



## The Absence of Divine Ideas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*

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### Abstract

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some prominent Thomists questioned whether St. Thomas Aquinas is really committed to a theory of divine ideas. There is no doubt that Aquinas articulates such a theory in his *Sentences Commentary*, *Disputed Questions on Truth*, and *Summa theologiae*. Still, he seems to omit an account of divine ideas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. If St. Thomas thinks divine ideas are necessary for understanding God's knowledge, why would he skip discussing them in this *ex professo* work? This paper will argue two points. First, St. Thomas does articulate a theory of divine ideas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, even though he changes his terminology. His account of divine reasons (*rationes*) is equivalent to a theory of divine ideas. Second, Aquinas changes his vocabulary because of the more apologetic aim of the work. Use of the term 'ideas' would be less effective in dialogue with his Muslim and pagan interlocutors.

### Keywords

St. Thomas Aquinas, Metaphysics, Divine Ideas, God, Divine Knowledge

### Introduction

The significance of St. Thomas Aquinas's account of divine ideas has surfaced on several occasions as a point of controversy in the secondary literature. Some scholars have argued that Aquinas does not need a theory of divine ideas. He includes them as a nod to the venerable tradition of St. Augustine while tacitly undermining the very need for them.<sup>1</sup> Aquinas's discussions of divine ideas invariably follow

<sup>1</sup> See, *inter alia*, Étienne Gilson, *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), pp. 170-183; Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, sixth edition (Paris: Vrin, 1965), pp. 146-148; Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), pp. 71-72; A.D. Sertillanges, *S. Thomas d'Aquin. Somme théologique. Dieu:*

his discussions of divine knowledge. St. Thomas adequately explains God's omniscience through the divine essence in the discussion of divine knowledge, so the discussion of divine ideas is superfluous. This interpretation has the advantage of explaining why divine ideas do not appear in every *ex professo* treatment of divine knowledge, most notably absent in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Finally, in addition to being superfluous, the theory might even be dangerous because divine ideas might be contrary to divine simplicity.

There appear to be a few external reasons for resisting the claim that divine ideas are an unnecessary part of St. Thomas's teaching. If they are useless or dangerous, then 'why did Saint Thomas not see this?'<sup>2</sup> He is a diligent thinker who carefully weighs all the sides of a position before articulating his own account. Aquinas explicitly considers whether divine ideas are contrary to divine simplicity, and he concludes that they are not. Why would he have missed that they are so dangerous? Again, Aquinas is not afraid to argue against St. Augustine at times. Why would he leave divine ideas in his system simply because *Augustinus dixit*?<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Aquinas says in his *Sentences* Commentary that 'he who denies that ideas exist denies that the Son exists.'<sup>4</sup> It is necessary not to hold heretical positions, so divine ideas must be required, not useless or dangerous. Although Aquinas does not speak of heresy in connection with divine ideas in later works, we can be sure that he did not abandon the position that they are necessary. St. Thomas writes in the prologue of the *Summa theologiae*, written after the relevant section of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that his purpose is to instruct beginners, and so replace Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* as the novice theologian's textbook. Students struggle with the *Sententiae* because of the useless multiplication of questions, articles, and arguments.<sup>5</sup> Since including unnecessary questions is contrary to the

*Tome II (Ia 12–17)* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des Jeunes, 1933), pp. 403–405; James Ross, 'Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990), pp. 171–198; Armand Maurer, 'James Ross on the Divine Ideas: A Reply,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991), pp. 213–220; James Ross, 'Response to Maurer and Dewan,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991), pp. 235–243.

<sup>2</sup> Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God according to St. Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> One of the prominent examples of Aquinas bucking the Augustinian tradition is divine illumination. See *De veritate*, q. 1, aa. 1–5, and Armand Maurer, 'St. Thomas and Eternal Truths,' *Medieval Studies* 32 (1970), pp. 91–107; reprinted in Armand Maurer, *Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers*, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 10 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 43–58.

<sup>4</sup> *In I Sent.*, d. 36, q. 2, a. 1, s.c. 2 in *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, edition nova, ed. R.P. Mandonnet, tomus 1 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929), p. 839.

<sup>5</sup> *Summa theologiae* (ST), prologus in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis opera omnia*, t. 4 (Roma: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888), p. 5ab: 'Consideravimus namque huius doctrinae notivios, in his quae a diversis conscripta sunt, plurimum impediri: partim

stated goal of the *Summa theologiae*, why would Aquinas retain a question on divine ideas just fifteen questions into the work if they were not necessary?<sup>6</sup>

These reasons indicate that divine ideas are an integral part of Aquinas's teaching, but they are hardly decisive. This paper looks more closely at St. Thomas's theory of divine ideas by asking why they are absent from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. The answer to this question will have three parts. First, I will overview St. Thomas's treatment of divine ideas, focusing on the accounts found in the *De veritate* and *Summa theologiae*. Second, I will look at Aquinas's understanding of God's knowledge of things other than himself in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, arguing that the theory of divine reasons (*rationes*) found in it is only linguistically different from his theory of divine ideas. Third, I will survey some recent suggestions for the 'absence' of divine ideas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and offer my own argument for their absence. Ultimately, I think we can explain the apparent absence of divine ideas if we consider the *Summa Contra Gentiles*' literary purpose.

## I. St. Thomas on Divine Ideas

Following St. Augustine, St. Thomas says that the Greek term 'idea' should be translated into Latin as 'form or species' (*forma vel species*).<sup>7</sup> By form, we should not understand some intrinsic form, as the soul is the form of human beings. Instead, by 'idea' is understood a separate form toward which something is formed, and this is an exemplar form to whose imitation something is constituted.<sup>8</sup> Such constituting can occur in two ways. In one way, as when a form is the principle of cognizing the thing. In another way, as when a form is the exemplar guiding the production of a thing.<sup>9</sup> Divine ideas are forms in both ways and play both a cognitive role and a causal role in St. Thomas's theory.

Since ideas play both a cognitive role and a causal role, we are led to ask whether the ideas are principles of speculative cognition or practical cognition. St. Thomas argues that speculative and practical

quidem propter multiplicationem inutilium quaestionum, articulorum et argumentorum.' All citations from the Leonine edition of St. Thomas's works will be cited on the following model: *ST I*, prologus (Leonine ed., 4.5ab). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>6</sup> See Louis Geiger, 'Les idées divines dans l'œuvre de S. Thomas,' in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974, Commemorative Studies*, volume 1, ed. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), pp. 181–182.

<sup>7</sup> *De veritate* q. 3, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 22/1.99:159–63). Cf. *ST I*, q. 15, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 4.199a).

<sup>8</sup> *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 22/1.99:163–182).

<sup>9</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 4.199a), esp: 'Forma autem alicuius rei praeter ipsam existens, ad duo esse potest: vel ut sit exemplar eius cuius dicitur forma; vel ut sit principium cognitionis ipsius, secundum quod formae cognoscibilium dicuntur in cognoscente.'

cognition is threefold according to its end. Knowledge can be either purely speculative, purely practical, or partially practical and partially speculative. Things the knower cannot bring about are purely speculative. God knows himself and evil, but he cannot cause himself, and he does not cause evil. Thus, his knowledge of them is speculative. Things the knower does bring about are simply practical. God has practical knowledge of anything that he creates. Between these two extremes are the things that the knower could bring about but does not. When a builder examines the individual parts of a house that cannot exist without each other or considers the house as a whole without ordering that knowledge to operation, his knowledge is partially speculative and partially practical. He considers something that he can make, but not insofar as he can make it. Everything God could create but does not falls into this category.<sup>10</sup>

St. Thomas then correlates the two roles of divine ideas with his discussion of speculative and practical cognition. This correlation results in the distinction between two types of ideas. Insofar as they play a causal role, divine ideas are called ‘exemplars,’ and they pertain to practical cognition. Exemplars are ideas according to which God will create something at some time. Insofar as they play a cognitive role, they are called ‘reasons’ (*rationes*) and pertain to speculative cognition. God has *rationes* of anything he could create regardless of whether he creates it.<sup>11</sup> Having made this distinction, St. Thomas emphasizes the causal role. Strictly speaking, the term ‘idea’ refers only to the exemplars according to which God actually produces creatures. Ideas are called *rationes* only in a broad and extended sense.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *ST I*, q. 14, a. 16 (Leonine ed., 4.197a). In the *De veritate*, St. Thomas articulates a fourfold distinction between speculative and practical knowledge. Knowledge is purely practical when it is actually being ordered and made. It is habitually or practically practical when it could be ordered to action but without the intention to do so. Knowledge is purely speculative when the knower is not naturally suited to produce the objects of the knowledge. It is also speculative when the knower could bring about the things that he knows by his knowledge but is not considering them insofar as they are operable. The builder can consider the properties, genus, and differentiae of a house separately, even though they are never found separately. See *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 22/1.107:85-121). The threefold account in the *Summa theologiae* condenses the second sort of practical knowledge and the second sort of speculative knowledge into one. For a more detailed explanation of this teaching, see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), pp. 4–21, especially the chart on p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 4.204ab), esp.: ‘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 cognoscitur a Deo, etiam si nullo tempore fiat; et ad omnia quae a Deo cognoscuntur secundum propriam rationem, et secundum quod cognoscuntur ab ipso per modum speculationis.’

<sup>12</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 4.204ab). Cf. *De veritate* q. 3, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 22/1.108:163–74). It is worth recalling that St. Thomas has changed his position about speculative and practical cognition. In the *De veritate*, he allows that an idea, properly speaking,

Having determined that an idea is primarily an exemplar, Thomas argues that there are many divine ideas. His argument for this position is taken from final causality. What the principal agent properly intends in any effect is the ultimate end, as an army's order by the general. That which is best in existing things is the good of the universe's order, as is obvious from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* XII. Therefore, God properly intends the order of the universe. However, if the universe's very order is *per se* created by him and intended by him, he must have an idea of the universe's order. The *ratio* of any whole cannot be had unless the proper *rationes* of the parts from which the whole is composed are also had, as the builder could not conceive the house's species unless he had the proper *ratio* of each of its parts. Therefore, there must be proper *rationes* of all things in the divine mind.<sup>13</sup>

Realizing that his conclusion seems contrary to divine simplicity, Thomas immediately explains that this plurality is not repugnant to simplicity. A form in the intellect can exist in two ways. First, it is a principle of the act of understanding. This form is a likeness of the thing understood in the intellect. A form as principle makes the intellect be in act. God's only form as principle is his essence. Thus, his wisdom and art are one.<sup>14</sup> Second, a form is the term of the act of understanding, as when the builder thinks out (*excogitat*) the form of a house through understanding.<sup>15</sup> God has many forms as terms.

God perfectly cognizes his essence; that is, he cognizes it according to every mode by which it is cognizable. The divine essence can be cognized not only as it is in itself but also as it can be participated by a creature according to some mode of likeness. Each creature has a proper species according to which it participates a likeness of the divine essence in some mode. Therefore, insofar as God cognizes his essence as it is imitable by such a creature, he cognizes his essence as the proper *ratio* and idea of this creature. The same is true for every creature. Thus, God understands the proper *rationes* of many things, which are many ideas.<sup>16</sup>

can be virtually practical. He only allows the term's strict sense to apply to what is actually practical in the ST.

<sup>13</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 4.201b-202a).

<sup>14</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2, ad 2 (ed. Leonine, 4.202b).

<sup>15</sup> *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 22/1.104:158-173), esp.: 'Forma enim in intellectu dupliciter esse potest. Uno modo ita quod sit principium actus intelligendi, sicut forma quae est intelligentis in quam est intelligens et haec est similitudo intellecti in ipso; alio modo ita quod sit terminus actus intelligendi, sicut artifex intelligendo excogitate per actum intelligendi et quasi per actum effecta, non potest esse principium actus intelligendi ut sit primum quo intelligatur sed magis se habet ut intellectum quo intelligitur quia per formam excogitatum artifex intelligit quid operandum sit.' St. Thomas makes the same distinction in the *ST* using different terms. He distinguishes the form by which (*qua*) the intellect understands and the form that (*quod*) the intellect understands. See *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 4.202a).

<sup>16</sup> *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 4.202ab). Cf. *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 4.460b).

This response is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it emphasizes that the divine ideas are posited because God must know what he creates. It would be imperfect for him to know what he creates only in a general way. If God is to understand the whole perfectly, he must know how the parts contribute to the whole. If he only knew the whole, God would only know the parts indistinctly and under some confusion.<sup>17</sup> In short, God would be as Averroes described; he would have only indeterminate knowledge of things other than himself.<sup>18</sup> He would be in potency, rather than perfect act. Second, St. Thomas emphasizes that ‘an idea does not name the divine essence insofar as it is an essence, but insofar as it is a likeness or *ratio* of this or that thing.’<sup>19</sup> When God knows his essence, he knows himself perfectly, and he knows all the ways his essence is imitable by creatures as secondary considerations. His understanding precedes any of these creatures’ existence and so is not caused by any of them. It causes them instead.<sup>20</sup> The many respects in which God knows himself as imitable are in God, not creatures, but they are not real respects like the respects distinguishing the persons of the Trinity. Instead, they are rational respects understood by God.<sup>21</sup>

## II. The *Summa Contra Gentiles*

Divine ideas are conspicuously absent from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. There is even irrefutable manuscript evidence that divine ideas were present in earlier drafts of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and Aquinas removed them in the final redaction.<sup>22</sup> This evidence seems to support the view of those who believe that that divine ideas add nothing to the discussion of divine knowledge.<sup>23</sup> A close look at the order of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*’ text and its arguments, however, reveals that the substance of Aquinas’s theory of divine ideas is present, even

<sup>17</sup> See *ST* I, q. 85, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 5.336a): ‘Actus autem perfectus ad quem pervenit intellectus, est scientia completa, per quam distincte et determinate res cognoscuntur. Actus autem incompletus est scientia imperfecta, per quam sciuntur res indistincte sub quadam confusione, quod enim sic cognoscitur, secundum quid cognoscitur in actu, et quodammodo in potentia.’

<sup>18</sup> Averroes, *Aristotelis Opera cum Verrois Commentariis*, vol. 8: *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome* (Venice: Apud Iunctas, 1574), comment 51, fol. 158ra68–b33.

<sup>19</sup> *ST* I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 1 (Leonine ed., 4.202b): “‘idea” non nominat divinam essentiam in quantum est essentia, sed in quantum est similitudo vel ratio huius vel illius rei.’

<sup>20</sup> *ST* I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 3 (Leonine ed., 4.202b).

<sup>21</sup> *ST* I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 4 (ed. Leonine, 4.202b).

<sup>22</sup> For an extensive investigation into the redactions of *SCG* I, c. 53, see Louis B. Geiger, ‘Les rédactions successives de *Contra Gentiles* I, 53 d’après l’autographe,’ in *S. Thomas d’Aquin aujourd’hui* (Bruges, 1963), pp. 221–240, and Boland, pp. 214–225.

<sup>23</sup> See the sources cited in note 1.



though he does not call them ‘divine ideas.’ The language of ‘divine ideas’ is absent, but the teaching is not.

Before delving into St. Thomas’s arguments from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, some comments on the division of questions are in order. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, cc. 44–77 is St. Thomas’s most extended discussion of divine knowledge. For the most part, these chapters treat the questions concerning God’s knowledge in the same order as St. Thomas treats them in his other *ex professo* works. A notable exception to this similarity is cc. 51–54.<sup>24</sup> The order of Aquinas’s presentation in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, cc. 49–57 and *Summa theologiae* I, q. 14, aa. 5–7 differs. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, cc. 49–50 and *Summa theologiae* I, q. 14, aa. 5–6, St. Thomas argues that God knows things other than himself with a proper cognition. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas immediately asks whether God’s knowledge is discursive in a. 7. However, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he delays the question of discursive knowledge until chapters 55–57.<sup>25</sup> Between c. 50, and c. 55, St. Thomas takes a detour to ask how God can know a multitude of objects.

At first glance, this detour does not seem to fit in the progression of the inquiry. Aquinas begins c. 50 by pointing out Avicenna’s error that God only has universal cognition of things other than himself, i.e., he knows them only insofar as they are beings. He spends the rest of the chapter arguing that God cognizes all other things as they are distinct from each other and God.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, arguing *that* God has distinct knowledge of things other than himself is not the same as explaining *how* God has such distinct knowledge, but some of the arguments in c. 50 seem to answer the latter question too.

Whatever cognizes something perfectly cognizes everything that is in it. God perfectly cognizes himself. Therefore, he cognizes everything that is in him according to active potency. All things according to their proper forms are in him according to active potency since he is the principle of every being. Therefore, he has proper cognition of all things.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Geiger, ‘Les Idées Divine,’ p. 198: ‘Cependant il n’est pas difficile de voir que les chapitres 51–54 forment un bloc que interrompt l’exposé.’ Chapters 60–62, which treat divine truth, are also an exception to the pattern, but this difference is not relevant to a discussion of divine ideas.

<sup>25</sup> Strictly speaking, these questions are phrased oppositely. *SCG* I, c. 55 asks whether God understands all things simultaneously, whereas *ST* I, q. 14, a. 7 asks whether God’s knowledge is discursive. This variation does not alter the fact that they are addressing the same question.

<sup>26</sup> *SCG* I, c. 50 (ed. Leonine, 13.144a1-8).

<sup>27</sup> *SCG* I, c. 50 (ed. Leonine, 13.144b41–48): ‘Praeterea. Quicumque cognoscit perfecte aliquid, cognoscit omnia quae sunt in illo. Sed Deus cognoscit seipsum perfecte. Ergo cognoscit omnia quae sunt in ipso secundum potentiam activam. Sed omnia secundum proprias formas sunt in ipso secundum potentiam activam: cum ipse sit omnis entis principium. Ipse igitur habet cognitionem propriam de omnibus rebus.’

Given this argument, the answer to how God knows a multitude of things seems clear. He knows them because all their proper forms are in him. Thomas offers a similar argument in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 6, and proceeds directly to the question of discursive knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Why does he proceed directly to the question of discursive knowledge in the *Summa theologiae*, but feels compelled to offer more arguments explaining how God knows a multitude of things in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*?

I submit that Thomas's progression of questions differs in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* because he has divine ideas in mind. Thomas announces at the beginning of *Summa theologiae* I, q. 14 that he will treat the divine ideas in its own question.<sup>29</sup> Thus, he delays his full explanation for *how* God knows a multitude until q. 15. Since the *Summa Contra Gentiles* makes no such announcement, Aquinas must account for how God knows many things immediately after he argues that God distinctly cognizes everything. It is not enough to say that the proper forms of everything preexist in God. By itself, this claim merely delays the explanation of *how* God knows many things because it leaves unexplained *how* the proper forms of everything preexist in God. Aquinas must explain the metaphysical structure of this preexistence especially because it is not apparent why such a plurality of forms is not contrary to divine simplicity.

As a result of this obligation, Thomas proceeds in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, cc. 51–52 to investigate various ways to understand the multitude of intellectual objects in the divine mind. Many of them are problematic. If each thing understood had a distinct being in God, God's essence would be a certain multitude, or it would undergo addition such that there would be accidents in God. If these intelligible forms exist in themselves as Plato supposed, then God would be in potency and consult another to gain knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

These solutions are contrary to the simplicity and perfection of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, so St. Thomas proposes in c. 53 that we diligently inspect how things understood exist in the intellect. When we know external things, the thing understood does not exist in our intellect according to its proper nature. We need a species in our intellect that is simultaneously a likeness of the thing known and the principle of our understanding, making our intellect actual.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *ST I*, q. 14, a. 6 (ed. Leonine, 4.176b). In this text, Thomas specifies that each thing's proper nature consists in its participation in some mode of divine perfection. God perfectly cognizing himself entails cognizing all the ways things can participate in him. The emphasis on participation is perhaps a little clearer than the 'active potency' described in *SCG I*, c. 50. However, the core of the argument is the same: God has proper cognition of other things because he knows how things can proceed from him.

<sup>29</sup> *ST I*, q. 14, prologus (ed. Leonine, 4.166a).

<sup>30</sup> *SCG I*, cc. 51–52 (ed. Leonine, 13.148a1–b39).

<sup>31</sup> *SCG I*, c. 53 (ed. Leonine, 13.150a1–b2).



In addition to the intelligible species, the intellect forms a certain intention of the thing understood, which is its *ratio*, which the definition signifies. This process is necessary because the intellect is indifferent to the presence or absence of the thing. The intellect understands the thing as separate from material conditions, without which conditions the thing does not actually exist (*in rerum natura non existit*). The separation could not occur unless the intellect formed an intention for itself. Since it is a quasi-term of intelligible operation, this intention is other than the intelligible species that makes the intellect be in act. Both the intelligible species and the intention are likenesses of the thing. However, the intelligible species is the principle of intellectual operation, and the intention is the term of intellectual cognition. The intellect can only form an intention of the thing because the intelligible species is a likeness of the exterior thing. Moreover, because the intention is like the thing, it follows that the intellect forms the intention in order to understand the thing itself.<sup>32</sup>

Turning to the divine intellect, St. Thomas notes that it understands no other species than its essence. Moreover, the divine essence is a likeness of all things. Thus, it follows that the conception of the divine intellect, as it understands itself, which is its Word, is a likeness of God himself understood and of all the things of which the divine essence is a likeness. Therefore, through one intelligible species, which is the divine essence, and through one understood intention, which is the Divine Word, God can understand many things.<sup>33</sup>

Having argued that the supremely simple divine essence is the likeness of all intelligible things through his one intention in c. 53, St. Thomas argues in c. 54 how this likeness is possible. He begins by noting that this problem is challenging: ‘it can seem difficult or impossible to someone that one and the same simple thing, like the divine essence, is the proper *ratio* or likeness of diverse things.’<sup>34</sup> The problem still lingers, and, as Msgr. John Wippel notes, ‘unless we resolve this, we may conclude that God has only a general or universal knowledge of things.’<sup>35</sup> Aquinas continues, the divine intellect comprehends in itself the perfections (*nobilitates*) of all beings, not through composition, but through perfection. Every form, whether proper or common, is a certain perfection. It does not include imperfection except as it falls short of true being (*esse*). Therefore, the divine intellect can comprehend what is proper to each thing in its essence by understanding how each thing imitates the divine essence and the way each thing falls short of the

<sup>32</sup> *SCG* I, c. 53 (ed. Leonine, 13.150b3–151a11).

<sup>33</sup> *SCG*, I, c. 53 (ed. Leonine, 13.151b1–11).

<sup>34</sup> *SCG* I, c. 54 (ed. Leonine, 13.154a1–4): ‘difficile vel impossibile alicui videri potest quod unum et idem simplex, ut divina essentia, sit propria ratio sive similitudo diversorum.’

<sup>35</sup> Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, The Etienne Gilson Series, n. 16 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), p. 26.

divine essence. Thus, by understanding his essence as imitable through the mode of life and not the mode of cognition, God has the proper form of a plant. Furthermore, if he understands his essence as imitable through the mode of cognition and not the mode of intellect, he has the proper form of an animal. The same follows for the other modes.<sup>36</sup>

From this argument, he says, it is clear that the divine essence, insofar as it is absolutely perfect, can be had as the proper *ratio* of singulars, and God can have proper cognition of them all. Since the proper *ratio* of one thing is distinguished from the proper *ratio* of another, and distinction is the principle of plurality, it is necessary to consider a certain distinction and plurality of *rationes* in the divine intellect. Consequently, since this obtains according as God understands the proper respect of assimilation that each creature has to him, it follows that the *rationes* of things in the divine intellect are not many or distinct except insofar as God cognizes things to be assimilable to him in many and diverse ways. St. Thomas concludes the chapter by noting that this reasoning is what St. Augustine had in mind when he said God makes man and horse according to different *rationes* and that things' *rationes* are many in the divine mind. Moreover, in some way, this reasoning saves Plato's opinion of ideas, according to which opinion all things that exist in material things are formed.<sup>37</sup>

Thomas's solution that God's simple essence is the proper *ratio* or likeness of all intelligible things relies on a distinction parallel to the one we saw above between form as principle and form as term. The divine essence is the only intelligible species for the divine intellect, i.e., its only principle. From this one intelligible species, the divine intellect 'forms in itself a certain *intentio* of the thing understood, which is its *ratio*, which the definition signifies.'<sup>38</sup> The *intentio* seems to serve the same role as the form as term. God has one *intentio* that entails many *rationes*. But why does Thomas use a new term when he could have used the distinction between an intelligible species as principle and an intelligible species as term as he did in the analysis above?<sup>39</sup> What does *intentio* add that intelligible species as term does not?

This answer to this question can be found in Aquinas's discussion of the eternal generation of the Divine Word in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, c. 11. He argues that intellectual life has various levels of

<sup>36</sup> *SCG* I, c. 54 (ed. Leonine, 13.154b26–155a25), esp.: 'Intellectus igitur divinus id quod est proprium unicuique in essentia sua comprehendere potest, intelligendo in quo eius essentiam imitetur, et in quo ab eius perfectione deficit unumquodque: utpote, intelligendo essentiam suam ut imitabilem per modum vitae et non cognitionis, accipit propriam formam plantae.'

<sup>37</sup> *SCG* I, c. 54 (ed. Leonine, 13. 155a25–155b19).

<sup>38</sup> *SCG* I, c. 53 (ed. Leonine, 13.150b4–6): 'format in seipso quandam intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipsius, quam significat definitio.'

<sup>39</sup> Geiger, 'Les Idées Divines,' 200: 'Ici, il ne se contente pas de distinguer entre l'espèce en tant que forme actualisante et en tant qu'elle est objet.'

perfection corresponding to diverse degrees of potency in self-knowledge. Intellectual life is the supreme and highest grade of life because it reflects upon itself and can understand itself. Among intellectual lives, God's intellectual life is the highest because his understanding is not other than his *esse*. Thus, his understood *intentio* is the divine essence itself. Aquinas then defines an understood *intentio* as 'that which the intellect conceives in itself of the thing understood.'<sup>40</sup> In man, an understood *intentio* is neither the thing understood itself nor the substance of the intellect itself. Instead, it is a certain conceived likeness of the thing. The understood *intentio* names an interior word that is signified by an exterior word. An *intentio* is "the intelligible content (*ratio*) of the thing, which the definition signifies."<sup>41</sup> An intention is the term of the intellect's understanding. Thus, Thomas distinguishes an *intentio* from an understood *intentio*: 'it is apparent that understanding the thing is other than understanding the understood intention itself, which the intellect makes when it reflects upon its work.'<sup>42</sup> An *intentio* is the product of a direct act of understanding, and an understood *intentio* is formed by intellectual reflection. The latter appears when the intellect looks back upon its work.

In God, since his *esse* and understanding are the same, the understood *intentio* is the same as his intellect. Moreover, because his intellect is the thing understood when he understands himself, he understands all things. When God understands himself, his intellect, the thing understood, and the understood *intentio* are the same.<sup>43</sup> And since what is understood *qua* understood must be in the intellect, God must be in his understanding *qua* understood. What is in the understanding is an understood *intentio* and word. Thus, by God's self-understanding, the Word of God is begotten.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas justifies his claim that the Word of God is begotten by God's self-understanding by identifying the being of a word interiorly conceived with an understood *intentio*. As with his understood *intentio*, the being of God's interiorly conceived word is the very act of being understood. An interiorly conceived word, then, is a certain *ratio* and likeness of the *thing* understood. This is as true for the Word of God as it is for a mental word conceived by a human intellect. When the interior word is a likeness of another as the principle of that other, it is an exemplar. When the interior word is a likeness of another as to a

<sup>40</sup> *SCG* IV, c. 11 (ed. Leonine 15.32): 'Dico autem *intentionem intellectam* id quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta.'

<sup>41</sup> *SCG* I, c. 53 (ed. Leonine, 13.150b5): 'ratio ipius, quam significat definitio.'

<sup>42</sup> *SCG* IV, c. 11 (ed. Leonine, 15.32b35–38): 'apparet quod aliud est intelligere rem, et aliud est intelligere ipsam intentionem intellectam, quod intellectus facit dum super suum opus refligitur.' From this difference, Thomas concludes that the sciences that deal with things (metaphysics, etc.) are other than the science that deals with intentions (logic).

<sup>43</sup> *SCG* IV, c. 11 (ed. Leonine, 15.32b45–33a3).

<sup>44</sup> *SCG* IV, c. 11 (ed. Leonine, 15.33a35–50).

principle, it is an image. The likeness existing in the artist's mind is both the principle of his operation and his artwork's exemplar. Since God's self-understanding is the principle of all things understood by him (by intellect and will), and since the principle of all things understood by God is the Word of God, that Divine Word is compared to all things understood by God as an exemplar.<sup>45</sup>

Several conclusions follow from this explanation of *intentio*. First, an understood *intentio* is not merely the thing understood. It is conceived in the intellect as an act of reflection upon the thing understood. The thing understood by God is his essence, i.e., himself. By a certain reflective act, as it were, God then forms the understood *intentio* and *rationes* of all the things that can have a likeness to his essence. These likenesses can, by an act of will, be exemplar causes. Since there are many ways of being like the divine essence, there are many *rationes*. Second, a divine understood *intentio*, which must be in the Word of God, is the exemplar of whatever God wills (or could will) to create. The *rationes* of all things are in God as in an exemplar cause, and they only exist because they were first in God's understood *intentio*.

From these two conclusions, we should say that Aquinas's theory of divine *rationes* in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is only linguistically different from his theory of divine ideas in other texts. The *rationes* in the divine intellect are the exemplar causes of everything that comes forth from God. Thus, as Wippel says, Aquinas's 'defense of a plurality of divine reasons for individual creatures is equivalent to a defense of a plurality of divine ideas.'<sup>46</sup> The fact that he uses the word '*ratio*' instead of '*idea*' is of little consequence. St. Augustine argues that '*ratio*' is not an excellent translation for the Greek term '*idea*' because '*ratio*' is primarily used to translate *logos*. However, he admits that whoever wants to use *ratio* still gets the same message across. St. Augustine even uses the term *ratio* in addition to the terms *idea*, *forma*, and *species* to explain the divine ideas.<sup>47</sup> St. Thomas, too, has seen fit to describe divine ideas using the less accurate—but still appropriate—term *ratio*.

### III. The Absence of Divine Ideas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*

If Aquinas's theory of divine *rationes* in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is, in fact, a theory of divine ideas, why would he switch to the less appropriate term? Scholars have offered several suggestions for this

<sup>45</sup> *SCG* IV, c. 11 (ed. Leonine, 15.34a51–b21), esp.: 'esse autem Verbi divini interius concepti, sive intentionis intellectae, est ipsum suum intelligi.'

<sup>46</sup> Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, p. 28. Cf. Geiger, 'Les idées divines,' p. 203–04.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *De div. qq.* 83, q. 46, n. 2 (PL 40.30).

change. Louis Geiger argues that Thomas had been utilizing the more Aristotelian vocabulary of intelligible species. So, he sticks to a more Aristotelian expression when he needed to account for a distinction between the species as actualizing form and the object known.<sup>48</sup> Wippel holds that Thomas does not speak of ideas because his primary concern in that section of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is to show how God can know many creatures without compromising his unity and simplicity. He is concerned with the cognitive role only, not the causal role. As we saw in the first section, Aquinas thinks that strictly speaking, divine ideas perform the causal role as exemplar causes. Thus, it is not surprising that he would choose a term other than ‘divine idea’ since he only speaks of the cognitive role.<sup>49</sup> Vivian Boland concurs with Wippel’s analysis, and he adds that Thomas became more sensitive to divine simplicity and Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s theory of ideas. The presence of the term ‘idea’ in prior editions of I, c. 54 ‘perhaps seemed too platonic.’<sup>50</sup> Aquinas did not feel the need to save the word ‘idea’ since he could express the same theory with the term *ratio*.

Gregory Doolan also reaffirms Wippel’s reasoning, and he adds that the use of the word *ratio* is crucial for understanding the sort of plurality that Thomas wishes to attribute to the divine ideas. The multiplicity of divine ideas is a multiplicity according to reason, not according to reality, i.e., a logical multiplicity. Thus, ‘it might be tempting to dismiss this multiplicity as *merely* logical and, hence, of no philosophical significance.’<sup>51</sup> We should not give in to this temptation. The plurality of ideas is rooted in the ontological reality that the divine essence can be imitated in many ways.<sup>52</sup> The multiplication of *rationes* in God is no human invention. It precedes all creation and accounts for the distinction in things: ‘there is a plurality of natures in things only inasmuch as there is first a plurality of ideas *in* God.’<sup>53</sup> The choice of *ratio* over ‘idea’ emphasizes this point. Not only does a multiplicity of *rationes* not contradict divine simplicity, but it is also necessary if God is to know a multitude of objects.

<sup>48</sup> Geiger, ‘Les idées divines,’ p. 204.

<sup>49</sup> Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, p. 29. This reason is plausible, but it does not fully explain why Thomas does not speak of ideas in *SCG* II or IV. I can see only two ways to account for this absence. The first is to say that since he began speaking of *intentio* and *rationes* in *SCG* I, he chose to be consistent in his language. The second is the suggestion that I will introduce *infra*.

<sup>50</sup> Boland, pp. 224–25.

<sup>51</sup> Doolan, p. 115.

<sup>52</sup> See *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3 (ed. Leonine, 22.1.105:244–59).

<sup>53</sup> Doolan, p. 117. Emphasis original. Cf. Vincent P. Branick, ‘The Unity of the Divine Ideas,’ *The New Scholasticism* 42 (1968): p. 171n1: ‘It is not up to us to choose the multiplicity or not. There is a structure of reality which precedes our intellection and which forces us to consider God in a multiplicity of ideas, as long as we are working with ideas.’

These reasons are good, but I would like to add one more possible explanation for omitting the word ‘idea’ in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Thomas might not have included a systematic treatment of divine ideas because it would not have been as conducive to the work’s purpose. Unlike his other works, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* has a more apologetic aim.<sup>54</sup> The work is meant to promote the truth of the Catholic faith by removing contrary errors. Since many of these errors are held by Muslims and pagans, who do not admit the authority of Scripture, it is necessary to have recourse to the common authority of natural reason.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*’ first three books are explicitly philosophical and refer to Scripture only in passing at the end of some chapters.<sup>56</sup> Since reason falls short of some divine truths, such as the fact that God is three and one, philosophical reasoning cannot demonstrate such truths.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Thomas says that his intention is not so much to convince his interlocutor by overwhelming arguments as it is to resolve the arguments that his interlocutor has against the truth.<sup>58</sup> Whenever the truth of the matter is only available by faith, it is sufficient to show that the Christian position is not contrary to reason. If it were contrary to reason, then it would have to be false. If it is consistent with reason, then it cannot be rejected out of hand.

At first glance, this apologetic explanation may seem unhelpful because the divine ideas are not beyond philosophical speculation. Divine

<sup>54</sup> Some argue that Thomas intended the work to be used only to convert the Muslims and pagans. I think Fr. Jean-Pierre Torrell is right to criticize those who reduce the book to such an end (*Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin*, vol. 1, *Sa personne et son œuvre*, Nouvelle édition profondément remaniée [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2015], pp. 153–56). Nevertheless, we must take Thomas seriously when he claims that ‘propositum nostrae intentionis est veritatem quam fides Catholica profitetur, pro nostro manifestere, errores eliminando contrarios’ (*SCG* I, c. 2 [ed. Leonine, 13.6a14–b1]). He intends this book to be an apology. Thomas writes the *SCG* to defend the truth against anyone who would reject it. Everyone who reads this work is meant to convert from his errors to the truth. Thus, I could agree with Ferdinand van Steenberghen when he suggests that ‘Thomas écrit manifestement pour les penseurs chrétiens (théologiens ou philosophes) attachés à leur foi; il n’est pas invraisemblable qu’il ait conçu spécialement la *Somme contre les Gentils* pour l’usage de personnes destinées à prendre contact avec les milieu intellectuels «infidèles», principalement dans des pays musulmans’ (*La philosophie au XIIIe siècle*, deuxième édition, Philosophes médiévaux 28 [Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1993], p. 290). I am more inclined, however, to agree with R.-A. Gauthier when he writes (contrary to his earlier opinion), that ‘n’est pas une intention d’apostolat *immédiat et limité*, mais une intention de sagesse à portée apostolique universelle’ (*Introduction Historique à S. Thomas d’Aquin. Contra Gentiles*, trans. R. Bernier and M. Corvez, vol. 1 [Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1961], p. 87).

<sup>55</sup> *SCG* I, c. 2 (ed. Leonine, 13.6a14-b22), esp.: ‘... propositum nostrae intentionis est veritatem quam fides Catholica profitetur, pro nostro modulo manifestare, errores eliminando contrarios ... . quia quidam eorum, ut Mahmetistae et pagani, non convenient nobiscum in auctoritate alicuius Scripturae ... . necesse est ad naturalem rationem recurrere, cui omnes assentire coguntur.’

<sup>56</sup> *SCG* I, c. 9 (ed. Leonine, 13.22b16-22).

<sup>57</sup> *SCG* I, c. 3 (ed. Leonine, 13.7a10-b7).

<sup>58</sup> *SCG* I, c. 9 (ed. Leonine, 13.22a13-17).



ideas are a properly philosophical subject of inquiry because they are exemplar causes. It would have been philosophically appropriate for Aquinas to include divine ideas in his discussion in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Nevertheless, I do not think that including divine ideas would have been more conducive to his goal.

Dialogue is always best served when the parties agree upon their terms. Thomas names Muslims and pagans as some of his dialogue partners in the work. He has in mind the pagan, Aristotle, the Muslims, Avicenna and Averroes, and their intellectual descendants. This fact matters for two reasons. First, the way that Christians use the term ‘ideas’ is foreign to his interlocutors.<sup>59</sup> If he wants to uproot his interlocutors’ errors and replace them with the truth, why would Thomas introduce a foreign vocabulary into the work? To speak in such jargon would not be conducive to his project. His interlocutors (at least in their Latin translations) are comfortable speaking in terms of *intentio*.<sup>60</sup> Aquinas uses this terminology in *SCG* I, c. 53, and tells the reader that the understood intention of the thing is the thing’s *ratio*, which the definition signifies.<sup>61</sup> I think Aquinas insists that an *intentio* is a *ratio* for two reasons. First, Aquinas uses *ratio* in his other works in connection with divine ideas and he does so because that is Augustine terminology. So, familiarity with *ratio* can serve as a bridge to the Christian understanding of the term *idea*. Second, the term *ratio* gives a hint to the sort of plurality Thomas understands divine ideas to have. Since God has many *rationes* insofar as he understands his essence to be imitable, divine ideas are relations of imitability. And these relations are not real relations, but relations of reason, that is, relations that follow upon an

<sup>59</sup> Aristotle consistently critiques the Platonic use of *idea* (*ydea*) in many places. See, *inter alia*, *Ethica Nicomachea* I, c. 6, 1096a11–97a14 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, 26/3.146–149), *Metaphysica*. I, c. 9, 990a32–93a10 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, 25/3.2.35–42), *Metaphysica* VII, c. 6, 1031a29–32a12 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, 25/3.2.141–42), *Metaphysica* VII, c. 14, 1039a25–b19 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, 25/3.2.160–61). Averroes echoes these critiques at *In Moralium Nicomachiorum Expositio* I, c. 6 (in *Aristoteles opera cum Averrois comentariis* [Venice Iunctina, 1553], 4va–4rb), *Commentaria in libros Metaphysicorum* I (*In I Met.*), comm. 25–49 (Iunctina, VIII.9rb–13va), *In VII Met.*, comm. 20–21 (Iunctina, VIII.80ra–81ra), *In VII Met.*, comm. 51–52 (Iunctina, VIII.94rb–vb).

<sup>60</sup> See, *inter alia*, Avicenna, *Liber de prima philosophia sive scientia divina* (*Met.*), I.5 vol. 1, ed. Simone van Reit (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 1:4; Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, V.5, vol. 2 ed. Simone van Reit (Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. 129:66–69. Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros* III (*In III De anima*), comm. 5 (Crawford, 387 and 411): ‘diffinitio igitur intellectus materialis est illud quod est in potentia omnes intentiones formarum materialium universalium . . . intellectus agens facit intentiones in potentia intellectas in actu ita quod recipit eas intellectus materialis.’ For more on Averroes’s use of *intentio*, see David Wirmer, ‘Averroes on Knowing Essences,’ in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson and Matteo Di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 116–37.

<sup>61</sup> *SCG* I, c. 53 (Leonine ed., 13.150b3–6): ‘Uterius autem considerandum est quod intellectus, per speciem rei formatus, intelligendo format in seipso quondam intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipius, quam significant definitio.’

act of the intellect and do not result in a real multiplicity or division. As Avicenna himself notes, relations of reason can be multiplied *ad infinitum* without positing any real plurality in the thing.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Thomas uses his interlocutors' vocabulary to argue that positions they are already willing to hold (i.e., that God knows himself perfectly) entail more conclusions than they were initially willing to accept.

Second, divine simplicity and unity are paramount for Aristotle, Avicenna, and Averroes.<sup>63</sup> Each admits divine knowledge and argues that all things have God as their source, but each does so with a great admixture of error because he wants to preserve divine simplicity. In the name of divine simplicity, they conclude either that God has no knowledge of creatures or that he only knows them in a general, imperfect, or indeterminate way.<sup>64</sup> Thomas wished to correct their error concerning divine knowledge, but he had to express the correction in a way that they would accept as faithful to divine simplicity. Any solution that hinted of divine complexity would have immediately turned his opponents away. Since his interlocutors would understand the word 'idea' first and foremost in terms of Platonic ideas, using the term 'idea' would make his task more difficult. Platonic ideas are outside of God's mind, so if God required such ideas to know creatures, he would be in potency to know and, therefore, imperfect. St. Thomas chose to use the term *ratio* instead of 'idea' because he thought that *ratio* would be more effective at proving his point and avoided certain objections. Since he could use the terms synonymously, he chose the term with less philosophical baggage.

This apologetic explanation should be added to Geiger, Wippel, Boland, and Doolan's explanations because it makes more sense of Thomas's claim at the end of *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, c. 54 that a theory of divine *rationes* saves Plato's theory of ideas, according to which all things that exist in material things are formed.<sup>65</sup> The account of divine *rationes* Aquinas had been articulating is similar to Plato's theory in that the *rationes* are certain exemplar causes in imitation of which

<sup>62</sup> Avicenna, *Met.*, III, c. 10 (van Reit ed, I.180:40–182:85). Aquinas refers to this text explicitly in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 1 (Leonine ed., 22/1.116:69–73), and he alludes to it in *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2, co. and ad 4 (Leonine ed., 4.202)

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle, *Met.*, XII, c. 7 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, XXV/3.2.259): 'Ostensum est autem et quia magnitudinem nullam contingit habere hanc substantiam, verum sine parte et indivisibilis est.' Avicenna, *Met.* VIII, c. 4 (van Reit, II.399:00–01): 'Dico igitur quod necesse esse non potest esse eiusmodi ut sit in eo compositio.' In VIII, c. 5, Avicenna refers to the Necessary Existent as 'the One' (van Reit ed., II.505:7). Averroes, *In XII Met.*, comm. 41 (Iunctina, VIII.152ra–153ra).

<sup>64</sup> For their views on God's knowledge, see Aristotle, *Metaphysica* XII, c. 9, 1074b15–75a4 (*Aristoteles Latinus*, 23/3.2.264–66); Avicenna, *Met.* VIII, c. 6 (van Reit ed., 412–22); Averroes, *In XII Met.*, comm. 51 (Iunctina, VIII.157va–158rb).

<sup>65</sup> *SCG* I, c. 54 (ed. Leonine, 13.155b16–19): 'In quo etiam aliquialiter salvatur Platonis opinio ponentis *ideas*, secundum quas formarentur omnia quae in rebus materialibus existunt.' Emphasis original.

other things come to be. The mention of the term ‘ideas’ and exemplar causality together lends credence to Wippel’s explanation, but it also is a subtle way for St. Thomas to introduce his Muslim and pagan interlocutors to a Christian way of expressing the matter. Having argued that the plurality of *rationes* in the mind of God is required, Thomas adds this line as if to tell his interlocutors, ‘When you hear Christians speaking of divine ideas, realize that they mean nothing more than what I have said here about *rationes*. Plato is right that ideas are the forms according to which all things are made, but they do not exist separately from God. Divine ideas are *rationes* in the divine mind.’

### Conclusion

It is quite noticeable that St. Thomas does not devote a section of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* to the divine ideas as he does in every other *ex professo* treatment of the issue. This absence becomes even more conspicuous considering that an autographed manuscript proves that *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, c. 53 underwent three revisions. An explicit mention of the divine ideas appears in all but the last redaction.<sup>66</sup> Does the removal of divine ideas from the work signal that they are not necessary? Was St. Thomas, as Gilson suggests, merely using them out of deference to tradition?<sup>67</sup> No. As is clear from Aquinas’s other *ex professo* treatments, divine ideas are first and foremost forms that are the exemplar causes of the things that God wills to create. Secondly, divine ideas are forms that are the *rationes* by which God knows all possible creatures. God has only one principle of his understanding, namely, the divine essence. Nevertheless, he has many forms as the terms of his understanding. A single idea cannot fulfill his perfect and distinct cognition of every possible creature.

St. Thomas upholds these same principles of divine knowledge in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. The divine essence is the only intelligible species and principle of God’s knowledge. However, he also has an understood intention that is the term of his intellectual operation, which is the Divine Word. This understood intention comprehends the divine essence through the mode of perfection and comprehends all the ways possible creatures could imitate it. Since the proper *ratio* of one

<sup>66</sup> For the manuscript, see ed. Leonine, 13.20\*–22\*. For an analysis of the revisions, see Louis B. Geiger, ‘Les rédactions successives,’ pp. 221–240, and Boland, pp. 214–225.

<sup>67</sup> Gilson, *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne*, pp. 173–74: ‘Pourtant, il est à peine exagéré de dire qu’au fond, tout ce que Saint Thomas a dit des Idées était dans son esprit une concession de plus faite du langage d’une philosophie qui n’était pas vraiment la sienne. C’était assui, n’en doutons-pas, la reconnaissance de l’auctorité théologique de Saint Augustin.’

imitation is distinguished from the proper *ratio* of another imitation, God has many *rationes*, one for each imitation.

The doctrine is the same, but the terminology is different. I think St. Thomas makes this change to speak more persuasively to his Muslim and pagan interlocutors. Rather than have the word 'idea' be a stumbling block to the dialogue, Aquinas switches to a term that is less accurate of itself but more appropriate for the context.

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