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In his *Out of My Later Years* Einstein observes that what is incomprehensible in the universe is just the fact that it is comprehensible. Yet, the comprehensibility of the world, which troubled Einstein as well as many other 20th century scientists and epistemologists, was not a problem at all for medieval thinkers. The standard theory of divine ideas, developed by St Augustine in his *De diversis quaestionibus 83*,¹ provided an excellent answer (or scheme for an answer) to this question. Our world is intelligible and ordered because God has created it according to (some of) the formal patterns (or universal types, conceived of as distinct from individual tokens) eternally present in his mind—that is, the divine ideas. As God thinks of them, He knows everything other than Himself, and, as He looks to them, He rationally creates everything in the world.

But in a genuine philosophical context, every solution poses its problems. This is also the case with the theory of divine ideas. In fact, it raises at least two main problems: it apparently compromises (i) the thesis of divine simplicity, since a plurality of things seems to be somehow present in God, and (ii) that of divine omniscience (and providence), since God seems to know creatures mediately only, by means of something else. Therefore, medieval philosophers and theologians had to discuss extensively

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¹ Cf. St. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus 83*, q. 46, *PL* 40, cols. 29-31: “Sunt namque ideae principales formae quaedam, vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae formatae non sunt (ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes), quae in divina intelligentia continentur; et cum ipsae neque oriantur neque intereant, secundum eas tamen formari dicitur omne quod oriri et interire potest, et omne quod oritur et interit.” For an assessment of this Augustinian doctrine in Antiquity and Middle Ages, see L.M. de Rijk, *Quaestio de Ideis. Some Notes on an Important Chapter of Platonism*, in: J. Mansfeld and L.M. de Rijk (eds.), *Kephalaion. Studies in Greek Philosophy and Its Continuation*, Assen 1975, 204-13.

these two subjects in their works, in order to find a suitable solution, one that could reconcile the conflicting demands put on the theory.

My purpose in this paper is to sketch Peter Auriol's doctrine of divine ideas, focussing on his analysis of the two above-mentioned questions, and what he proposes as a solution to them. Auriol's position is particularly interesting since it shows better than any other of his time the sharp conflict between the Greek logico-metaphysical apparatus (in the form of medieval Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism) and (some of) the chief contents of the Christian faith—a conflict which was the real engine in the development of late-medieval philosophy.² Auriol expounds his conception of divine ideas and exemplar causality in d. 35 of his longer commentary on the first book of the *Sentences* (his *Scriptum*),³ often clarifying his view by contrasting it with those of St Thomas Aquinas⁴ and John Duns Scotus.⁵ Therefore in the first section of this article I shall briefly sum up the theories of the two earlier Mendicant masters. In the second section, Auriol's chief arguments against them will be analysed. The third section will be devoted to an exposition of Auriol's own position. Finally, in the last section, some provisional conclusions will be drawn.

1. *The Polemical Targets: Aquinas' and Duns Scotus' Doctrines*

1.1 *Thomas Aquinas*

St Thomas' most complete and clear presentation of the theory of divine exemplarism can be found in qq. 14 and 15 of the first part of his *Summa theologiae*⁶—the text to which Auriol refers most frequently when he discusses Aquinas' position.

According to the Dominican master, the divine ideas are really the same as the divine essence, but distinct in reason from it, since God is absolutely simple and no reality different from Himself can be present in

² On this topic see Alessandro D. Conti, *Paradigma aristotelico e teologia cristiana nel secolo XIV. Fede e ragione ad Oxford e Parigi sul finire del medioevo*, in: *Medioevo*, 22 (1996), 137-223.

³ *Petri Aureoli Commentariorum in primum librum Sententiarum Pars prima*, ed. C. Sarnanus, Romae 1596.

⁴ Auriol refers (explicitly or implicitly) to St Thomas' opinion on the subject 12 times: pp. 749a, 758a-b, 763a, 764a, 779b, 789a-b, 795a, 805a, 814b, 817b, 824b, and 825a.

⁵ Auriol refers (explicitly or implicitly) to Scotus' opinion 6 times: pp. 750a, 763a, 764a, 784a-b, 794a, and 814b.

⁶ Cf. also Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5; d. 36, qq. 1-2; *Summa contra Gentiles* I, ch. 54; III, ch. 24; *Quaestiones de veritate*, q. 3, aa. 2-3.

Him. So divine ideas are produced by the mental relations by means of which God views his essence as capable of being imitated by a possible creature—and in effect, everything created by God has a certain similarity to the divine essence.⁷ Therefore the name ‘idea’ refers to the divine essence, but it does not connote the divine essence as it is in itself, but as it is the real model of every creature.⁸ The fullness of God’s perfection is echoed by every possible creature in its own way, as any imitation of the divine essence is always partial and inadequate. Thus the ideas are the standards against which the particular natures of created individuals are measured (*rerum perfectiones*), and the formal reasons which explain the internal structures of things. From this point of view, one can say that the divine ideas are things themselves as they subsist from eternity in the mind of God.⁹

When any given possible creature is brought into existence by the divine volition, then the divine idea which is its corresponding paradigm also serves as a principle of divine creation, thereby becoming an *exemplar* in the strict sense of the term. As a consequence, according to Aquinas, there is a difference between a divine idea as a *ratio* by means of which God from eternity thinks of any given possible and as an *exemplar* by means of which God produces at a certain point in time an individual or a given set of individuals. *Qua* principle of knowledge (*ratio*) the idea is connected with mere possibles; *qua* principle of action (*exemplar*) it is connected only with the things which are (or were or will be) part of the actual world.¹⁰ This distinction prevents Aquinas’ system from lapsing into

⁷ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 15, a. 1: “Ad tertium, dicendum quod Deus secundum essentiam suam est similitudo omnium rerum; unde idea in Deo nihil est aliud quam Dei essentia. . . . [a.2] Ad quartum dicendum quod respectus multiplicantes ideas, non sunt in rebus creatis, sed in Deo. Non tamen sunt reales respectus, sicut illi quibus distinguuntur Personae, sed respectus intellecti a Deo.”

⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d. 36, q. 2: “Hoc nomen ‘idea’ nominat essentiam divinam secundum quod est exemplar imitata a creatura. . . . Idea non nominat essentiam tantum, sed essentiam imitabilem.”

⁹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 6: “Quicquid perfectionis est in quacumque creatura, totum praexistit et continetur in Deo secundum modum excellentem. Non solum autem id in quo creaturae communicant, scilicet ipsum esse, ad perfectionem pertinet; sed etiam ea per quae creaturae ad invicem distinguuntur, sicut vivere, et intelligere, et huiusmodi. . . . Et omnis forma, per quam quaelibet res in propria specie constituitur, perfectio quaedam est. Et sic omnia in Deo praexistunt, non solum quantum ad id quod commune est omnibus, sed etiam quantum ad ea secundum quae res distinguuntur. Et sic, cum Deus in se omnes perfectiones contineat, comparatur Dei essentia ad omnes rerum essentias, non sicut commune ad propria, ut unitas ad numeros, vel centrum ad lineas; sed sicut perfectus actus ad imperfectos.”

¹⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 15, a. 3: “Idea, secundum quod est principium

some form of necessitarianism: the two spheres of existent and possible do not coincide, since the existent is a sub-set of the possible. God does not give existence to every possible individual corresponding to a certain idea nor to every idea present in his mind. In this gap between the two spheres lies the mystery of divine volition and freedom, since nothing can prompt God to exert his omnipotence in order to give existence to any one idea or another.

Divine ideas are universals. More precisely, they are ideas of species—of all the species that God has produced and could have produced, as we have seen.¹¹ Their plurality is not repugnant to divine absolute simplicity, because the ideas are not to be regarded as forms by which God understands (*intelligibiles species*) something else,¹² but as objects of understanding, and a plurality of things understood does not cause any composition in the mind which understands them.¹³ The really existent divine

factionis rerum, *exemplar* dici potest; et ad practicam cognitionem pertinet. Secundum autem quod principium cognoscitivum est, proprie dicitur *ratio*; et potest etiam ad scientiam speculativam pertinere. Secundum ergo quod exemplar est, secundum hoc se habet ad omnia quae a Deo fiunt secundum aliquod tempus. Secundum vero quod principium cognoscitivum est, se habet ad omnia quae cognoscuntur a Deo, etiam si nullo tempore fiant; et ad omnia quae a Deo cognoscuntur secundum propriam rationem, et secundum quod cognoscuntur ab ipso per modum speculationis.”

¹¹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 15, a. 3: “Dicendum quod eorum quae neque sunt neque erunt neque fuerunt, Deus non habet practicam cognitionem, nisi virtute tantum. Unde respectu eorum non est idea in Deo, secundum quod idea significat exemplar, sed solum secundum quod significat rationem. . . . Ad quartum dicendum quod genera non possunt habere ideam aliam ab idea speciei.” In the commentary on the first book of the *Sentences* (d. 36, q. 2, a. 3) and in his *Quaestiones de veritate* (q. 3, a. 3) St. Thomas seems to admit the existence in God of ideas of singulars (“Ponimus etiam quod per divinam providentiam definiuntur omnia singularia; et ideo oportet nos singularium ponere ideas”), but in the later *Summa theologiae* he does not mention them. As a matter of fact, they are redundant within his theological system. Since individuals are the outcomes of the union of the specific forms (*formae specierum*) with prime matter, so that matter and form are the sole metaphysical components of the singulars, the complete knowledge of the components is sufficient for assuring also a complete knowledge of the composites. See also below, at nn. 15-19.

¹² Within Thomas’ system it is the divine essence itself which plays the role of *species intelligibilis*. So, his essence is both that by which God understands and the object of God’s knowledge at once.

¹³ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 15, a. 2: “Hoc autem quomodo divinae simplicitati non repugnet, facile est videre, si quis consideret ideam operati esse in mente operantis sicut quod intelligitur, non autem sicut species qua intelligitur, quae est forma faciens intellectum in actu. Forma enim domus in mente aedificatoris est aliquid ab eo intellectum, ad cuius similitudinem domum in materia format. Non est autem contra simplicitatem divini intellectus, quod multa intelligat, sed contra simplicitatem eius esset si per plures species eius intellectus formaretur. Unde plures ideae sunt in mente divina ut intellectae ab ipso.”

essence is one simple thing; there is no implied real internal complexity, but only a rational composition. Divine ideas are the divine essence as it is known by God Himself as imitable.¹⁴

On the other hand, if the ideas were the sole objects of divine intellection (*quod intelligitur*) when God thinks of Himself, then He could not know individuals adequately, and consequently could not exercise his providence and justice. As far as the problem of divine knowledge of individuals is concerned, Aquinas thought that God conceives of not only created natures (which directly correspond to the divine ideas), but also created individuals perfectly. He argued that, since (i) God is the first cause, whose proper effect is being (*esse*), and (ii) it is through his knowledge (*scientia*) that God produces everything,¹⁵ therefore He necessarily conceives of all that He creates:

Cum Deus sit causa rerum per suam scientiam, in tantum se extendit scientia Dei, in quantum se extendit eius causalitas. Unde, cum virtus activa Dei se extendat non solum ad formas, a quibus accipitur ratio universalis, sed etiam usque ad materiam, necesse est quod scientia Dei usque ad singularia se extendat, quae per materiam individuantur.¹⁶

It could not be otherwise, since the intelligible species of the divine intellect are the divine essence itself,¹⁷ which is immaterial, and this is the efficient cause of the individual creatures and of their own metaphysical principles.¹⁸ Individuals fall within the horizon of divine science because God knows perfectly their metaphysical constituents, i.e. form, which is an instantiation of one of the divine ideas, and matter,¹⁹ which is their true principle of individuation.

¹⁴ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 15, a. 2: “[Deus] enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit: unde cognoscit eam secundum omnem modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem eam cognosci ... secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis. Unaquaeque autem creatura habet propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo modo participat divinae essentiae similitudinem. Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae.”

¹⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 8; and q. 22, a. 2, on divine providence.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 11.

¹⁷ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 2.

¹⁸ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 11.

¹⁹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh.* I, q. 44, a. 2. See also above, n. 11.

1.2 *Duns Scotus*

Duns Scotus' discussion of divine ideas shows a completely different approach to the matter.²⁰ Scotus rejects the most common explanation on many important points, and tries to fit the theory into his general philosophy by substituting ideas of individuals for ideas of species and subordinating their existence to God's thought and will. He believes that the traditional interpretation of St Augustine's doctrine is misleading, since it assumes that God thinks of the possibles as they (*qua* ideas) are present in his mind from eternity. According to Scotus, it is just the opposite: the possibles are present (*qua* ideas) in God's mind because He thinks of them. Were the common opinion true, divine ideas would be something real, grounded on mental relations, and to a certain extent they would be independent of the divine intellect. In fact, the principle of knowledge (*ratio intelligendi*) naturally precedes the act of understanding itself and is independent of it; thus, if the divine ideas were *rationes intelligendi*, they would precede and be independent of the act of understanding by which God thinks of his essence as infinitely imitable. Therefore, the ideas would not be the effect of God's intellection of his essence, but the cause, an unacceptable conclusion:

Item, contra primam opinionem specialiter videtur sequi quod illae relationes sint reales, quia ratio intelligendi ut est ratio, praecedit naturaliter intellectionem,—et per consequens quoad nihil quod est eius ut est ratio intelligendi, causatur per intellectionem, nec sequitur intellectionem; si ergo <supple: essentia divina> sub relatione rationis est ratio intelligendi lapidem, illa relatio rationis non producitur in essentia intellectione lapidis, quia praecedit naturaliter illam intellectionem. Ergo illa <scilicet relatio rationis> produceretur per aliam <scilicet intellectionem>. Sed illam <scilicet relationem rationis> non praecedit nisi illa <scilicet intellectio> quae est essentiae ut essentia; hac <scilicet intellectione> non producitur <supple: illa relatio> (quod concedunt); ergo illa relatio erit in essentia ut est ratio, et non per aliquam actionem intellectus.²¹

As a consequence, Scotus gives a description of the *logical* steps of the mental process which precedes the free act of creation, through which God chooses the possibles that will become realities and gives them *esse reale*. These steps are as follows: first, the divine intellect thinks of the divine essence in itself; second, it produces the ideas of the possibles in

²⁰ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 30, qq. 1-2; d. 35, q. unica; and d. 36, q. unica, ed. Vaticana VI, 181-90, 245-270, and 281-290; and *Lectura* I, d. 35, q. unica, and d. 36, q. unica, ed. Vaticana XVII, 445-53, and 468-71.

²¹ Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 35, q. unica, ed. Vaticana VI, 253. According to de Rijk 1975 (*op. cit.*, above n. 2), 208ff., Scotus' view is a development of Henry of Ghent's.

their intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*) and thinks of them; third, the divine intellect compares its own intellections to the intelligibles, and thereby produces a mental relation (*relatio rationis*) for each intelligible; fourth, it reflects on these mental relations and knows them as such.²² 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 St Thomas.

This explanation has the merit of avoiding the two main problems raised by the standard (Thomistic) theory—that is, the presence in God of a plurality of “things” co-eternal with his mind, and the possibility of a perfect knowledge of individuals—since i) the ideas are the objects produced by the mental activity of God, and ii) they are not ideas of universal natures, but of individuals (more precisely, of all producible singular creatures that the divine mind can conceive): “Iuxta hoc additur quod ideae divinae maxime erunt singularium, quia distincte repraesentant omnia alia intelligibilia a Deo.”²³

Yet 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. The relationship between these ideas and the essence is left ambiguous.

What Duns Scotus seems to suggest 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 makeable thing before creating the world since He is an infinitely intelligent agent, and every intelligent agent acts according to some plan.²⁴

²² Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 35, q. unica, ed. Vaticana VI, 258: “Deus in primo instanti intelligit essentiam suam sub ratione mere absoluta; in secundo instanti producit lapidem in esse intelligibili et intelligit lapidem, ita quod ibi est relatio in lapide intellecto ad intellectionem divinam, sed nulla adhuc in intellectione divina ad lapidem, sed intellectio divina terminat relationem ‘lapidis ut intellecti’ ad ipsam; in tertio instanti, forte, intellectus divinus potest comparare suam intellectionem ad quodcumque intelligibile ad quod nos possumus comparare, et tunc comparando se ad lapidem intellectum, potest causare in se relationem rationis; et in quarto instanti potest quasi reflecti super istam relationem causatam in tertio instanti, et tunc illa relatio rationis erit cognita. Sic ergo non est relatio rationis necessaria ad intelligendum lapidem—tamquam prior lapide—ut obiectum, immo ipsa ‘ut causata’ est posterior (in tertio instanti), et adhuc posterior erit ipsa ‘ut cognita’, quia in quarto instanti.”

²³ Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, lib. VII, q. 15, in: *Opera Philosophica*, vol. IV, St. Bonaventure, NY 1997, 299.

²⁴ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, pars 1, qq. 1-2, ed. Vaticana II, 174: “Ostenso esse de proprietatibus relativis primi entis, ulterius ad ostendendum illius primi infinitatem et per consequens esse de ente infinito procedo sic: primo ostendo quod primum efficiens

2. Auriol's Criticisms

1. Auriol accepts the Aristotelian thesis of the absolute simplicity and actuality (*actus purus*) of God; moreover, he also stresses that the divine essence is the only proper object of God's knowledge. On the other hand, following St Augustine, he acknowledges i) that there is a plurality of ideas in God, and ii) that He perfectly knows any individual creature (the only realities in the world), notwithstanding that divine ideas are universal. So apparently he seems to admit the essence of the Thomistic assessment of the theory of ideas. In reality, he tries to remove the tension between the Aristotelian and Christian demands by diminishing the requirements of the Christian horn of the dilemma, choosing to remain as faithful as possible to Aristotelian principles, concepts, and schemes rather than appropriately modify them in order to adapt them to Christian belief, as St. Thomas did. As a consequence, he rejects Duns Scotus' approach to the subject and St Thomas' account of exemplar causality, and proposes a different explanation, where i) much more stress is put on the absolute simplicity of God, and ii) a new conception of the relationships between divine essence and ideas, and between ideas and creatures is worked out.

2. Aquinas' solution is unsatisfactory according to Auriol, because St Thomas' qualification of ideas as that which is understood by God is a mere *petitio principii*, which therefore does not solve the problem of the "real" presence of a multiplicity of "things" in Him. Further, the arguments advanced for expounding God's complete knowledge of singulars *qua* such are ineffective.

Auriol objects: according to St. Thomas' theory the divine essence would be simple and composite at the same time, since Aquinas conceives of divine ideas as *rerum perfectiones* eternally existing in the essence. Consequently, for him each idea is the proper measure (or pattern) of a single set of possible and/or real individuals. Therefore, divine ideas would be not only epistemological principles, but ontological also, and, as such, a plurality of different entities somehow existing in God. This solution

est intelligens et volens ita quod sua intelligentia est infinitorum distincte et quod sua essentia est repraesentativa infinitorum (quae quidem essentia est sua intelligentia), et ex hoc secundo concludetur sua infinitas. Et sic cum triplici primitate ostensa erit quadruplex medium ad ostendendum eius infinitatem. Sed tamen istud quartum medium, scilicet quod primum efficiens est intelligens et volens, ex quo sicut ex quodam medio aliis addito concluditur sua infinitas, suppono quantum ad aliquid usque ad distinctionem 35." See also *ibidem*, 175-88.

fails to achieve its goal, since it is more difficult to understand how a plurality of distinct principles can subsist in an absolutely simple reality than to understand how an absolutely simple reality can be the model imitated (*similitudo*) by everything else:

Sed iste modus dicendi petit principium. Aequalis enim difficultas et impossibilitas esse videtur quod in aliquo simplici perfectiones propriae et distinctae omnium rerum praeexistant et quod illud simpliciter sit similitudo propria omnium rerum per quam omnia in sua distinctione repraesentantur et cognoscuntur. Immo et maior difficultas videtur quod in aliquo simplici perfectiones propriae et distinctae praeeistere possint quam quod unum simpliciter sit similitudo diversorum. Sed nos quaerimus hic quomodo simplex Dei essentia sit similitudo dissimilium et numerorum, ergo hoc declarare per hoc quod in ea praeexistant formae et perfectiones propriae singulorum est difficile, quia est magis difficile declarare.²⁵

Moreover, if creatures were in God like imperfect acts in a perfect one, in the same way as animal is in man (so St Thomas),²⁶ then creatures' patterns would be in God as his principles and metaphysical constituents (*formaliter et quidditative*), and therefore God would be everything—which He certainly is, but metaphorically (*translative*) only, insofar as He is the cause of everything:

Praeterea, animal continetur in homine formaliter et quidditative, unde haec est vera 'homo est animal'; minores etiam numeri continentur in maiori, utpote binarius in trinario potentialiter et per modum partis. Sed manifestum est quod propriae formae creaturarum non continentur in Deo formaliter et quidditative. Non est enim verum quod Deus sit lapis vel leo nisi translative, nec etiam continentur ibi ut partes deitatis. Ergo incongrua est ista: 'sic creaturae sunt in Deo quasi actus imperfecti in actu perfecto, sicut animal in homine, vel binarius in trinario'. Et ideo nec probatur; quamvis qui novit hominem noverit animal, et qui novit Deum ex hoc cognoscat entia secundum proprias rationes.²⁷

In sum, according to Auriol, Aquinas' conception of divine ideas hypothesizes them, so that God's being itself is nothing but the "union" of divine ideas. The problem with such a doctrine is the relationship between the divine essence and ideas, since these latter are conceived of as constitutive parts of the former, and the real objects of divine knowledge.

Nor does Auriol agree with Aquinas' affirmations concerning God's understanding of individuals. The Franciscan notes that St. Thomas' answer is inadequate, since it presupposes that matter is the principle of individuation, whereas matter in itself is as common as form, and only

²⁵ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 2, 795b-796a.

²⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* I, ch. 54; and *STh.* I, q. 14, a. 6.

²⁷ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 2, 796a.

qua individualized by quantity is it the effective principle of individuation. Thus Aquinas is unable to elucidate how God perfectly knows individuals as individuals. His account could justify only a knowledge of individuals as occurrences of a given type (*in ratione individui vagi*)—for instance, God could know Socrates only as a man, but not as this man or that man:

Sed hic modus dicendi non tollit difficultatem. Quamvis enim ex Dei activitate possit a priori probari quod deitas similitudo sit et exemplar, non solum quoad formam, immo quoad materiam, materia vero etiam secundum eos non est principium individuationis nisi in quantum est individuata. Est autem commune hoc omnibus individuis eiusdem speciei, scilicet quod quaelibet componitur ex hac materia et ex hac forma, et per consequens Deus habet similitudinem omnium individuorum quoad materiam et quoad formam. Non tamen per hoc probatur quod divina essentia representet individua ut signata sunt et distincta, sed potius prout conveniunt in natura specifica, quae componitur ex materia et forma, aut in ratione individui vagi, in quantum quodlibet est aliquod hoc compositum ex aliqua hac materia et ex hac aliqua forma.²⁸

St Thomas' theory of ideas fails to justify God's knowledge of individuals as such (*individua ut signata*), as he is unable to find a suitable connection between the thesis of God's perfection and simplicity and that of his direct and intuitive knowledge of individuals. Auriol points out that St Thomas' solution cannot avoid the unwelcome outcome of Aristotle's and Averroes' theological doctrine, according to which God, because of his absolute perfection and simplicity, is ignorant of the particular ways of existence of individuals.²⁹ Aquinas' arguments against this thesis are

²⁸ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 4, a. 3, 817b. As a matter of fact, Auriol thought that the principle of individuation is the form and the matter taken together. The form plays the active role in designating the matter as the particular matter of a given individual, and the matter plays the passive role of being designated as the particular matter of that individual by receiving the form. In other words, Auriol assumes individuality as a *primum*, and consequently denies the necessity of properly explaining individuation. For him, the metaphysical causes of a thing (i.e. particular matter and form) sufficiently account for its singularity—cf. *Petri Aureoli Commentariorum in secundum, tertium, quartum libros Sententiarum Pars secunda*, ed. P. Capullius, Romae 1605, lib. II, d. 9, pars 3, a. 3, 142.

²⁹ On Aristotle's and Averroes' thesis about divine knowledge as interpreted by Auriol see *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 4, a. 2, 813b: "Propterea dixerunt alii, ut Philosophus et Commentator, quod Deus nullo modo cognoscit singularia ut signata, sed solummodo quidditativas rationes omnium et virtutes omnes specificas usque ad indivisibiles et atomas virtutes, ita quod plus sciri non potest nisi signando et demonstrando ac individuando istas virtutes. Quod non est fas aut conveniens bonitati et perfectioni divinae, multipliciter probant. Ista enim notitia quae nullam perfectionem addit, sed forte vilitatem et imperfectionem, non est ponenda in Deo; sed notitia demonstrativa et designativa virtutum omnium generaliter cognitarum specificae et atome nullam perfectionem addit, sed potius concomitantur illam quaedam indignitates. Non enim veritas ista completa, triangulus habet tres <angulos>, perfectius scietur si designative cognoscatur iste vel ille triangulus habere

powerless.³⁰ One can agree i) that God must know perfectly all that He causes and has caused, and ii) that He is the first cause of everything which exists (individuals and their own metaphysical principles included), but it does not necessarily follow from this that He therefore perfectly knows individuals. In fact, this consequence is necessary only if we assume that God knows what He produces (or has produced) as its efficient cause, but in this case his knowledge would be dianoetical (*scientia discursiva*) and not intuitive, since no effect falls within the essence of its efficient cause. This kind of knowledge is clearly at odds with God's perfection and simplicity, since it implies a process of reasoning from premisses to conclusions and consequently a multiplicity of acts of understanding concerning the same object:

Praeterea, arguunt sic: cognitis principiis in quibus constituitur essentia rei, necesse est rem illam cognosci; sed materia designata et forma individuata sunt principia ex quibus constituitur singulare signatum; Dei autem cognitio usque ad materiam, formam et accidentia individuata pertinet, cum omnia sint virtualiter in divina essentia tamquam in prima origine essendi; ergo Deus usque ad cognitionem singularium pertinet. Sed haec ratio deficit, ut praecedens. Non enim continentur ista virtualiter in Deo, nisi quatenus est exemplar, quia Deus non est efficiens secundum opinionem istorum philosophorum; et dato quod esset, non cognoscit Deus res per hoc quod est efficiens, alioquin intelligeret discursive,³¹ sed pro eo quod est exemplar uniforme huius materiae et illius, et huius formae et illius; et ideo non repraesentat ut hoc vel illud, sed tantum absolute secundum istos.³²

There are only two ways of avoiding this aporia: i) one can reformulate the relationships between divine essence and ideas, and between ideas and creatures, or ii) one can assume, as Duns Scotus did, that the ideas are ideas of singulars and not of species. Auriol does not examine this last hypothesis when he discusses Scotus' opinion, but in at least one important passage he, like Aquinas, speaks of divine ideas as *rationes*

tres <angulos>, et sic de omnibus aliis, quam si absolute sciatur omnis triangulus habet tres <angulos> absque signatione illius vel istius. Et similiter de veritate incomplexa patet quod quidditas trianguli non melius scitur cognoscendo hunc triangulum vel illum quam absolute sciendo trianguli definitionem." See also for Auriol's theory of intellectual cognition of singulars, Russell Friedman's contribution to this volume.

³⁰ Cf. *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 4, a. 2, 814b-6b.

³¹ On the connection between knowing as efficient cause and knowing in a dianoetical way see the following passage (*ibid.*, 814b): "Concederent enim quod Deus est causa omnium rerum exemplaris, et ita cognoscit omnia in quantum est similitudo omnium et causa exemplaris, non in quantum efficiens, alioquin sua scientia esset discursiva, non enim in efficiente cognoscitur effectus intuitive, sed <supple: aliquid cognoscitur intuitive> tantum in sua similitudine eminenti."

³² *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 4, a. 2, 814b-5a.

specificae, so implicitly rejecting Duns Scotus' approach.³³ The way he chooses to solve the aporia is to redefine the relationship between the divine essence and creatures by introducing a new notion of similarity (*similitudo*), conceived of as the complement of the relation of imitability, which Auriol takes to be an intrinsic determination of the divine essence.

3. Notwithstanding the rejection of one of the two particular theses of Duns Scotus' view on the subject, the Subtle Doctor's general proposal seems to Auriol more convincing than that of St Thomas, because it is more consistent with the "dogma" of divine simplicity and actuality, insofar as it dispenses with the mental relations (*habitudines*) on which divine ideas would be grounded according to the Thomistic (and common) opinion. Nevertheless, it is insufficient, inasmuch as i) it does not explain how the divine essence, which is absolutely simple, can be the unique model (*similitudo*) of creatures that are totally different from each other, and ii) it (like Aquinas' position) maintains that divine ideas are the object of God's intuitive knowledge, albeit a secondary object, while the divine essence is the primary and immediate object of divine cognition, whereas for Auriol the divine essence is the sole object of divine knowledge, everything else being known by it and in it:

Sed iste modus dicendi, licet in hoc verus sit quod habitudines istas tollit, deficit tamen in duobus. Primo quidem in hoc quod non dat modum nec ostendit possibilitatem istius, quod scilicet essentia, cum sit simplicissima, potest esse similitudo dissimillimorum inter se quales sunt creaturae; nec declarat quomodo aliquid simplex possit esse illimitatum in representando contraria. Secundo vero quia imaginatur quod divina essentia ponat res in esse exemplato et representato ita quod divinus intuitus primo terminetur ad essentiam, secundario vero ad creaturas representatas per essentiam terminetur—cuius oppositum supra multipliciter est ostensum.³⁴

In Auriol's opinion any kind of distinction between God's essence and divine ideas, even if only a formal one, as Duns Scotus claimed, is not only incompatible with divine simplicity, but also logically inconsistent. Affirming that ideas in God are somehow distinct from his essence (and so a secondary object of his knowledge) is equivalent to holding that the image of an object on a mirror and the "presence" of the object in the same mirror are two different "things" (*duo*). Creatures do not have any

³³ Cf. *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 1, 791b-2a: "Deus est omnis entitas et omnis quidditas eminenter tamquam similitudo subsistens omnium naturarum secundum proprias et specificas rationes, in tantum quod intueri divinam essentiam est intueri aequipollenter omnes naturas secundum formas proprias et specificas aequipollenter et amplius quam eminenter."

³⁴ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 2, 794b-5a.

kind of subsistence in God; there is no mental being of a creature (the idea) in God distinct from the divine essence. Therefore the knowledge of the divine essence *qua* imitable does not cause any object of knowledge distinct from the divine essence itself:

Unde non debet intelligi quod divina essentia aliter res exhibeat praesentes, nisi quia ipsa est praesentialitas eminens omnium rerum aequalens divino intuitui quantum si creaturae essent in se ipsis praesentes. Sicut imago quae lucet in speculo non aliter exhibet faciem praesentem nisi quatenus est praesentialitas ipsius faciei. Non enim sunt duo praesentialitas faciei in ipsa imagine et ipsa imago; et similiter non est aliud praesentialitas creaturarum in essentia divina quam essentia ipsa; et ideo non ponit creaturas in esse repraesentato distincto a se, nec est ibi aliqua relatio rationis medianans circa ipsam, cum non sint extrema distincta.³⁵

The only possible conclusion of these analyses is that God's absolute perfection and simplicity are incompatible with i) any presence in Him of something in any way distinct from Himself, and ii) any object of direct knowledge other than the divine essence. The plurality of ideas must therefore be turned into the divine essence without the ideas missing their function in the economy of creation.

3. *Auriol's Theory*

The *pars construens* of Auriol's theory of divine ideas and exemplar causality is aimed at building up a new conception of God's essence in relation to creatures, which can account for both the ordered creation of the world and God's perfect knowledge of individuals. Its keystone is the new notion of *similitudo* that Auriol works out. By means of it, he can solve not only the problem of God's complete knowledge of creatures, but also the problem of the "presence" in Him of a plurality of ideas, insofar as the concept of connotation employed by Auriol in this particular context entails the new notion of *similitudo*.

The point of departure of Auriol's doctrine is the conviction that God's essence, although absolutely simple according to its reality and formal principles (*simplicissimum secundum rem et rationem*), is by itself the unique perfect standard and pattern (*exemplar*) of every single creature, no matter how various and different they are from each other.³⁶ So, according

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 795a.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 796a: "Oportet quod deitas ponatur similitudo eminens et proprium exemplar cuiuslibet entitatis. . . . Deitas est similitudo propria cuiuslibet specificae naturae, non quidem secundum aliam et aliam perfectionem quam habeat in se, aut secundum aliam <et aliam> rationem—ut praedicti <the reference is to St. Thomas, in particular to *STh*.

to Auriol, the divine essence is the only principle of divine creation: ideas do not play any effective role in it. Nor are they the principles (*rationes*) of divine thought—the first of the two functions performed by divine ideas according to Aquinas—since divinity (*deitas*) itself is the necessary and sufficient principle of that. Otherwise, either God's essence would not really be the exemplar cause of everything—in the case of its being the substratum of the ideas (*substrata ratio*)—or it would be divisible—in the case of its being the whole (*ratio totalis*) compounded by the ideas themselves:

Praeterea, aut istae plures rationes se haberent ad rationem deitatis tamquam ad substratam rationem aut tamquam ad rationem totalem cuius essent partes. Sed non potest dari primum, quia tunc non esset Deus causa exemplaris per se et formaliter, sed tantum per modum substrati, in quantum scilicet subiceretur huiusmodi rationibus—hoc autem absonum est. Nec potest dari secundum. Ratio namque deitatis non potest esse totalis, ut dividatur in plures rationes quae integrent et componant, cum sit ratio unius simplicis formae. Ergo dari non potest quod Deus exemplar rerum sit per aliam et aliam rationem.³⁷

The main consequence of this position for the problem of God's knowledge of individuals is that the plurality of ideas becomes a mere plurality of connotation, since ideas are the creatures *qua* present in the mind of God as indirectly signified by the divine essence itself (*connotative* and *denominative*). So we can speak of divine ideas only in terms of instantiations of that relation of one-to-many by means of which creatures are represented by the divine essence as it is their origin and cause. In fact, although absolutely simple in itself, the divine essence is nevertheless manifold, if considered from the point of view of the things which imitate it, since it is the model of all things. For that reason, God's intuition of the divine essence has the divine essence itself as its unique object, and not the ideas, but, on the other hand, directly knowing the divine essence is knowing all the possibles that denominatively derive from it. Thus, to affirm a plurality of ideas in God is only a way of affirming the ontological and epistemological link between the divine essence and the plurality of creatures originated from it:

I, q. 14, a. 6> imaginari videntur—; immo sub una et eadem simplici perfectione, secundum rem et rationem quae importatur per deitatem, <ipsa deitas> exemplar est omnium entitatum. Nec aliqua multitudo secundum rationem concipitur circa deitatem, sed tota ista multiplicitas attenditur in connotatis et concipitur circa creaturas exemplatas." See also: pars 4, a. 3, 820a-b.

³⁷ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 2, 796b.

Licet essentia divina simplicissima sit in se, est tamen plures in connotatis. Quamvis enim essentia, quae terminat intuitum divinum, simplex et una sit tam re quam ratione, nihilominus ea cognita plura dicuntur cognita, non quidem terminative, sed denominative . . . Et propter hoc rationes incommutabiles dicuntur plures, non quin sit una incommutabilis ratio in se quidditative, sed quia ab ipsa unica existente plura denominantur et connotantur—sicut apparebit inferius, cum agetur de multitudinē idearum.³⁸

This thesis is more radical than the common one maintained by 13th and 14th century theologians, such as Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, or Giles of Rome. They appealed to a sort of non-real mode of existence of the divine ideas,³⁹ originating from the relations of imitability holding between the divine essence and the possible creatures, so that the existence of divine ideas is purely of reason. Auriol appears to deny divine ideas even this kind of existence. Divine ideas are not the indirect objects of divine intellection, as St Thomas believed, nor is the divine essence like a mirror where they are present as images of the possible creatures, so that God can know individuals by reflection. Were this the case, knowing his own essence and knowing creatures would be two distinct “acts” (so to speak) in God, performed by means of two different kinds of principles—a conclusion inconsistent with divine simplicity, perfection, and actuality:

Creaturae non sunt obiecta secundaria terminantia intuitum divinum, relucendo tamquam in speculo in divina essentia, sicut videtur fingere imaginatio communis. Quandoque enim aliquid aspicitur in aliquo tamquam in speculo, tunc est ibi alius actus videndi et alia species, sive ratio, qua videtur speculum et qua videtur res in speculo, quamvis concurrant in eodem oculo simul species speculi et species rei. Sed secundum sic ponentes divinus intellectus intuetur creaturas in sua essentia quasi speculo relucentes. Ergo per aliam similitudinem videbit creaturas quam per essentiam, alioquin essentia non se habebit ut speculum. Cum ergo per aliam similitudinem non videat creaturas, patet quod essentia non se habeat per modum speculi. Praeterea, Deus non intelligit creaturas per reflexionem. Actus enim reflexus videtur imperfectior quam directus; sed si divinus intuitus primo ferretur in essentiam et deinde procederet ad creaturas quasi per quoddam speculum, videret eas per reflexionem—quae enim videntur in speculo, videntur per lineam reflexam. Ergo id quod prius.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 2, a. 2, 777b.

³⁹ Cf. Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, Notre Dame, Ind. 1987, 1037.

⁴⁰ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 2, a. 1, 774a. In addition to this, Auriol thinks that this is the genuine intention of St Augustine himself, whose conviction on this particular point would coincide with Aristotle's conception of divine knowledge. Cf. *ibid.*, 774b: “Tertia quoque propositio est quod haec fuit intentio Augustini, et in hoc cum Philosopho concordavit, scilicet quod nihil aliud extra Deum esset in ipsius intuitu obiectivo, quin immo sui ipsius intuitio esset intuitio omnium aliorum acquipollenter et eminenter.” Thus, according to Auriol, the common approach to this matter lacks adequate authoritative support as well.

As a consequence, the statement that God knows creatures (or more generally, something different from Himself) is false, if it means that God's intellection first grasps the divine essence and then creatures, as though God's intuition of Himself and God's intuition of creatures were distinct.⁴¹ In fact, this interpretation implies that divine ideas are the creatures as they are conceived of *terminative* by God—that is, the ideas are the objects intended by God's intellection as He thinks of creatures. According to this account, divine ideas should depend to a certain extent on creatures themselves and have a diminished form of being (*esse diminutum*), necessarily distinct from the divine essence—which certainly is not the case. Therefore Auriol affirms that creatures are known *denominative* by God, that is, by means of a different reality (the divine essence) and according to their relation of dependence upon the divine essence itself:

Ubi considerandum est quod aliquid dicitur intelligi terminative, aliquid vero denominative. Terminative quidem res est quantum ad illud esse quod habet per modum conspicui quod est esse in anima et esse diminutum; denominative vero quantum ad illud esse quod habet in re extra quod verum est et reale. Et licet sit eadem res, non tamen esse et esse intentionale sunt idem esse. Sic ergo Deus non intelligit creaturas terminative, quod ipsae terminent intuitum divinum, nec in esse reali nec in esse intentionali, sed alio terminante, videlicet divina essentia, ipsae dicuntur denominative intelligi—sicut si res posita in esse intentionali, non solum differret secundum esse diminutum a re existente extra, immo secundum esse reale. Constat enim quod tunc res exterior non intelligeretur terminative,⁴² alia re intuitum terminante. Ut verbi gratia, si rosa quae lucet in mente haberet esse reale, sicut habet esse diminutum, ea terminante intuitum intellectus rosae, omnes particulares exterius existentes denominative intelligi dicerentur, et non minus perfecte.⁴³

This relation of one-to-many, holding between the divine essence and the creatures which originate from it, is a relation of similarity.⁴⁴ It also explains how God can know individuals perfectly—even though mediately, through their own ostensive definitions (*demonstratio*). In fact, each individual as such (*signatum*) has its own relation of similarity to the divine

⁴¹ Cf. *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 2, a. 2, 775a-b: “An concedi debeat quod Deus vere et proprie intelligat creaturas aut aliquid aliud extra se. Circa secundum vero considerandum quod Deum intelligere creaturas aut aliquid aliud <extra> se sub uno quidem sensu concedi potest, sub alio vero non potest. Si enim quaeratur an Deus sic intelligat creaturam quod intuitum suum ferat super essentiam, et ex hoc procedat ulterius usque ad creaturam, ita quod sint duo intuita, Deus et creatura, et sit ibi pluralitas ac multitudo intellectorum, et ponat in numerum creatura cum Deo in ratione intellecti; sic nullo modo concedi potest quod Deus intelligat creaturas aut aliquid aliud extra se.”

⁴² The edition reads: *denominative*, but this reading does not make sense.

⁴³ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 2, a. 2, 776b-7a.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 3, a. 2, 796a.

essence, since it is one of the infinite possible imitations of God's essence, and, thanks to its ostensive definition, is clearly distinguishable from any other individual belonging to the same species, even apart from its spatial and temporal determinations:

Deitas est similitudo appropriata omnium individuorum signatorum, non quidem immediate, quasi demonstret ea et signet, sed mediante demonstratione. In quantum enim repraesentat non solum lapidem certum et distinctum in se, sed cum hoc demonstrabilitatem aut demonstrationem ipsius lapidis quam importat hic lapis, in tantum divinus intellectus intelligit hunc lapidem vel illum signatum.⁴⁵

4. *Concluding Remarks*

This survey of Auriol's theory of divine ideas is too general to enable us to draw indisputable conclusions. We can only try to formulate some conjectural ones. Paradoxically, the first and most important one is that Auriol's analysis of the question of divine simplicity is a sort of demolition of the thesis of the existence of divine ideas. *In principio*, there is only one divine essence, but *postea* there will be many creatures of many different types (and there could be many more), each imitating the divine essence according to different aspects and degrees. For Auriol, the divine essence, in its absolute unity and simplicity, is sufficient to justify this passage from the One to the many. His theory does not reserve any real function for the ideas. The imitability proper to the divine essence is more than enough to explain the production of creatures as well as God's knowledge of them. In fact, the *similitudo* which Auriol speaks of is the complement of the relation of imitability: each creature is somehow similar to the divine essence and, conversely, the divine essence is similar to each creature, since it is its model. God, who does not know anything but Himself, can therefore perfectly conceive of each individual in virtue of the fact that each individual is one of the infinite possible imitations of His essence.

Unfortunately, this account presupposes that imitability is a proper feature, and not a relation of reason, of the divine essence, otherwise God could not know creatures by means of his essence. As a consequence, within Auriol's system, creation,⁴⁶ which is the effect of this imitability,

⁴⁵ *Comm. in I librum Sent.*, d. 35, pars 4, a. 3, 820a-b.

⁴⁶ On creation and divine power in Auriol see Lauge Olaf Nielsen, *Dictates of Faith versus Dictates of Reason: Peter Auriole on Divine Power, Creation, and Human Rationality*, in: Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale, 7 (1996), 213-41.

becomes as necessary as the divine essence itself—an evident heresy, which is the price paid by Auriol for his fidelity to Aristotelian philosophy. This final result shows once again the way Christian faith exceeds its own theological systems, whenever they are simple transcriptions of its main contents into the terms of a given rigid philosophical apparatus.

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