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Shades of Platonism in Franciscan Metaphysics: The Problem of Divine Ideas. Remarks on a Recent Work¹

The problem of divine ideas is one of the most consequential in the entire history of Western Thought, and effects of the Medieval debate on exemplarism can still be found in Early Modern and Modern metaphysics. Speaking of the Middle Ages, such a topic provides a vivid example of the prominent role played by Platonism in the tradition of the Schools in the 13th and the 14th century, often associated with the sole authority of Aristotle. Among the different traditions animating the Schools at this stage, the Franciscan is surely one of the most sensitive to this topic, both because of the relevance attributed to Augustine as a fundamental authority of the Order, and of the turning point brought about by Bonaventure.

These are just a few of the reasons why the collective volume *Divine Ideas in Franciscan Thought (XIIIth-XIVth Century)*, edited by Jacopo Francesco Falà and Irene Zavattero, should be welcomed. The book is published within the series of medieval studies *Flumen Sapientiae*, directed by Irene Zavattero. It collects chapters in English and Italian, all dealing with Medieval Franciscan thought in the 13th to the 14th centuries, authored by a team made up of experienced and younger scholars. Five precious textual appendixes in Latin (Olivi, Trabibus, Novocastro, Caracciolus, Mayronis) accompany the essays, providing very useful study materials.

An indisputable quality of this volume is that of unearthing the debate connecting the most significant Franciscan masters, and the book does show that the evolution of Franciscan discussion of divine ideas might be understood just by simply looking at the internal discussions between members of the Order (with the exception of Henry of Ghent, one of the favorite targets of the Franciscan discussions). This path passes through prominent characters such as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, and ends with Ockham and the dismantling of the doctrines about divine ideas in the 14th century, although they were later adopted by other authors like Ripa.

Yet, one could not approach the topic of the divine ideas without starting from Augustine's account. As Zavattero recalls in the introduction to the volume (*In Augustine's Footsteps. The Doctrine of Ideas in Franciscan Thought*),

¹ FALÀ, Jacopo Francesco/ZAVATTERO, Irene (eds): *Divine Ideas in Franciscan Thought (XIIIth-XIVth Century)* (= *Flumen Sapientiae* 8). Rome: Aracne 2018, 504 pp. ISBN 978-88-255-2191-7.

Augustine understood Plato's ideas as "primary forms or permanent reasons of things" (*De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus. De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus* [= Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 44A]. Brepols: Turnhout 1975, q. 46, 2, 71), eternal exemplars contained in the divine intelligence and connected with the issue of the rational order established by God in His creation by a deliberative act. Indeed, by creating the world, God is not merely the cause of it, but He is its *rational* cause too, an agent establishing for its creature a specific order and structure that God has already known for eternity. In his concluding essay (*Late Medieval Exemplarism. A Philosophical Assessment*), Alessandro Conti properly notices how

"in supporting such a thesis Augustine simply followed a well established tradition of (Neo-Platonic) thought, according to which there are three main kinds of universals: 1) ideal universals, namely the Ideas of natural species present in the Intellect (the second hypostasis); 2) formal universals, namely the common natures which are the main metaphysical constituent of singular substances; and 3) universals by representation, namely the general concepts present in the minds of human beings" (462).

Therefore, Augustine left posterity a (Neo-)Platonic framework, but also a model which could hardly be conciliated with the absolute power of the Christian God. As Conti notes, that metaphysical structure indeed invited Medieval philosophers to subscribe to "some sort of principle of plenitude, allowing us to claim that God created all the kinds of beings it was possible to create and that our universe is, therefore, the only possible kind of universe". Yet, once we recognize the true and absolute infinity and freedom of God, we should rather give up such a demand and conceive God's creation as "not rationally assessed", and "gratuitous, i.e. lacking a rational foundation" (464). Furthermore, Augustine's exemplarism entailed at least two other issues. On the one hand, as Conti stresses, "it is hardly compatible with the image of God as pure and absolutely simple actuality, which Christian thinkers had borrowed from Aristotle" (466). Indeed, the ideas being identical, in its reality, with God's essence, the latter would be populated by a multiplicity of creatureal distinctions. On the other hand, Augustine's model did not really make clear "of what things are there ideas" (*ibid.*), namely if ideas are mainly Platonic universals or they reach, with the Neo-Platonics, the levels of the *specie specialissima* or even of the individual substance.

Although Bonaventure represents a mandatory passage in the construction, via Augustine, of a Franciscan metaphysics able to mediate these questions, one can identify a pre-history of the problem, which paved the way for Bonaventure's thought. Already in the early 13th century, two relevant questions addressed by Franciscan theologians regard indeed: 1) the kind of relationship linking God with His creatures before the creation, and 2) the relation between the multiplicity of created things and the unity of their *rationes* in the mind of God. As the essay of Riccardo Saccenti (*Sic bonum cognoscitur et similiter lux. Divine Ideas in the Firsts Franciscan Masters [Alexander of Hales and John of La Rochelle]*) highlights, already Peter Lombard had thought about this relation, needing to explain a passage from Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*

(Rom. 11:36), where it is said: “For him and by him, and in him, are all things”. Does God’s *substance* contain everything before creation? A possibility that a theologian could not accept. Also inspired by Augustine, Peter Lombard articulated the relationship between God and the creatures over two levels, a natural and a substantial, grounding to the latter the doctrine that God has immutable and eternal *knowledge* of everything He created, despite the becoming and the deterioration in time of creatures (5). God’s knowledge is, however, ‘limited’ to what He has chosen from eternity so “all things are before God not because they still exist [...], but because God the eternal knows them” (7).

Such a reading, Saccenti stresses, constitutes the main background of the introduction, in a theological lexicon, of the term *ydea*, even if not entirely distinct from terms like *ratio* and *sapientia*. Likewise, according to Alexander of Hales, the *rationes* are not in God’s essence, but rather in God’s wisdom, as *exemplaria*. Yet Alexander also “associates the notion of ‘idea’ to that of *exemplar*, explaining that the ideas are divine *exemplaria* on which all the created and mutable things depend (13). In this sense, the term ‘idea’ has the same value as *ratio*, and means the form of stable and immutable knowledge of things which is in God’s mind”, but it especially means “the divine model which is the formal principle of a created thing” (13–14). In God can thus be found a multiplicity of ideas, which is that of the different models of which the created things flow out, and which is able to explain why the creation has always been plural. Instead, with a different perspective, John of La Rochelle uses *ydea* and *exemplar* just to indicate “the eternal models which the divine mind knows as possible, and can indicate both the future existing things and the future non-existing things” (23). According to this perspective, La Rochelle defends against his earlier colleagues the infinity of God’s knowledge and power, which is not restricted by time, but rather reflected by an infinite possibility of divine ideas.

Therefore, the term ‘idea’ has its documented technical use among the Franciscans even before Bonaventure. Massimiliano Lenzi’s essay (*La negazione delle idee e l’“oscuratismo” dei filosofi*), devoted to the great Franciscan master and overall to the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, seeks especially to stress how the existence of divine ideas is, for Bonaventure, just a “premise of a theological nature, based first of all on the authority of Augustine” (33), and how harsh Bonaventure’s criticism against Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s idealism is. According to Bonaventure, divine ideas are fundamental to explaining how the world is intrinsically knowable and known, given that “the divine idea expresses the thing better (*perfectius*) than how the thing is able to express itself, for God, through his ideas, will be able to know the things (*perfectius*) better than how it might know them through the things themselves” (37).

From a pure metaphysical perspective—as many of the following essays in this collection stress—Bonaventure is, with Aquinas, one of the prominent representatives of what we may call the “imitability theory”, a widespread doctrine according to which divine ideas rise “for a secondary consideration of the divine intellect upon the divine essence” (75). Knowing His own essence, God

knows Himself perfectly, including also knowledge of Himself as imitable by each possible creature. Therefore, God knows, secondarily, the relations that possible creatures could have to His essence, and such relations are what the Scholastics call “divine ideas”. Borrowing the clear words of Jacopo Falà (*Divine ideas in the Collationes Oxonienses*), “ideas have no real being, nor are they real relations *ex parte Dei*, otherwise God would depend in some way *realiter* on creatures and would so lose His absoluteness. Reasons of imitability are instead relations of reason: the ontological status of ideas, from this perspective, can be easily described as *esse rationis*” (121).

However, Bonaventure’s idealism, Lenzi notices, pursues the limits traced by Augustine for a reevaluation of Plato compatible with Aristotle’s criticisms; namely “Bonaventure says that, if Plato, as Augustine held, placed the ideas in the divine mind, he is to be commended, if instead, as Aristotle wants, he placed them out of it, he was mistaken, since, as Aristotle demonstrated, they are useless” (39). This shows, as Lenzi remarks, that “the true hostility of Bonaventure never regarded Aristotle himself, by just the ‘heterodox Aristotelians’ of the Faculty of Arts” (38). Another important aspect is that Bonaventure’s ideas are only logically (*secundum rationem*) multiple: they express the way God thinks itself in relation to the creatures and this is why “Bonaventure claims that they are multiple not according to what they ‘mean’—the divine essence—but according to what they ‘connote’, that is according to those creatures in relation to which the divine essence is signified” (41). In such a connotation, God’s knowledge reaches the individuals too, and even regards not just actual, created things, but also the possible ones: so Bonaventure embraces a position already held by John of La Rochelle.

The final part of Lenzi’s essay is dedicated to Aquinas, showing how Thomas, contrary to Bonaventure, attributed to Aristotle a true exemplarism, opposite to Plato’s wrong view. Actually, it is worth remembering, by appealing again to the words of Conti, the position held by Aquinas—with Bonaventure, one of the most relevant supporters of the view that “divine ideas are really the same as the divine essence, but distinct in reason from it” (471).

According to Thomas, ideas are mental beings existing just in the mind of God inasmuch as contemplating His own essence as imitable by possible creatures. Accordingly, whereas the divine essence remains absolutely simple, without any real internal articulation, “divine ideas are the divine essence *qua* viewed by itself as imitable, since God’s knowledge originates entirely within Himself. Therefore the divine essence itself is the unique idea of all possible things, so that everything created has certain similarity to the divine essence” (472). Such a perspective also helps Aquinas to explain why the plurality of the ideas was not repugnant to the simplicity of God: divine ideas being nothing but relations, “there is only one divine idea, that is, the divine essence itself considered as imitable” (475). Such an imitability is, to Aquinas, “sufficient to expound the production of creatures as well as God’s knowledge of them” (*ibid*), because the given essence is similar to each creature as its model.

Going back to Franciscan thought, the case of Peter John Olivi is clearly one of the most significant, given that the French master was censored in 1283 also for his teaching regarding divine ideas, which conflicted with Aquinas’

and especially with William of La Mare's. In his chapter (*Divine Ideas and Beatific Vision by Peter John Olivi*), Stève Bobillier sketches Olivi's view with special attention to its relationship with the beatific vision, and aiming at mitigating the portrait of Olivi as a "destroyer" of divine ideas. Bobillier's position is that, although Olivi has been very heterodox on this topic "he nevertheless demonstrates a constant wish to follow the tradition, and, for example, to present accurate interpretations of the texts of Augustine and Bonaventure" (70). The analysis of Olivi's works shows indeed that he subscribed to the existence of divine ideas, basing his view especially on the concept of *ratio realis*. As Bobillier notes, "the willing and the knowing of God each designate a *ratio realis*, a 'mode of partial intelligibility' of God, and both express His being" (55), so the divine ideas must be understood according to God's intellect and will: the former precedes the latter as God "knows things, not as they exist actually, but in so far as they are intelligible and susceptible to creation" (*ibid.*); the latter precedes the first as God's will freely directs him to will and to produce the things which he wants (56). Yet, it is important to notice, with the following essay by Timothy B. Noone and Carl A. Vater (*The Sources of Scotus' Theory of Divine Ideas*), that Olivi is also a critic of the "imitability theory", which to his eyes seems to limit God to an indirect knowledge of possible creatures, known "only through a comparison to the divine essence through the manner of their ability to participate in the divine essence" (78).

However, one of the main pieces of evidence of Olivi's actual belief in divine ideas is his theory of blessed's vision, which implies (against Gaillard) both the apprehension of a *ratio* really existing in God, and the multiplicity of such a *ratio* (the ideas). Yet, Olivi's perspective is heterodox especially as concerns the relationship between divine ideas and human intellection. Indeed, Olivi thinks of divine ideas as the representative *ratio* of the intelligible things, but at the same time "he does not accept that they can be the *ratio* which illuminates the human intellect" (62), in the way an active intellect would illuminate a passive one. Divine ideas are participated in by human intellect, but just "in confusing and imperfect mode", that is in the species of memory, and they cooperate with human knowledge "only to the extent that God is the principle of the will" (63). This according to Olivi's famous idea that God and man "can only relate to one another through the will". Olivi is however original in his position about the blessed's vision of the divine essence, identifying beatific vision with a direct vision of the essence of God, incomplete and limited by its capacities, but not mediated by representational species, and able to grant the ethical aim of the knowledge of God's essence. In their vision, the blessed see indeed "not only God, but also—in a process of meta-knowledge—themselves seeing God", loving not only God, but also the act of loving Him.

Bonaventure and Olivi are cardinal points in early Franciscan thought; still, a fundamental turn, even in explaining the ontology of divine ideas, is that brought about by John Duns Scotus, whose crucial contribution lies especially in providing an alternative to the "imitability theory", by claiming that God knows *directly*, even if as a secondary object of His intellection, all possible

creatures. Hence, as Conti argues, Scotus “requires that ideas become both direct, but secondary, objects of divine intellection (the primary object being the divine essence itself) and be to a certain degree hypostatized thanks to the formal distinction” (485). Accordingly, what Scotus suggests “is that God produces the ideas of possibles as He is able to create—that is to say, as He is omnipotent. In fact, God creates the world since He can, and He thinks of every makable thing before creating the world since He is an infinitely intelligent agent” (478). Hence, God poses His own ideas, since, as Falà notices, “defending the necessity of divine ideas in the dynamic of God’s awareness of creatures means [for him] to vilify His intellect, because it implies that something (divine ideas) is needed for God in order to actualize the capability of knowing creatures” (114).

As is especially stressed by the essay by Ernesto Dezza (*Giovanni Duns Scotto e gli instantia naturae*), in shaping his solution Scotus uses the concept of “instants of nature”, namely logical moments articulating the creation of the things in their intelligible being, and so articulating the free establishment, by God, of his own concepts. In *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, Scotus articulates the process as follows: 1) first, God creates the thing as intelligible; 2) so, God considers intelligible things as possibilities, given that their being is not repugnant; 3) the thing is presented to the will, to be created (153). As Dezza notices (155), elsewhere (in *Ordinatio*, d. 35), Scotus presents the same with a slightly different articulation, which is nevertheless quite neglected by his followers although it looks much more similar to that of the tradition: 1) God knows His essence as simply absolute; 2) He produces the thing in its intelligible being and knows it; maybe God compares His intellect with the thing, causing a relation of reason with it; 4) God knows the relationship between Himself and the thing (*ibid.*).

Accordingly, Scotus’ model entails that there is nothing like a metaphysical “imitability” of God’s essence. As Conti remarks, “the relation of imitability plays no decisive role in this ‘chain’ of mental actions, nor do the *respectus rationis*, which, in contrast, were the cause of the multiplicity of ideas according to Thomas Aquinas” (477). God does not start the act of creation through the mediation of divine ideas: He knows possible creatures *directly*, even if “Scotus’ solution is weak on one important point; it does not clarify the relation between the divine essence which God thinks of ‘at the first instant’ and the ideas of possibles that He produces straight after” (478). However, the core of Scotus’ position is that divine ideas are created and not coeternal with him; this, Dezza remarks, is because the created world does not pursue the metaphysical paradigm of the “principle of plenitude”: the contingency we find in creation implies that even the primary cause must create in a contingent way. Nevertheless, Scotus’ new paradigm thinks of contingency in a radically new way, that is as “a state of affairs in which the opposite might exist simultaneously to the actual, existing world” (138). Such a perspective lies on a revolutionary conception of possibility as a logical non-contradiction in itself, without any reference to the conditions of its feasibility, which is to its physical potentiality. Logical possibility, Dezza argues, “forestalls all activity, both in God and man; such a distinction between logical possibility and real possibil-

ity constitutes the conceptual space which is needed to show the contingency of the divine and human action, since it postulates an area of existence of the non-impossible which is much larger than the realizable” (143).

In the light of the crucial change introduced by Scotus’ contingentism, various essays in this volume sketch the premises, and the consequences, of it. Timothy Noone and Carl Vater focus on the sources of Scotus’ view, identifying them in Olivi and a student of his, Petrus de Trabibus. According to the authors, Scotus borrowed from both of them especially his criticism of the “imitability theory”. From Olivi and Trabibus, he would take especially the belief that divine ideas, flowing out of metaphysical relations, cannot be known before their *relata*. At the same time, he completes Petrus’ arguments by “pointing out that imitability is not a specific difference of any creature. Since determinate knowledge comes from knowing the specific difference of a thing, determinate knowledge of a creature cannot be had from imitability” (83). So “Divine ideas cannot be relations of imitation by which God knows possible creatures because imitation is not the specific difference of any creature and a relation cannot be known before the terms of the relation are known” (89). From such an analysis, Scotus concludes that “the only way to articulate a theory of divine ideas that uphold the nobility of God’s perfect knowledge and the nobility of God’s supreme simplicity is to say that God knows possible creatures directly” (88).

However, Scotus still defends the concept of rational relation, since “God creates according to his divine ideas” (*ibid.*): “Divine ideas are rational relations for Scotus, but they are not rational relations in the way that his predecessors argued” (89). In fact, according to Scotus a divine idea is nothing but the cognized object which exist objectively in the divine mind: “God can cognize possible creatures directly, but [Scotus] insists that the character of an idea still includes a relation” (86–87) which depends on the moments of the instants of nature. The idea is complete only when God knows the relationship between Himself and the possible creatures, and this entails that “for Scotus, divine ideas are in fact rational relations, but their function is precisely the opposite as they do for the imitability theorists” (87), that is the rational relation comes only because God *already* knows possible creatures (so, after such a knowledge and not before it).

Scotus’s thought is addressed also by Jacopo Falà’s chapter, devoted to the *Collationes Oxonienses* (focusing on qq. 8–9). This text, recently edited (in 2016) by Guido Alliney and Marina Fedeli, reports a discussion between students or bachelors in the Franciscan convent of Oxford, which, according to Alliney, Fedeli and Falà, took place in Spring 1301. Falà follows Alliney and Fedeli also in attributing most of the questions to the thought of Scotus, showing how deep his influence was, and those of Henry, also in the discussion of divine ideas. According to Falà’s reading, the whole of question 8 is an account of a debate between Scotus and a follower of Henry, presumably Richard of Conington or Robert of Cowton. In *collatio* 8, the position of Scotus appears especially in the defense of the doctrine “according to which God can know all things different from Himself through the direct awareness of His own

essence, without recurring to ideas as relations of imitability” (114), and so rejecting the exemplarist paradigm, which Henry pushed to the point of accepting ideas of each *species specialissima*.

Still, Henry’s most peculiar view is that identifying *de facto* (in the reading of many) divine ideas and the creatural essences as conceived by God’s mind, able to immediately attribute to the *esse diminutum* of the creatures inasmuch as thought, an *esse reale* preceding God’s creation. Conversely, Scotus thinks of creation as radically *ex nihilo*, and so he rejected Henry’s vocabulary of the *esse essentiae*, which he associates with the *esse existentiae*, which cannot be eternal without threatening God’s absolute freedom. Falà argues that only starting from the *Ordinatio* (I, d. 36) Scotus defines the intelligible quiddities “as endowed with *esse obiectivum*, which is created by the divine intellect when it produces creatures *in esse intelligibili*” (128), and the lacking of any reference to the *esse obiectivum* in *collatio* 9 would confirm the hypothesis of an early date of composition of the *Collationes*, namely in 1301.

Scotus’s thought is just as important for two other Franciscan masters, James of the Marches and William of Alnwick. Marina Fedeli’s essay (*Le idee divine e la relazione di imitabilità dell’essenza in Giacomo d’Ascoli*) shows well how James thinks of divine ideas as “stable and immutable forms of everything”, “contained in the divine intelligence” where they are eternal models of the created things (164–165). Like Scotus, James conceives of divine ideas as “objects of the divine intellect, as what God thinks, and not as they have a relationship with God. The imitability, namely the *respectus* of reason which links the ideas to God’s intellect ‘accompanies’ the divine idea, but it does not constitute it” (166). A consequence of this approach is that the divine idea is primarily of the divine essence and only secondarily of the created quiddities insofar as known: “it is not imitability that provides a reason for the idea, but the essence taken absolutely by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (167). Accordingly, for James the creature is something provided, from eternity, with its own entity *alia a Deo*, actually distinct from God, and “from eternity, the creatures had been *obiective* in God” (169) as a non-repugnant reality, even if provided just with an accidental existence in His mind.

As Fedeli points out, James accepts such a distinction between the creature and God in the light of his model of a tripartite being (real being, intentional being and being of reason), arguing that the creature is actually distinct from God, but just intentionally. Namely, the essence of the creature has an eternal intentional being represented by the essence of God, as its species; and this being comes before any knowledge that God has of the creature. However, although the *respectus imitabilitatis* does not constitute the divine ideas in their being, James follows Scotus also in supporting the relative reality of the relation.

In turn, James’ account seems to be the target of other authors’ criticisms, and especially of that developed by William of Alnwick. As Davide Riserbato (*Ut induit rationem ideae. L’essenza divina e l’essere intelligibile: identità [e differenza] secondo Guglielmo di Alnwick*) shows, “the reflection of the English master consists in determining the ontological status of divine ideas, demonstrating that the intelligible eternal being attributed to the creature by the di-

vine essence (*esse intelligibile ab aeterno*), likewise it being-known too (*esse cognitum* or *intellectum*) [...] is not caused or produced” (178). Indeed, according to William, a produced or caused *esse intelligibile* of the creature would be coeternal to God, and the only solution to escape such a paradox is to identify the *esse intelligibilis* of the creature with God Himself. In this discussion William’s target is especially James, who actually denied any identity between the eternal intelligible being of the creature and God’s essence, reducing the creature’s being to the *esse intelligibile*. On the contrary, for William, the being-represented and its representing form are identical, and the eternal intelligible being of the creature coincides *realiter* with God.

Indeed, William’s view is that the essence of God includes the *esse intelligibile* of the creatures in the same way as the primary cause includes the causal power of the secondary ones. Such an inclusion found the identity between form and being sought by William, “identity which becomes a distinction when considering the same cause as already existing in nature, whose causality, even if that [secondary] cause did not exist, would all the same be perfectly contained by the primary cause” (195). Yet, William borrows from James a distinction between subjective and objective intelligible being, admitting that the creature could have an eternal subjective intelligible being, but only in an improper sense, that is “to the extent that God’s eternal intellection also has as its secondary object the subjective intelligible being of the creature” (196).

After Scotus, the Franciscan debate will move towards a progressive dismantling of the doctrine of the divine ideas, which culminated with Ockham. Still, before the *Venerabilis Inceptor*, other masters tried to rethink that issue. One of them is Peter Auriol, whose thought on divine ideas was already reconstructed by Conti elsewhere, and has now been further studied by Chiara Paladini’s essay (*Exemplar Causality as similitudo aequivoca in Peter Auriol*). Paladini contextualizes the position of Auriol especially in respect to that of Aquinas (divine ideas as relations of imitability) and Scotus (divine ideas as objects of knowledge); two perspectives appearing to Auriol unable to explain in particular the passage from the one to the many and so “how God can at once know himself and the many things (the ideas)” (211). Avoiding multiplying entities in the divine essence, Auriol “explains God’s knowledge of creatures by means of a unique object, that is its own essence” (215). For Auriol, the act of knowledge must be understood as a qualitative variation in a subject, that is “through an intellectual act, the subject actively relates itself to a specific object within its mental ‘field of vision’” (217), and posits the object in an intentional existence. Accordingly, God’s intellect “relates itself directly to his essence (and only to this), and then posits it in *apparentia objective*, in the same way that in the human cognitive process the intentional act relates itself to an object in its mental ‘field of vision’ and posits it in *esse intentionali*” (218). This explains how the divine essence is the only object to which God directs His *intelligere* and so His knowledge, within the creature appears *denominative* “by the fact that what appears in God *indirectly* is the *undivided* totality of all creatures” (219).

Paladini stresses that, in Auriol’s view, God knows individuals just in a mediated way, and the divine essence “turns out to be the only exemplar for the

creation of both specific natures and individuals” (230). So, he partially disagrees with Averroes, who denied that God has complete knowledge of individuals, but he also agrees with him in saying that God’s own essence suffices for God to get such a knowledge. Nevertheless, “Auriol’s exemplarism [...] does not entail a direct correspondence between archetype and copy, since there can be no correspondence at all between the divine essence and creatures, based on something holding between idea and *ideatum*” (233) supposed by Augustine. On the contrary, Auriol grants his model upon the original concept of “equivocal exemplar”, that is God’s essence acts like an exemplar cause that produces effects different from it. By formulating this model, Auriol “is able to contest precisely the traditional model of creation: equivocation requires no conformity of the being to an idea, so there is no contradiction in the fact that the single *ratio* of divinity is *equivocally* the exemplar cause of different forms” (235).

Still, Scotus’ breakthrough is important even in the light of the efforts of some Franciscan masters in re-discussing Platonism. This debate is presented by William Duba (*From Scotus to the Platonic: Hugh of Novocastro, Landolph Caracciolo and Francis of Meyronnes*), who focuses on Novocastro, Caracciolo and especially the Platonism of Meyronnes. Duba starts from the opposition between Scotus’ reduction of divine ideas to intelligible objects and Augustine’s exemplarism, showing how Novocastro tries to place the Subtle Doctor and Plato close together. According to Hugh, “ideas exist” and “are creations cognized objectively from eternity”, including “divine ideas of individuals, relations, genera and differences” (249). So, he essentially agrees with Scotus in thinking of divine ideas as the cognized object insofar as objectively known by God. Still, at the same time, he defends Plato from Aristotle’s accusations, denying that he claimed the real being of the ideas, and attributing to him a Scotist view. In its turn, instead, Caracciolo’s is an attempt to reply to Auriol’s criticisms, “reasserting Scotus’ view holding the ideas to be formally distinct in the divine essence, and criticizing Auriol severely for arguing that a relation of likeness should run from God, the exemplar, to creatures, the exemplified” (254). Conversely, Caracciolo holds that the relation of likeness “does not go from the divine essence to creatures, but rather from creatures to the divine essence” (256) and his thought can be summarised in the following three theses: 1) “distinct cognizables, including matter and form, accidents and passions, have distinct ideas in God”, whereas 2) negations and privations have no corresponding ideas; and 3) “all ideas in God are practical, in the sense that God can produce or do everything he cognizes”.

Special attention should be given to Meyronnes’s account of divine ideas, which openly breaks with Scotus and tries to retrieve Augustine and Plato. Nevertheless, Meyronnes distinguishes between two senses of the “idea”, a theological and a metaphysical, attributing to the first group Augustine’s divine ideas and limiting the second group to universals. So, from the theological point of view, he subscribes to Augustine’s position, whereas from a metaphysical side he seems to mainly follow Avicenna. As Duba notes,

“from Augustine, Meyronnes takes [the view] that the ideas are exemplars formally in the divine mind [...] and eminently contained in the divine essence. From Avicenna, he gets that ideas are precise quiddities, that is, they express what it is to be something, and they express just what it is to be something shorn of the trappings of being any particular instantiation. [...] Finally, from Plato, he states that an idea is the formal definition (in a broad sense) of a given thing, that is, a form” (269).

A crossbreed between Scotus and Augustine is, instead, that of Petrus Thomae, as presented by Garrett Smith (*Petrus Thomae on Divine Ideas and Intelligible Being*). The goal of Petrus is twofold: “first he offers a definition of the divine idea largely derived from Augustine, second, he identified this definition with the Scotist notion that the objects of divine knowledge are the intelligible quiddities of creatures” (374). Accordingly, with Augustine, Petrus’s divine ideas are “stable principles” eternally present in God’s mind, according to which creatures are formable to their proper nature; at the same time, the Spanish Franciscan also denies Scotus’s claim that divine ideas are produced by the divine intellect, trying to disarm the contradiction between the two different formulations of the instants of natures’ sequence formulated by Scotus, the first presenting a creation of the divine ideas by God, the second claiming that the quiddities of the creatures are contained by the divine essence and represented by it to divine intellect. According to Peter, the production is only metaphorical, and Scotus did not actually affirm the first position, that of divine ideas’ production. Therefore,

“the divine essences is like a perfect and infinite mirror, which can represent every other being. There are representations in the divine essence, but they have no causal relation to the divine essence. [...] The representations of creatures are in the divine essence, but they are not caused by it. They are not in it subjectively, however, as a part of the divine essence, but as a reflection that shines out of a mirror” (385).

Yet, relevant elements of Platonism, even if influenced by Augustine, can be found also in Petrus’ defense of the reality of the divine ideas. According to Peter too, ideas “have a real, true, and eternal being distinct from the divine being” (387). Moreover, there is “a plurality of eternal beings, namely, God and all the quiddities of creatures that are contained in and represented by the divine essence” (389). A conclusion pushing Peter even to accept the existence of a *plura aeterna*, a position defended by the necessity of a positive plurality of eternal relations of reason between the possible creatures and the divine mind. But also a perspective that forces Peter to defend a different account of “nothing” in the definition of creation as *ex nihilo*.

After Bonaventure and Scotus, a crucial turning point for the Franciscan Schools of the 14th century is—of course—William of Ockham. From the side of the divine ideas, Ockham is also the main responsible for their dismantlement. In his chapter (*Le idee divine in Guglielmo di Ockham*), Alessandro Ghisalberti follows the steps of Ockham’s dismissal, which first of all starts from criticism to Scotus’s instants of nature. Ockham challenges especially

Scotus' use of this concept in describing God's logically ordered knowledge, first of his essence and then of the essence of His creature. According to Ockham, such a view cannot be defended: either by a formal distinction or by a distinction of reason. Indeed, there are no instants of nature in God, who "in every imaginable instant knows his own essence, knowing at the same instant all creature, since he knows everything in a unique act of knowledge" (407).

But what is Ockham's own solution? As Conti too remarks, Ockham understands the sole divine essence as "insufficient from granting the rationality of creation, since the production of something is rational if and only if the producer analytically knows what he is going to produce—and creatures in no way are the divine essence" (480). Accordingly, the *Venerabilis Inceptor* wipes out the entire debate on divine exemplarism by a simple redefinition of the term "idea". For Ockham, the world idea is a connotative or a relative term, "that is", in the words of Ghisalberti, "the term idea has not any *quid rei*, it does not own an autonomous significant content" (408). The idea is nothing but "a description of what the name means, and it is the following: 'The idea is a thing known by an intellective productive principle, looking at which the active principle is able to produce something in the real being'" (408). Ockham's original solution is so that

"the very creature is the idea, first of all, because it fits all the components of the given definition of the idea; it is known by an active productive principle, and God looks at the idea to produce in a rational fashion. Indeed, even if God knows his own essence, if he would not know what he can produce, it would produce it in an unaware way, and not rationally, and so not through the idea. Thus, God really looks at the producible creature and looking to it he can actually produce it" (409).

Or, with the words of Conti, for Ockham "God knows creatures not mediately by understanding something else, but immediately in themselves, and creates what He creates directly, without using something else as a formal principle of his action" (481). Hence, the divine ideas, Ghisalberti stresses, "are not to be placed in God as exemplars really existing in the divine mind, turning to which the divine intellect produces the creatures, but they rather are placed in God only *obiective*, inasmuch as entities that he knows, since ideas coincide with the things itself, insofar as they are producible by God" (412).

As Ghisalberti stresses, Ockham's account is a direct consequence of his thought regarding divine omnipotence and a new conception of the creature as a radical individual reality. Indeed, exemplarism seems to Ockham a constant obstacle to the consideration of the simplicity of God's essence and the radical contingency of the nature he created. A view representing the main *novitas* introduced by Ockham in the Franciscan School. According to Ghisalberti, the latter is especially the idea that "the absolute freedom of the creator God, and the importance of the single individuals raised out of God's act of love [...] are treated by Ockham by saving them from any preexisting order, and entrusting them to God's absolute and ordered power". Therefore, "there is no needed to pass through the attribute to God's intellect of ideal abstract knowledges, and, ultimately, conflicting with his full simplicity; the rules of

the Aristotelian logic must be respected, but they cannot be extended to the investigation on the contents of the *scientia Dei*, free from any obligation to temporality” (425). Accordingly, Ghisalberti argues, there is no access anymore to what Scotus called a “theology in itself”, but just to a “theology of the viator”, a non-metaphysical attempt to approach God, «according to which theological epistemology must distinguish the path marking the epistemic structures of the human subject respect to the epistemic enigma lying in the *potentia Dei absoluta*, characterized by an incomprehensible distance” for human knowledge (425–426).

However, despite the strength of Ockham’s attack to exemplarism, traces of this doctrine can be still found in later authors like John of Ripa, as proven by Andrea Nannini’s essay (*Immensa exemplaritas. La dottrina delle idee nella metafisica di Giovanni da Ripa*). Nannini unearths, in particular, the way Ripa rethinks the problem of the relationship between God’s unity and the multiplicity of the creatures. Ripa’s metaphysics is intentionally over-complex, and grounded on God’s absolute immensity and on the fundamental metaphysical mechanism of the *replicatio unitatis divinae*. This latter could be described as a “system of progressive articulations, originated from the divine essence understood as a One, each communicates *ad extra* and adds to the previous ones a new denomination of perfection” (433). By this principle, the internal punctiform unity of God can be multiplied on a plurality of creatural levels. Such a *replicatio*, which according to Nannini reprises, metaphysically, the mathematical generation of numbers, generates different “latitudes”, namely metaphysical dimensions populated by the various perfections of the creatures, that is by their ideas; finally, on a third level, it generates individuals. A crucial source of Ripa is overall the treatise *De unitate De et pluralitate creaturarum*, which the Franciscan erroneously attributed to Anselm of Canterbury, but that was actually written by Acardus of Saint-Victor.

Thanks to his peculiar approach, Ripa is able to deny all univocity between God and the creatures, accepting a relation of analogy between the perfections of God and the created perfections. What Ripa takes from the Pseudo-Anselm is indeed a threefold articulation of the ideas:

“a first level is the very divine essence, which is immense and creative perfection; a second level is represented by the multiplicity of the ideas in the mind of God, in the *Verbum*, eternally thought without being necessarily temporally produced; only on a third lever we have the temporal production of the things eternally thought by God, which determine the richness and the multiplicity of the created Universe, which is shaped, through following *replicationes*, on the original perfection contained by God’s essence” (441).

According to his idea of God’s overflowing infinity, ideas are for Ripa infinite, and from the same perspective, Ripa also proposes a harsh attack against Duns Scotus’s doctrine of the production of the ideas, which Nannini rebuilds meticulously.

The last essay of this valuable collection is that of Conti. His contribution provides a very complete overview of the evolution of medieval exemplarism

(to which we already referred several times) focusing especially on the logical tools that Medieval authors used to face the issue, and showing the almost-deterministic evolution that the various logical approaches impose to these doctrines. Conti looks in particular at the classic problem of identity and distinction, and their use in explain the relationship between the divine essence and divine ideas or, mutually, between different ideas in God. As he notices, from this perspective Medieval authors can be divided into two groups: a first one (made of all those coming before Scotus, such as Bonaventure, Aquinas, Olivi, etc.) pivot especially on real identity, falling into many difficulties and paradoxes when they try to conciliate God's omnipotence with the rational structure of possibilities He contains and actualizes. Indeed, these authors are pushed by their very premises to defend the identity of the divine essence and the divine ideas. The second group of authors (gathering Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, and almost the totality of the 14th century Franciscans), opts instead for weaker relations such as formal or intentional distinction. This tradition has "a more functional logical apparatus with respect to their goal, *i.e.* distinguish the ideas between them and from divine essence and at the same time preserve their (real) identity with it" (468). Nevertheless, "without an instrument such as the formal distinction [...] it is almost impossible for a late medieval thinker not to end up either denying the existence of ideas in God or making them practically independent from Him" (484). Yet, Scotus account is destined to collapse against the criticism of Ockham, who breaks with the *Subtle Doctor* especially for not accepting his use of the formal distinction and for questioning the use of intentional distinctions within the articulation of the instants of nature.

Other final remarks of Conti contribute to analyzing the entire evolution of the problem of the divine ideas in Franciscan thought, by pointing out three different approaches. A first one is that of "some people, not particularly aware of the contrast between philosophical tools and the content of Augustine's doctrine of exemplarism", which tried to defend and clarify that the relation between the Aristotelian reason and the enigma of the Christian God's infinity by inadequate means. These authors, such as Alexander of Hales, Aquinas, Bonaventure, or Olivi, introduced "a somehow distorted interpretation of the views they intended to illustrate", identifying divine essence and divine ideas. A second group, composed by James of Ascoli, Peter Auriol and Petrus Thomae, pointed especially at constraining the theological problem within the boundaries of their previous metaphysical and conceptual apparatuses, often ending up in denying the problem initially posed by Augustine. Yet there is just a third group, including Duns Scotus and Ockham, trying to develop new concepts and paradigms "that will adequately explain the content of faith, or at least be wholly compatible with it, thereby breaking new ground for philosophical thinking" (487). A debate concluded by the gigantomachy between the two Franciscan masters and which—we may stress—ends with the success of Ockham's razor, able to undermine the very foundations of Augustine's approach.