number of objections against his conception of potency as inchoation. One of the most interesting for our purposes is his response to an objection to the effect that if the potency of matter is the form itself in potential being, then matter is in potency owing to something that is extrinsic to its nature. In answer to this argument, James reminds us that one of the properties of matter is that it is a lack (carentia). But there are two sorts of lack: the lacking of any form whatsoever whether in potency or in actuality—this is something that belongs to matter per se. The other is the lack of all forms existing in a state of actuality, but not of all forms in a state of potency; and this kind of lack, James explains, is due to something added on (superadditum) to the nature of matter. The distinction between these two kinds of matter is equivalent James tells us to the distinction drawn by Simplicius between natural potency and the potency of matter: whereas the latter is a pure privation, the former is an “impression of the form.”

But this answer still leaves open the question of the provenance of this aliquid superadditum. There are only two possibilities: either the potency comes from matter itself or it comes from some external agent. James takes Simplicius as having proved that it cannot come from matter; it must therefore come from some agent. Now what James of Viterbo wants to prove is that the agent in question is God who infuses the potencies in matter at creation. Interestingly enough, though, James claims support for this in Simplicius. He does not mean to suggest that Simplicius held that the ideas were located

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97 Quod. II, q. 5, 81, 728-730.
98 “Et de hac intelligit Simplicius in Praedicamentis, cum ait quod aliquid est naturalis potentia, et aliquid materiae potentia. Haec quidem enim, scilicet naturalis potentia, impressio speciei est. Haec autem, scilicet materiae potentia, privatio est et nondum idoneitas, sed etiam haec carens adhuc.” Quod II, q. 5, 81, 749-753.
99 “Unde Simplicius in Praedicamentis, quaerens de potentia materiae quae ad secundam speciem qualitatis pertinent, unde habeat esse, sic dicit: Utrum ergo a materia est potentia haec, ut quidam putant, vel ipsa materia est quod potentia, ut aliis videtur. Et solvit dicens : aut hoc inconveniens neque exhibet causam materia a seipsa debilis existente, neque substantiam dat cum exciderit ab ente, neque potentiae principium cum sit penitus impotens, neque qualitatis exordium cum non sit qualis secundum se ipsam, sed neque habet aliquid fecundum cum sit nudius omnibus, et indegens existat et pauper secundum se ipsam. Ex quibus verbis patet quod huiusmodi potentia non habet ortum a materia.” Quod. II, q. 5, 82, 761-770. See above, p. @@.
in the divine intellect; he means, rather, that the only correct way of interpreting how Simplicius describes the forms is by understanding them the way Augustine does as “the forms in God:”

That agent is God who infused these sorts of potencies in matter at creation. They are preparations (*praeparationes*) of forms and beginnings (*exordia*). Simplicius says that this potency is in matter from the species according to the participation in the reasons (*rationum/logoi*). Elsewhere he says that propensity, being an impression of the species, is given to matter by the species, that is, by the form, by which he means not that the form exists in matter—for in that case it would come from itself—but that it has immaterial being. But the form, thus understood, is an idea existing in God whence it comes to be in matter, This is what Boethius says in the book on Trinity: “It is from those forms that are beyond matter that these forms came to be that are in matter and constitute bodies.”

As we saw above, 101 James believes that for something to be a seminal reason it must have two features: it must be an *inchoativum formae* and it must be an active principle of change. The inchoation, we now know, is conceptualized in terms of Aristotle and Simplicius’ discussion of the second species of quality. But in what way is the seminal reason an active principle of change? As we have also seen James is critical of the way in which other authors account for change because they either make the seminal reason itself such a principle, thus making it both an active and passive principle or make it an entirely passive principle the actual cause of movement being an external agent. James takes something of both of these solutions. On the one hand, he considers that the *inchoativum formae* is already an active principle insofar as it inclines matter to its act; 102 this is what he calls the active principle *sicut inclinans*. However, this inclination is insufficient to bring about the actualization of the form on its own, an external agent is therefore required that effectively brings about the change; this is the active principle

100 Quod. II, q. 5, 82, 776-85.
101 See above, p. @
102 “Et hoc modo illud inchoativum formae, quod est ipsa forma in potentia, dicitur activum principium, quia per huiusmodi potentiam inclinatur materia ad actum.” Quod. II, q. 5, 89, 103-105.
James explains that the active principle is able to do this owing to the powers granted to it by God. God’s causal role in the production of natural change is the same as his causal role in the production of volition, that is to say, God causes change in the very loose sense that he bestows adequate powers to creatures so that they might directly cause change, not in the sense that he actively participates as an efficient cause in the production of a particular volition or the generation of a particular form.  

As in the case of volition and cognition, James admits that there must be an external agent in order to bring the inchoation to its completion. And as in those other cases the causal contribution of the extrinsic agent seems to be very meager. We know that it does not act by rendering manifest what is already there in a latent form, for that would be to deny that reality of change. It now turns out that it does not produce its effect by transferring or introducing anything in the seminal reason either. The extrinsic agent causes by changing the mode or the disposition of the preexisting form, by making the potential form an actual form.

Given that this is taken to occur in all cases of natural change that means that for James of Viterbo the forms of all things preexist in matter. But if this is so why is it then external agents bring about only determined or specific effects? His answer is that although all forms coexist in matter, they are ordered in two ways. First of all they are ordered according to perfection, in the sense that the form of a composite is nobler and more perfect than the form of an element. Second, they are ordered according to the sequence in which they advance from potency to act. Thus, in order for matter to be changed into a particular form $a$, matter must first be actualized by a certain form $a'$ that has an immediate relation (ordinem) with $a$ (i.e. matter cannot be actualized immediately

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103 Quod. II, q. 5, 90, 1042-1067.
104 “Hanc autem transmutationem efficit agens extrinsecum ex virtute sibi tribute a conditore et institutore omnium naturarum; qui, ex superabundanti sua bonitate, sicut perfectionem essendi rebus communicavit, sic et eis dedit virtutem agenda in alia, non creando sed transmutando.” Quod. II, q. 5, 89, 1015-1019.
105 Quod. II, q. 5, 78, 633-37. See also Quod. II, q. 5, 72, 459. James does not want to say that the actual form preexists in matter (albeit latently) because then no change would take place. But according to his position the form in potency, which he says preexists in matter, is only modally distinct from the actualized form, which hardly seems a more satisfactory way of accounting for change.
106 Quod. II, q. 5, 86, 905-6.
107 Quod. II, q. 5, 87, 935-6.
by $a$).\textsuperscript{108} Now, that with which the form of the substance that is to result from change has an “immediate relation” is the form that is found in what James calls that substance’s “proximate agent”\textsuperscript{109}—for instance the semen of an adult horse, as opposed to that horse itself or a celestial body. The form of horseseness present in the proximate agent bears a resemblance or “immediate relation” with the form that will emerge in the recipient matter, that is, in the mare’s womb. But of course the fact that horse semen should result in a horse being generated is determined, not by any causal fitness between the cause and the effect, but by the particular place horse semen occupies in the sequence of advancement of potency to act, and this ordering as indeed the first one, is instituted by God.\textsuperscript{110}

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A very clear pattern thus emerges from the way in which James of Viterbo understands the move from potency to actuality in volition, cognition and natural generation. Moreover, this pattern clearly results the properties he attributes to idoneitates. In each case three types of causes are involved: a formal cause, an efficient cause and an external cause. An act of will is formally caused by the faculty by means of its store of idoneitates under the metaphorical motion of the object, i.e., the external cause, and the efficient motion of God.\textsuperscript{111} Likewise, the intellect formally moves itself to a specific act of knowledge once it has been stimulated by the phantasm under the efficient causation of God. Finally, the seminal reasons or inchoations stored in matter yield biological creatures of a certain sort when they are acted upon by the requisite proximate (external) agent. Although James does not use this terminology, the relation, in each case, between the external cause—object, phantasm, or proximate agent—and the propensity is one of extrinsic denomination, the external cause contributing nothing to the content or formal nature of the act. Thus, the object known by the intellect is said to move the will because when the object is known an inclination relating to that object

\textsuperscript{108} Quod. II, q. 5, 88, 955-66. Compare with Quod. I, q. 12, 172, 504-14.  
\textsuperscript{109} Quod. II, q. 5, 91, 1057-67.  
\textsuperscript{110} Quod. II, q. 5, 87, 951-54.  
\textsuperscript{111} See Ruello, 340.
occurs in the soul, not because the object specifies, in however indirect a way, the intellect; that the inclination should be of the “right” object is due to the “connection” of intellect and will in the soul. Similarly, phantasms move the intellect because there happens to be “a relation of conformity” between the phantasm and the corresponding concept produced by the intellect, not because of some formal causal interaction between the object and the intellect, for, as we saw, such interaction is ruled out explicitly by James. Finally, generation occurs because there exists an “immediate relation” between the appropriate cause (the proximate cause) and the being generated, which immediate relation results not from direct causal interaction between the putative cause and the effect but is instituted by God. In all three cases, then, the external agent has a mode of causation which appears to be little more than a causa sine qua non. That external agency should be so conceived is of course the necessary consequence of the fact that James considers the intellect, the will and matter to be endowed with the requisite information qua incomplete actualities, which are not yet the actual perfection but are already exordia on the way to perfection.

JAMES OF VITERBO AS SCHOLAR AND PHILOSOPHER

Having examined James of Viterbo’s use of Simplicius doctrine of propensities in detail and established the central role the latter’s concept of propensity plays in explaining the will’s self-motion, the actuation of the intellect and the necessity of postulating of seminal reasons, I now want to close with some remarks on James’s relation to Simplicius and on the posterity of James’s doctrine.

A first remark concerns the characteristic way in which James cites Simplicius. Although even a casual reader of Simplicius’ commentary could not fail to be struck by the constant appeal to Neoplatonic doctrines—such as the doctrine of logoi, the hypostases, the allusions to Plotinus’s theory of intellection—James of Viterbo pays little attention to these doctrines in his reading of the commentary on the Categories. As is the

112 Quod. I, q. 12, 172, 504-14.
113 See Bernard of Auvergne, Impugnationes contra Jacobum de Viterbio., ms. Borghesianus 298, f. 177va, for objections to this aspect of James’s doctrine.
case with his contemporaries, he is inclined to look upon Simplicius as he does Averroes as an important and philosophically astute commentator of Aristotle or as someone whose philosophical insights, insofar as they depart from Aristotle, are part of an Aristotelian “research program.” When James does consider Simplicius’s appeal to Neoplatonic theses, he tends to consider them as approximations of the true—Augustinian or Boethian—explanation. One particularly clear instance of this is offered by James’s interpretation of Simplicius’s explanation of the provenance of propensities. James commends Simplicius for having correctly surmised that they must come from an immaterial principle, and while noting that Simplicius says that they are in matter as a result “of participation in the reasons”, he immediately concludes that what is really meant is that the forms are infused in matter by God at creation. Conversely, when explicating a passage from the Consolation of Philosophy, where Boethius makes use of the word “species”, James explains that what is meant by “species” are in fact propensities.114

A second remark has to do with James’s original use of Simplicius. As I said at the outset, James was one of a number of authors who used not just Simplicius but the works of other Neoplatonic authors newly made available by the translations of William of Moerbeke. However James is exceptional not only for the extensive use he makes of the recently translated works, particularly those of Philoponos,115 Themistius and Simplicius, something recent scholarship has brought to light, but also for the originality of that use. The application of Simplicius’s discussion of quality to the problem of the will’s self-motion, intellection and natural change bears witness to this originality and is to my knowledge unique in the context of late 13th century Augustinianism and contributes in no small way to the feeling that his solution to these problems is, in the words of one scholar, *sui generis*.116 Of course, this is not to say that James’s position is entirely devoid of difficulties. It could be that these difficulties were the principle reason

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114 Quod. I, q. 12, 172, 531 – 173, 539.
116 J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, 191, n. 64. This feeling was shared by Bernard of Auvergne who remarked on the “uniqueness” of James’s position in his *Impugnationes contra Jacobum de Viterbio*, “… dicendum quod ipse singularis est in hoc quod nec sancti nec aliui umquam hoc dixerunt”. *Impugnationes...*, Borghesianus 298, f. 178va.
for which his views met with a less than enthusiastic response from his contemporaries;¹¹⁷ but it could also be that the times were not yet ripe for philosophers to take seriously the rather radical brand of innatism espoused by James.