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THE THEORY OF IDEAS ACCORDING TO FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES

COMMENTARY ON THE SENTENCES (CONFLATUS), I, DIST. 47[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1.

Augustine's interpretation of Plato's theory of Ideas had a great influence on medieval philosophers. A detailed monograph on the history of the theory of Ideas in the Middle Ages would be welcome[2], and this paper aims to contribute to it. I shall discuss a remarkable view, viz. that of the early-fourteenth-century Franciscan theologian Francis of Meyronnes, a personal pupil of John Duns Scotus.

Medievals traditionally refer to question 46 of Augustine's *De diversis questionibus LXXXIII* for the view that Plato's Ideas, being perfect entities, exist in God's mind[3]. Following upon Neoplatonic inter-

[1] Thanks are due to James McAllister (Leiden) for the correction of my English.

[2] Recent studies that discuss a larger period of medieval philosophy, are : « Idee », in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* Bd. IV (I-K). Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976, cols. 55-134 (by different authors) — section 9 (among others on Henry of Ghent) is by J.P. BECKMANN, section 11 (among others on John Duns Scotus) is by C. KNUDSEN. *Idea, VI Colloquio Internazionale, Roma, 5-7 gennaio 1989*, Atti a cura di M. FATTORI e M.L. BIANCHI. Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1990, esp., for our purpose, L.M. DE RIJK's contribution, « Un tournant important dans l'usage du mot *Idea* chez Henri de Gand », pp. 89-98 ; M.J.F.M. HOENEN, « Propter dicta Augustini. Die philosophische Bedeutung der mittelalterlichen Ideenlehre », in *Theologisches Quartalschrift*, forthcoming.

[3] AUGUSTINE, *De diversis questionibus LXXXIII,* ed. A. MUTZENBECHER (*Opera* 12/2, CCSL 44A). Turnhout, Brepols, 1975, pp. 70-73.

pretation, according to which, as I see it, the Ideas function primarily as grounds for the existence of the material world and make possible the reduction of sensible reality to an ultimate principle, Augustine introduces an epistemological turn — though not in the most radical sense, as we shall see[4]. His view is not accepted without qualification in medieval philosophy, but that Ideas do not exist separately in reality outside God is a recurring feature. Medieval philosophers reject the existence of Ideas as separate realities, or, in other words, as hypostasized universals, as they interpret them. Francis of Meyronnes's view is an exception.

Especially in the thirteenth century, e.g. in the works of Bonaventure (ca. 1217-1274) and Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), Ideas are considered as *really* identical with God's nature, and, besides, as *imitable* by the Creator, in the sense that God created the universe with a view to the Ideas[5]. According to Bonaventure, God's intellect is capable of expressing all things (this is God's eternal act), and therefore His intellect possesses from eternity the exemplary Forms of things[6]. In his *Quotlibeta* Thomas Aquinas says:

> For the term "Idea" signifies that it is a Form understood by an agent, to the likeness of which he intends to produce an external work, just as an architect conceives beforehand the form of a house in his mind, that is exactly the Idea of the house to be built in matter[7].

[4] See my discussion below of the *esse obiectivum* in Henry of Ghent and in Francis of Meyronnes.

[5] See HOENEN, « Propter dicta Augustini... », and other recent literature on Bonaventure (his note 15) and Thomas Aquinas (note 17).

[6] See BONAVENTURA, *De scientia Christi*, q. 2, i, c. : « Divinus intellectus omnia eternaliter exprimens habet aeternaliter omnium rerum similitudines exemplares ».

[7] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quotlibeta*, IV, questio 1, 1c. : « Hoc enim significat nomen ideae, ut sit scilicet quaedam forma intellecta ab agente, ad cuius similitudinem exterius opus producere intendit, sicut aedificator in mente sua praeconcipit formam domus, quae est quasi idea domus in materia fiendae ». See also, e.g., *In I Sent.*, dist. 36.

A substantial difference in point of view can be found in the works of the Flemish theologian Henry of Ghent (1220-1294)[8]. He divides being into real (*esse reale*, the physical world) and rational (*esse rationis*, mental being); the latter is subdivided into what is called subjective being (*esse subiectivum*, i.e. the mental acts) and objective being (*esse obiectivum*, i.e. the contents of these acts)[9]. According to Henry, the Ideas do not only signify God's essence as far as imitable by creatures, but they have also an existence *in virtue of their own in the divine mind.* This innovation, though influenced by the Arab philosopher Avicenna (980-1037)[10], is in the proper sense medieval, at least in its terminology, not to be found in the earlier neo-platonic tradition, I think[11]. So, according to Henry, there is a distinction between Ideas as having, on the one hand, a subjective, and, on the other, an objective being. Here we find a radical epistemological interpretation, for the Ideas are now seen as essential constituents of knowledge. The Ideas exist in the divine mind, just as in Plato. From his reading of Plato's *Timaeus* Henry concludes that Plato, most probably, assumed the Ideas to be the essences themselves of things as existing in the divine mind, rather than the grounds (*rationes*) themselves as existing in the divine essences, i.e. he thinks that Plato chooses, as he himself does, an epistemological rather than an ontological interpretation of Ideas[12].

John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265-1308/9) takes as his point of departure God's absolute being. When knowing, God firstly[13] knows His own essence as purely absolute; then, secondly, He produces, say, a stone in

[8] See the paper by TH. KOBUSCH, « Heinrich von Gent und die neuplatonische Ideenlehre », in the present volume. Further his *Sein und Sprache. Historische Grundlegung einer Ontologie der Sprache*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1987, pp. 86 ff.

[9] See e.g., *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*, q. 1 (see KOBUSCH, « Heinrich von Gent... », nn. 4, 5, 7-9).

[10] See DE RIJK, « Un tournant important... », p. 91.

[11] See the article « Idee », in *Historisches Wörterbuch...*, col. 95.

[12] HENRY OF GHENT, *Quodlibet*, IX, 2, ed. R. MACKEN (*Opera omnia*, 13). Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1983, p. 36 : « Magis apparet quod posuit [sc. Plato] ideas ipsas rerum essentias in divina notitia quam ipsas rationes in divina essentia ».

[13] ... or : « in the first moment » as he expresses it, Duns Scotus uses here the notion *signa nature* which also marks the stages of conceptual order. See S. KNUUTTILLA, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*. London and New York, 1993, pp. 139-140.

intelligible being, and knows a stone such that there is a relation in the stone *as known* to the divine act of knowledge[14]. Like Henry, Duns Scotus thinks the Ideas have an intelligible, objective being in God's mind.

As often, he develops his view partly in reaction to others. Duns criticizes the opinion, attributed by the modern editors to Henry of Ghent, that another kind of knowledge is presupposed preceeding God's knowledge, as a kind of *species*, here implying premisses and a conclusion. He also criticizes what can be identified as Bonaventure's view, according to which the Ideas are grounds *(rationes)* of knowledge in the sense of the *middle terms* in demonstrations[15]. The core of Duns Scotus's theory is that a beginning of knowledge should be assumed — in this case, God's essence taken as such *(essentia ut nude accepta)*. If other kinds of knowledge are presupposed, an infinite regress would follow, he says[16]. The essence is naturally prior to the act of knowledge, and this relation cannot be reversed, as some, such as Henry of Ghent, suggest. Henry takes this relation as « first formal object », having *esse diminutum* (« diminished being ») instead of *obiectum cognitum* (« object known »). In no way, he thinks, does God's knowledge presuppose being, of whatever kind this may be. The epistemological function of Ideas is primary, and thus Ideas are primarily constitutive of knowledge.

There are other interesting interpretations of the Ideas in this period, such as Ockham's, but they are not relevant to our subject[17].

[14] John Duns Scot, *Ordinatio*, I, 35. ed. Civitas Vaticana, Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, VI, 1963, p. 258.

[15] A third opinion (in an interpolated text) that is criticized, interprets the ideas as acts of knowledge. The editors of the Vatican edition do not identify the author of this opinion. The first two conceptions correspond to a difference in conception of *ratio*.

[16] *Ordinatio*, I, 35, q. unica, ed. Vaticana, 1963, p. 250, l. 6 : « Ergo oportet stare quod illae rationes possunt intelligi a Deo per essentiam ut nude acceptam [...] ».

[17] Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, 35, q. 5 (*Opera theologica*, IV. St. Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure University, 1979, pp. 500-501) gave his own interpretation in that he saw the ideas as the creatures themselves, inasfar as they are known by an efficient agent. See M. McCord Adams, *William Ockham*. Notre Dame (Ind.), University of Notre Dame Press, 1987, ch. 25.

1.2.

I conclude: the medievals traditionally locate the Ideas in a mind, primarily God's mind. Secondly, in *some* philosophers, especially Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus, there is a distinction between, on the one hand, subjective being (i.e. mental acts), and, on the other, objective being of Ideas (i.e. objects of thought).

For a better understanding of this notion of objective being, some general remarks will be useful: When following some philosophers, we can divide being into *two* parts: on the one hand, the individual things in the outer world (be it innate objects, animals, man, or God), and, on the other, the intellect (be it human or divine). To put this distinction in Latin terms: they divide *ens* into *ens extra animam* and *ens in anima*, or *ens rationis*. In an Aristotelian philosophy this division into *two* parts is natural.

Assuming the notion of objective being, as we read of it in Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus, we can divide being into *three* parts, viz. being outside the mind, being in the mind in the sense of subjective being (the mental acts), and objective being (the contents of a mind, be it human or divine). This latter kind exists independently of *factual* existence, and could be labelled the «inner, or essential, potentiality of things». So an individual man *factually* exists, but the essence of man, of which realizations factually exist, has «potential» being. This analysis implies a richer ontology and semantics than the division into two constituents.

The next question is about the *status* of the third realm of objective being, i.e. how can it be thought to exist? Generally the medievals assume this realm to exist in the divine mind. It does not possess a separate existence, apart from God's mind, mainly because this would imply, to a medieval thinker, a level of being which was independent from a mind, and something which would not have been created by God.

It may be helpful to compare Francis's theory with e.g. Karl R. Popper's «third world», the autonomous realm that should be assumed according to his epistemology. Popper's first world is that of physical objects or of physical states; the second world consists of states of consciousness, or mental states; the third is the world of objective contents of thought, especially of scientific and poetic

thoughts and of works of arts[18]. For example: with the word « library » we refer not to the books themselves as physical objects, nor to the minds of the individual visitors, but to the contents of the books, which exist apart from the contingent books and visitors. It should be noted that Francis's version of the third realm is broader than that of Popper: according to Francis this third world also has an ontological function, as we shall see below.

1.3.

In the present contribution I wish to discuss the theory of Ideas according to Francis of Meyronnes. In his view of Ideas, Francis distinguishes between a *theological* and *metaphysical* approach to Ideas. From a *theological* point of view, he has changed his opinion significantly, as he himself says[19]. Before his *Commentary on the Sentences,* he thought that Ideas — of which he says that they should be accepted only because of Augustine's words, and not for compelling reasons — are perfect entities in the divine mind; later, he came to think of them as a kind of relations. From a *metaphysical* viewpoint, however, Ideas exist as the *esse essentie* (the « being of essence ») having what is called a *potentia objectiva* (« objective potency »), independent of any intellect, even of God's. Francis agrees with Plato in this respect: he says — this is, I think, quite unusual for his times — that Ideas in this sense exist *independently*. His position is more radical than that of his predecessors.

[18] See e.g., K.R. POPPER, *Objective Knowledge. An Evolutionary Approach.* Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1972, esp. ch. 3 : « Epistemology without a knowing subject », pp. 106-152. See also 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, offered to Prof. C.J. de Vogel.* Assen, Van Gorcum, 1975, pp. 204-213, esp. p. 211, n. 70.

[19] See below, § 3.

2. FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES

2.1. On his life

On Francis's life and works we are dependent on Roth's monograph of 1936[20]. Francis was born, not after 1288[21], in Meyronnes[22], a little town in Provence, in the south of France. He entered the Franciscan monastery in Digne[23]. After his study in the *studium generale* of the order at Paris, he studied theology from 1304 to 1307, when he also was a pupil of John Duns Scotus[24]. In 1320 he became a bachelor[25], in 1323 a master in theology[26]. He then moved to Avignon. He was still alive after 1328, — when exactly he died is not known.

2.2. On his works

Francis composed many works. He can be easily recognized in that he usually gives *four* arguments for or against any thesis[27].

In 1321 he composed his *Commentary on the Sentences*[28], which is a *reportatio* (*opus baccalaurei*) of his lectures. The first book was also published separately in a longer and more elaborate version by the master himself[29], and is called *Conflatus* (i.e. a collection, viz. of

[20] B. ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes. Sein Leben, seine Werke, seine Lehre von Formalunterschied in Gott* (Franziskanische Forschungen, 3). Werl, Franziskus-Druckerei, 1936.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[24] Scotus's third stay in Paris.

[25] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 33.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

[27] He is also remarkable because he thinks that Porphyry's *Isagoge* is the second edtion of Plato's *Sophistes*. See ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 17.

[28] Henceforth referred to as *In Sent.*

[29] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, pp. 56 and 148.

opinions[30], together with Francis's own views). The *Conflatus*[31] was edited in 1520 by Mauritius Hibernicus[32], who added interesting notes in the margin; he is often critical of Francis when he deviates from Scotus's opinions. Mauritius is also a commentator on the works of Duns Scotus in Wadding's edition. There he mentions Francis's view of the Ideas at least once, and criticizes it[33].

Apart from the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Francis wrote, in Paris, his *Quodlibeta*[34], of which book VII is called the *Vinculum* («chain»)[35], that was also edited separately[36]. His *Formalitates* are also useful for his views on Ideas (this work, by the way, partially gives the same text as the *Conflatus)*. Up to now I have not found fundamental differences on the theory of the Ideas between the works mentioned, though in different places he discusses different aspects.

[30] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 99.

[31] I was able to compare the printed edition *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum* (ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 60) only with a part of a manuscript, viz. Erfurt, *Stadtbibl., Amplon.*, F 120, ff. 70vb-73ra. Both book and manuscript contain some faults : the manuscript is not evidently superior to the early print. See ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, pp. 56, 98. The only modern edition of one of Francis's works is in FRANÇOIS DE MEYRONNES – PIERRE ROGER, *Disputatio (1320-1321)*, ed. J. BARBET. Paris, 1961.

[32] = Mauritius Oschillai de Portu O.F.M., doctor in theology, taught theology at the university of Padua. In 1506 he became Archbishop of Taum in Ireland. He died on 25 March 1513. See ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, pp. 56 and 58. See also the edition L. WADDING, *Joannis Duns Scoti in universam logicam quaestiones*, the *judicium* R.P.F. LUCAE WADDINGI.

[33] FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent. (Conflatus)*, ed. Venetiis 1520, commentarius in Liber I, dist. 36, q. un., p. 569b.

[34] See H. ROSSMANN, « Die *Quodlibeta* und verschiedene sonstige Schriften des Franz von Meyronnes OFM », in *Franziskanische Studien*, 54 (1972), pp. 1-72.

[35] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 102.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

3. Francis's theory of Ideas

The main source for Francis's theory of Ideas is distinction 47 of the *Conflatus*. There he says that one should distinguish Ideas according to different *formal considerations,* viz. of theology and of metaphysics. First, I shall discuss Francis's opinion on the Ideas in God's mind, which is, according to him, the point of view of *theology*, in respect of which he changed his mind — as I said above; secondly, his view on the Ideas considered from a *metaphysical* point of view[37].

3.1. The theological point of view: Ideas in the divine mind

As to the first part, Francis distinguishes between four ways of interpreting the expression « things are said to be in God », viz. 1) that things are said to be in God eminently, i.e. all things are said to be in God; 2) virtually, i.e. things as far as they can be created, are said to be in God; 3) exemplarily, i.e. things known, are said to be in God; and 4) formally, i.e. the perfections without qualification, are said to be in God[38]. In this paper I cannot discuss the implications of these views, nor possible attributions to authors. Francis says that he accepts the expression in the fourth mode, viz. that the Ideas are formal perfections in God's mind.

Discussing the necessity to assume Ideas as existing formally in God, some, Francis says, adduce four reasons[39] : Ideas are the basis for action, for cognition, for assimilation, and for participation. According to Francis, these reasons are not necessary (he does not give any further arguments). Only because of *Augustine's* words, he acknowledges, should Ideas be posited formally in God[40].

37 Francis of Meyronnes, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. ii, f. 133vb Q.

38 *Ibid.*, f. 133rb F.

39 *Ibid.*, f. 133rb G.

40 *Ibid.*, f. 133va I : « Ideo videtur aliquibus quod nulla necessitas sit ponendi illas ideas evidentes ; nobis tamen propter dicta Augustini ponende sunt formaliter in Deo, ut patet ex priori deductione ».

Determining the properties of Ideas, Francis takes his stand on Augustine's *De diversis questiones LXXXXIII* (in different places), and deduces that they are formally in God because 1) they are the beatifying object of rejoicing; 2) only that which is formally in God should be adored; 3) because only God is wise in virtue of what is formally in God, and 4) because only eternal things can be formally in God[41].

Then the essence of the Ideas. Before he wrote the *Conflatus*, it seemed to Francis that in God the Ideas were absolute and unrelated beings, and in this sense they were perfect without qualification. Now, this no longer seems convincing to him — Hibernicus's commentary in the margin adds: *sapientis est mutare sententiam* («it is a mark of wisdom to change one's opinion»). His later view is that «Idea» can be said to mean something constituted of an essence *and* a relation, or, if this is not correct, one should say that it is a *relatio fundamentalis* («fundamental relation»)[42]. It is proper that God is related to a creature not with a real, but with a fundamental relation. The difference between these Ideas and God's essence is formal: there is no real distinction[43].

According to Francis, the Ideas in this sense are infinite in number, because otherwise it cannot be explained how by the same general basis of knowledge individual things can be known that are distinct by individual grounds. Therefore, just as individuals are potentially infi-

[41] FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. i, f. 133rb G.

[42] Initially, Francis says that God has a *relatio aptitudinalis* towards creatures. Next, he characterizes the relation as « fundamental », which is the preferable term, because, in his own words (see *In Sent.*, dist. 30, q. iii, f. 133va LM), an aptitudinal relation implies that an act flowing from that which has the relation, is expected (e.g. the capability of laughing is a relation in man with respect to the act of laughing, which can be expected), and for God as creator this cannot be the case, given his freedom ; the term « fundamental relation » should, therefore, be preferred.

[43] *Ibid.*, f. 133va L : « Ad primum : apparuit mihi aliquando quod in Deo exemplaria essent absoluta et perfectiones simpliciter sicut et alie perfectiones, sed pronunc non apparet mihi necessarium. Dico ergo quod si idea ponatur dicere perfectionem simpliciter, potest dici quod idea dicit aliquid constitutum ex essentia et respectu. Vel si non placet, potest dici quod non est inconveniens quod relatio aptitudinalis dicat perfectionem simpliciter ».

nite, so Ideas should be totally infinite. In this way individuals can be known distinctly as far as they are distinct[44].

While Duns Scotus assumes that Ideas are objects known and produced in intelligible being, Francis takes another stand. Take one Idea, e.g. a stone produced as such, and known by God. Such a stone cannot be adored, nor is it eternal, nor is God formally wise by it; therefore it is not an Idea, because all these conditions are required for something to be an idea, as had been pointed out by Augustine.

In the margin of the edition, the following warning has been added: "*tangit Scotum, sed tu defende ipsum ut expedit*" («he refers to Scotus, but you defend him as is proper»). Mauritius Hibernicus rejects Francis's opinion, according to which some, like Duns Scotus, think that, although a stone in itself should not be adored, yet, it can in relation to God. Francis replies that something that in virtue of itself cannot be adored should not be adored because of a relation to something else. A creature in real being that has a real relation to God should be adored rather than that which has only a rational relation, like the objects known as such[45].

3.2. The metaphysical point of view: Ideas in the *esse essentiae*

Now the *metaphysical* point of view. Francis rejects the view that an Idea as far as understood is just *(precise)* that Idea[46]. He concludes that Ideas, taken in this sense, are the *quidditates* («quiddities») in the *esse essentie* («the being of essence»). And Idea as such can indeed be

[44] FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. i, f. 133vb NO : « Et ideas oportet esse infinitas omnino, alioquin non possint cognosci distincte et inquantum sunt distincta ». To what extent does Francis accept ideas of individuals ? Is his view different from Henry of Ghent's ? (See TH. KOBUSCH's paper in this volume.)

[45] *Ibid.*, f. 133vb P.

[46] *Ibid.*, f. 134ra B : « Et hoc patet, quia abstrahentium non est mendacium. Sic ergo per intellectum precisa quidditas habet rationem idee secundum quod Plato et Avicenna loquebantur de ideis : secundum quod equinitas est tantum equinitas, non faciendo nunc mentionem de ideis secundum intentionem sanctorum ».

understood, but should not be taken *as understood*[47]. This is the being of the Ideas *as such*, in their *purity and precision*. Francis *uses* Ideas in this sense in different passages of his work.

In distinction 42 of his *Conflatus* he raises the question whether the essences of created natures possess a being *in potentia obiectiva* (« objective possibility »), i.e. in the realm of pure possibilities[48]. There are many arguments in favour and against, of which Francis thinks those in favour to be more probable[49]. He says, among other qualifications, that these essences in their *esse essentie* (« being of essence ») are neither caused nor uncaused[50]. Creation presupposes a kind of foundation, and annihilation into nothing is into that which is without contradiction. So Francis tries to save creation for this[51]. In contradistinction, *factual* reality is the realm of the *esse existentie* (« the being of existence »). This is the level of contingent things willed by God, in which a man is white, exists, etc[52].

In question VIII of the *Quodlibeta* Francis discusses the *esse essentie* in detail[53]. His arguments are different from those in the *Conflatus*, but not fundamentally, I believe. He repeatedly rejects the suggestion that God could not have created this *esse essentie*.

47 FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. i, f. 134ra C : « Sicut unumquodque intelligitur, sic aptum natum est intelligi, et sicut aptum natum est intelligi separata, sequestrata vel precisa, ergo sic apta nata est intelligi ». (Francis does not seem to make any formal or material difference between *idea* and *quidditas).*

48 *Ibid.*, dist. 42, q. i, f. 117rb H.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*, f. 117vb I : « Illud autem absolutum in illo priori in quo precedit, non est causatum, nam quidditas in sua ultimata precisione nec est causata, nec non causata ».

51 *Ibid.* : « Ad tertiam de creatione dico quod creatio ita est de nihilo quod nihil existens presupponit, sed quando ibi presupponit quidditatem secundum aliquem ordinem, contradictio est. Unde oportet quod suum fundamentum presupponat, cum sit relatio ».

52 *Ibid.*, f. 117vb L : « Ad octavam de actualitate dico quod eodem modo actualitas vel actus est idem quod esse existentie vel necessario sibi est annexum ».

53 ID., *Quodlibeta*, ed. Venetiis 1507, 241rb H.

Elaborating the notion of quiddity, Francis distinguishes four *signa* («signs») or *instantia* («instances»), adopting a distinction often used by Duns Scotus[54]. One could call those signs «metaphysical moments» that clarify the stages of conceptual priority[55]. The first is that in which the quiddity is *just* the quiddity; the second is that in which it is *intelligible*, because intelligibility is truth, and this is its property; the third is that in which is added to it: *being understood by God* (for being *understandable* belongs to it intrinsically, like a proper property; being *understood*, however, is extrinsical and accidental, and, consequently, later); the fourth is that moment in which the quiddity is understood by a *creature*, and this is accidental and contingent, and therefore last, for what belongs to it in the third sign, viz. being understood by God, although it belongs to it accidentally, belongs to it necessarily *from outside*; but that it is understood by a creature, is contingent. Therefore, quiddity as such, i.e. in the first sign, is prior to that it is in being known or understandable, and as such it has being in objective potency, and so it is an Idea.

Some of his predecessors say that Ideas *as understood* are pure[56]. But Francis rejects this, because *being understood* belongs to quiddity accidentally, not necessarily. I shall return to this view below, when discussing Francis's criticism of Duns Scotus.

Francis and others who follow Avicenna more closely, as he remarks[57], say that this purity is not only on the part of the intellect, but also on the part of the object. So, the quiddity points to both directions without existing in one of the two or without them being dependent on one of them. So, the *esse essentie* is such that the intellect can use it as a basis of abstraction (the *esse essentie* is *abstractable*), and the things in the outer world have it as a basis of order. In the first metaphysical

54 FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent.*, dist. 42, q. iii, f. 134ra B.

55 See S. KNUUTTILLA, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*. London and New York, 1993, pp. 139 f.

56 *Ibid.*, dist. 47, q. i, f. 134ra C: « Dicunt enim aliqui quod idee secundum intellectum sunt precise ».

57 *Ibid.*,, f. 134ra D: « Et ideo dicunt alii magis sequentes Avicennam quod illa precisio non solum est ex parte intellectus, sed etiam ex parte objecti ». In the margin it is said: « opinio aliorum, quam videtur imitari ».

moment in which the quiddity precedes other signs, it is clear-cut and pure, so to speak. Although the accidental abstraction occurs on the basis of the intellect, *abstractability* is in it before any abstraction of the intellect; similarly, the quidditative separateness, that is in something in the first mode of saying *per se* (a thing's essence), is there before what is in something in the second mode (e.g. the capability to laugh), according to the nature of things[58]. Accordingly, one of Francis's honorific titles is *magister abstractionum*[59].

The universals *as such* do not possess being in the soul, nor in reality, because the whole predicamental order into which the universals of substance and accidents are divided, is unchangeable[60]. It is not dependent on consideration of human beings, nor on the actual duration of things. For in such an order the unchangeable rules are founded, and those other two kinds of being, viz. in the soul and in reality, are contingent. It is accidental to man as man to exist actually, and it is accidental to man as man to be in our conception; otherwise, if he were not known, he would perish. This makes clear the view of the changeable, contingent nature of the intellect as part of the soul.

It is necessary to assume Ideas, Francis says, for both epistemological and ontological reasons[61]. The reason why Ideas are commonly not accepted is, he says, because of the *infamia* of the word, the bad reputation acquired because of Aristotle's attacks on Plato. They should be assumed for epistemological reasons, viz. because of predication, definition, demonstrations that are invariable, and a distinction between necessary and contingent propositions[62]. They should also be assumed for ontological considerations, viz. to preserve the participation of

[58] FRANCIS OF MEYRONNES, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. iii, f. 134ra D : « In primo ergo signo in quo quidditas precedit alia signa, ipsa est precisa ab aliis sicut intelligitur. Unde licet accidentalis abstractio sit per intellectum, abstrahibilitas tamen inest sibi ante omnem abstractionem intellectus et precisio quidditativa ».

[59] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, p. 16, n. 12.

[60] *Ibid.*, q. iv, f. 134vb OP : « Ideo videtur dicendum quod universalia secundum se non habent esse in anima nec in rerum natura ».

[61] *Ibid.*, q. iii, f. 134rb H.

[62] This is a *signum*, not the most fundamental consideration. See HOENEN, « Propter dicta Augustini... », forthcoming.

things, the generation of things, the order and coordination of universals in genera and species[63].

All these reasons make Francis's view of Ideas resemble Plato's. The question can therefore be raised, Francis says, whether Plato's Ideas are the same as those posited by himself. One should understand, he says, that the name « Idea » has been invented by Plato, and means the same as « Form »[64]. Now, « Form » should be understood as « definition », and so Plato accepted it according to Francis. Plato sometimes spoke like a *theologian* about Ideas, just like Augustine, in that sense that he understood them as divine principles and causes ; sometimes, however, he spoke like a *metaphysician*, in which perspective Ideas are nothing other than the *quidditative ground*, and for this reason he is criticized by Aristotle.

Aristotle has charged Plato with *real* separation between the Ideas and the things participating in them[65]. The Philosopher attributes four properties to the Ideas, viz. singularity, actual existence, local separation, and their being measured by time or another measure. Now, Plato clearly denied this, Francis says. Ideas do not exist in the mind, nor in reality ; they abstract from act and potency, and from place and duration. They are the basis of a universal in the mind that can be applied to many things. In fact, the reason why Aristotle criticized Plato, is his whim, Francis concludes, because he envied Plato, as is also evident from his other works. One could say, he adds, that Aristotle was the *best physicist* ; however, he was the *worst metaphysician*, because he did not know how to abstract, and therefore composed the worst metaphysics[66]. It is improbable, Francis says, that such a famous philosopher as Plato, whom Augustine and all church fathers praise above all, would have assumed something completely absurd. It should be repeated that such essences, although they can be called « Ideas », are metaphysical entities and are not called so by theologians, because the latter focus only on those that are in the divine mind.

[63] *Ibid.*, q. iii, f. 134va M.

[64] Francis refers to Augustine's *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII.*

[65] Francis of Meyronnes, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. iii, f. 134ra D.

[66] *Ibid.*, dist. 42, q. iii, f. 134rb F : « Aliter dicitur quod Aristoteles fuit optimus physicus, sed pessimus metaphysicus, quia nescivit abstrahere, et ideo passimam metaphysicam fecit ».

Francis also discusses Scotus's view, according to which, as has been remarked before, an Idea is a *quiddity produced in intelligible being*. Francis does not agree, because, Scotus speaks either in a *theological* manner or *metaphysically*[67]. If *theologically*, his master is evidently wrong. For in this way, according to Augustine, an Idea is the most noble and outstanding thing. Now, an essence that is produced possesses being only in a certain respect, or *esse diminutum* («diminished being»). If, however, he speaks *metaphysically*, then Duns Scotus should be corrected, for Ideas in the formal sense abstract from production; therefore, *as produced*, the quiddities are not Ideas.

To sum up: the *esse essentiae* is the realm of potentiality, the imitability from a metaphysical point of view[68]. It could also be labelled an a priori area of what is intelligible. As such it does not have any kind of existence. The Ideas are, other than in Duns Scotus's view, not intensional correlates of divine thought, but apart from it. So Francis takes a radical position. This realm of potentiality is the absolute condition of the human understanding.

4. Conclusion

Francis of Meyronnes distinguishes between a theological and a metaphysical approach to Ideas. So there is a tension between theology and metaphysics, for Francis suggests a kind of double truth. From a theological point of view, Ideas are accepted, because Augustine says so. At first Francis thought that the Ideas were perfect realities in God's mind, later that they were fundamental relations. From a metaphysical point of view the Ideas are the quiddities in the *esse essentie*[69]. The

[67] Francis of Meyronnes, *In Sent.*, dist. 47, q. iii, f. 134ra BC.

[68] See Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy...*, p. 139 f.

[69] See L. Hödl, « Potentia objectiva / subjectiva », in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, VII. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989, cols. 1162-1165 ; L. Honnefelder, « Possibilien », in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, VII, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989, cols. 1126-1135.

Ideas have ontological and epistemological functions. They exist eternally in a certain sense: they are called neither caused nor uncaused. Especially in the *Quodlibeta* Francis of Meyronnes shows himself aware of the danger of accepting something outside God that God could not have created. However, Mauritius Hibernicus, for example, criticized Francis of Meyronnes for, in his view, Francis assumes something outside God that God could not have, viz. the *esse essentiae*. His metaphysical consideration of Ideas forms part of a tradition in which incorporeal entities of some kind are assumed (the Stoic *lecta*, Gregory of Rimini's *complexe significabile*, etc.) that are viewed with suspicion by others.

The fifteenth-century Scotist William of Vaurouillon OFM (1390/4 - 1463)[70] says that Francis's theory of Ideas is different from that of Duns Scotus. Instead, he followed Henry of Ghent[71]. The latter conclusion, adopted by B. Roth without comment, is wrong[72].

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[70] See I. BRADY, « William of Vaurouillon OFM, A Fifteenth-Century Scotist », in J.K. RYAN and B.M. BONANSEA (eds.), *John Duns Scotus, 1265-1965*. Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 1965, pp. 291-310.

[71] ROTH, *Franz von Mayronnes...*, pp. 451 f.

[72] To what extent his theory was influential on later thought, I cannot determine. It remains an object of research how far theories such as those of Bolzano, Frege and Husserl in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are the same. P. Vignaux compares Francis's view with that of E. Stein (E. STEIN, *Enfliches und Ewoges Sein, Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn de Seins,* 1950) : P. VIGNAUX, « L'être comme perfection selon François de Meyronnes », in *Études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale*, Université de Montréal, Publications de l'institut d'études médiévales XVII. Montréal – Paris, 1962, pp. 259-318, p. 284 (n. 50) ; also in P. VIGNAUX, *De saint Anselme à Luther* (Études de philosophie médiévale, hors série). Paris, 1976, pp. 253-312 (also with original pagenumbers). For K.R. POPPER, see above, § 1. 2. See also KOBUSCH, *Sein und Sprache...*, pp. 346 ff.