The sixteenth century Jesuit philosopher Francisco Suárez has long been recognized as an important figure in the history of thought. He stands near the end of a long tradition of scholastic thinkers whose thought, broadly inspired by Aristotle, had provided the dominant mode of thinking about philosophical problems in an academic setting for over three hundred years. In addition, his thought continued to exert an influence long after his death and long after Descartes inaugurated the modern era of philosophy.¹ In this paper, I want to discuss the account of internal sensation that he provides in his massive commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima*.² The notion of an internal sense was integral to Aristotelian influenced

¹ An early draft of the first part of this paper was read at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI in May 1998. I want to thank the Marquette University Philosophy Department for providing me with a reduced course load in Spring 1999 that gave me the time to rewrite and expand the initial paper. I am grateful to Edward P. Mahoney, Anthony Lisska and Richard C. Taylor for many helpful conversations.

² Francisco Suárez, *Commentaria una cum quaestionibus in libros Aristotelis De anima*, ed. Salvador Castellote, 3 vols., Madrid 1978-1991. Henceforth, I will cite this work as *DA*, followed by disputation, question and paragraph. This work has a rather complicated textual history. Briefly, the *Commentaria* is the result of Suárez’s early teaching assignment at Segovia in 1572. The work was never published in Suárez’s lifetime. However, towards the end of his life, Suárez decided to rework the material for publication. He replaced the nomenclature of “disputation” and “question” with that of “book” and “chapter” and managed to rework the entire first disputation and the first six questions of the second disputation before his death in 1617. When his editor, P. Alvarez put together the final edition of the work in 1621, he used the revised first books (based on the first 18 questions of the early version) and the early manuscript to make a complete work. Castellote’s
accounts of cognition for a reason brought out clearly in the following passage from Thomas Aquinas:

It must be said that sense does not apprehend the essences of realities, but only their exterior accidents. Likewise, imagination does not apprehend the essences of realities, but only likenesses of bodies. The intellect alone, then, apprehends the essences of realities.³

Suárez echoes this sentiment:

There is a great difference between sense and intellect because sense stops at (sistere) the cognition of sensible external accidents. Intellect, however, does not stop there but from the cognition of accidents it advances to contemplating those realities that are concealed (latere) under the accidents. And therefore it is called “intellect” as from “reading within”⁴

By demarcating the respective spheres of sensation and intellect in such a way, both thinkers appear to be causing themselves some real problems. How, after all, can the intellect know an essence if the human cognitive apparatus is never in direct contact with such an essence? Are we risking a view in which the intellect must simply create an essence from the accidental information with which it works? To solve such potential problems, both Aquinas and Suárez delineate a theory in which the internal senses play an essential mediating role between external sensation of accidents and intellectual knowledge of essences. For both thinkers, the internal sense is the location of the phantasms, that is, images (imagines) or likenesses (similitudines) of a particular sensible object. These phantasms, as we shall see soon, are required for any intellectual cognition and so their nature and status in the internal sense power is crucial for any account of internal sensation.

Now, Aristotle had posited the notion of an internal sense as a means to bridge the gap between the radically discrete activities of the external

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⁴ Dtf IX.4.1 (vol. III: 152): “Est differentia magna inter sensum et intellectus quod sensus in exterorum accidentium sensibilium cognitione sistit, intellectus vero non sic, sed ex accidentium cognitione ad contemplanda ea quae sub accidentibus latent ingreditur, et ideo intellectus dictus est quasi «intus legens».”