

An Inconsistency in Aquinas's *De veritate* Account of Divine Ideas

CARL A. VATER

*St. John Vianney Theological Seminary
Denver, CO*

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS offers his most extended treatment of divine ideas in *De veritate* (1256–1259).¹ A close reading of this account of ideas reveals a serious inconsistency that renders the account incomprehensible as written. The inconsistency in Aquinas's theory can be found between his definition of divine ideas and his account of divine ideas as principles of speculative or practical cognition. In short, Thomas's definition of an idea includes the agent's intention to produce the artifact, but he claims that such an intention is irrelevant when he discusses ideas as principles of speculative and practical cognition. In the latter discussion, all that matters for an exemplar idea is that the agent knows he could produce an artifact like the idea. There is a tension here. Do divine ideas in the strict sense of exemplars require an intention to produce or not? I will argue that this tension is ultimately irreconcilable and that we can attribute Thomas's later emphasis on the role of divine exemplars in what is actually produced in part to an attempt to resolve this tension.

This paper will have five parts. First, I will discuss Aquinas's *De veritate* account of ideas as exemplar forms that necessarily include intention. Second, I will treat his *De veritate* account of ideas as principles of speculative and practical knowledge, which declares the intention to produce irrelevant. Third, noting the inconsistency of the conclusions of the first and second parts, I will examine the ways in which Aquinas uses

¹ I follow the chronology of Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 1, *Sa personne et son oeuvre*, Nouvelle édition profondément remaniée (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2015).

the term “intention” as a possible way to resolve the tension. This section will conclude that Aquinas uses the term “intention” to refer to an act of the agent’s will, which confirms that the inconsistency of *De veritate*’s account of divine ideas unresolvable as written. Fourth, I will briefly look at Aquinas’s later accounts of divine ideas, which I suggest are changed from the *De veritate* account in a way that resolves the inconsistency. I will also suggest that Aquinas makes these changes in later works precisely so that he could resolve the inconsistency. Finally, I will summarize all these points in a conclusion.

Divine Ideas as Exemplar Forms

In *De veritate*, Aquinas begins his account of divine ideas by discussing how the Greek term “idea” should be translated into Latin. Following Augustine, he concludes that it should be translated as “form.” The form of some thing can be said in three different ways. In one way, the form of something can be understood as the form from which (*a qua*) a thing is formed, as the formation of an effect proceeds from the form of the agent. But such a form is not what is meant by the term “idea.” In another way, the form of something can be understood as the form according to which (*secundum quam*) something is formed, as the soul is man’s form and a statue’s shape is the bronze’s form. This sort of form, which is part of the composite being, is not what is meant by “idea” because an idea signifies a form that is separated from that of which it is a form. Thus, in a third way, some thing’s form is said to be the form of something to which (*ad quam*) something is formed, and this is an exemplar form to the imitation of which something is constituted. This third sense of the term “idea” agrees with the common use of the term, namely, that an idea is that form which something imitates.²

It follows that imitation is essential to the character of an idea. But, Thomas continues, something can imitate another in two ways. In one way, it imitates from the intention of an agent, as when the painter paints a picture that imitates someone whose figure it depicts. In another way, it imitates by accident, outside of any intention and comes to be by chance. Accidental imitation occurs when a painter makes an image that just happens to resemble something or something. The resemblance happens by chance. But when something imitates some form by chance it is not said to be formed “to” (*ad*) that form because the term “to” (*ad*) seems to imply an

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 3, a. 1. All citations of *De veritate* are from volume 22/1 of the Leonine edition, and all translations are my own from the Latin therein.

order to an end. Since an exemplar form or idea is that to which (*ad quem*) something is formed, it is necessary that something imitate an exemplar form or idea essentially (*per se*) and not accidentally.³

The likeness between the exemplar form and the imitation must be intentional. There is a certain ambiguity in Aquinas's use of "intention" here. Aquinas could mean that it is intention in the sense that it is foreknown, or he could mean it is intentional in the sense that it is willed. The second sense entails the first, but the first sense could occur without the second. So, it is obvious that the likeness between the imitation and the exemplar form must be foreknown. The likeness between the two cannot be identified after the imitation comes to be. It cannot be an afterthought. The artist must have in mind that what he is making imitates the idea. Moreover, if he actually produces the artifact, he has to want the artifact to imitate his idea. The ambiguity is how much weight we should put on the likeness being foreknown versus the likeness's being willed. The former is accomplished by an act of the intellect. The latter is accomplished by an act of the will. This ambiguity will be settled in the third section.

Aquinas continues his account of exemplar forms saying it is not enough to say that an exemplar form is an intentional imitation because something acts because of an end in two ways. In one way, the agent acts such that the agent himself determines the end for himself, as happens in all agents that act through intellect. In another way, the end of the agent is determined by another principal agent. Aquinas uses the example of an arrow moving toward the end determined by the archer. If something is made to the imitation of another by an agent that does not determine the end for itself, then the imitated form will not have the character of an exemplar or idea. Even though the son imitates the form of the father, we should not call the father's form the idea of the son because the father determines neither the end of his own humanity nor the end of his son's humanity. It is only when the agent acts because of an end that he determines for himself that a form is the exemplar of another. Thus, we call the form of art in the artist the exemplar or idea of his artwork. Thomas adds that when an artist produces a work of art in imitation of an external form, that external form is the exemplar form of the artifact.⁴

Thomas concludes the foregoing analysis with a definition (*ratio*) of an idea. "An idea," he says, "is the form which something imitates from the intention of agent who predetermines the end for himself."⁵ This analy-

³ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.

⁴ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.

⁵ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.

sis of the term “idea” makes it clear that an idea is first and foremost an exemplar form. It is a form that is separated from that which imitates it. And the imitation must be intentional. No accidental intention meets the standard of an idea. Yet, as I noted, there is a certain ambiguity in Thomas’s use of “intention.” This ambiguity is exacerbated by what Aquinas says about divine ideas as principles of speculative and practical cognition, so before resolving the ambiguity, it will be helpful to see what he says about speculative and practical cognition.

Divine Ideas as Principles of Speculative and Practical Cognition

In *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, Aquinas asks whether ideas pertain to practical cognition only or also to speculative cognition. He begins his response by drawing a fourfold distinction in speculative and practical cognition. In the first place, speculative and practical cognition are distinguished by their ends. The end of speculative cognition is truth absolutely, and the end of practical cognition is operation. Upon close examination, however, both speculative and practical cognition can be distinguished into two.

Considering practical cognition, Thomas notes that something can be ordered to operation in two ways. Sometimes it is actually ordered toward operation, as when the artist proposes to induce a preconceived form into matter. This sort of cognition is actually practical (*actu practica*) cognition. Other times, the cognition can be ordered to operation, but is not actually being so ordered, as when the artist thinks out the form of an artifact and knows the way to make it yet does not intend to make it. This sort of cognition is habitually or virtually practical (*practica habitu vel virtute*) cognition, not actually practical cognition.⁶

Speculative cognition, Thomas says, occurs when what is known can in no way be ordered to act, and this occurs in two ways. In one way, when the cognition is of things that are not naturally suited to being produced through the knower’s knowledge, as when we cognize natural things. In another way, when the thing cognized is indeed operable through the knower’s knowledge, yet it is not being considered as operable. Things are produced in being (*esse*) through operation, but certain aspects of things can be separated according to intellect that are not separable according to being. So, when things that are operable through intellect are considered by distinguishing from each other those things that cannot be distinguished according to being, it is not actually practical or habitually practical cognition, but only speculative cognition. Thomas uses the example of the builder who considers a house by investigating its properties

⁶ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 3.

(*passiones*), genus, differences, and so on. The house's genus and differences are found indistinctly in the house itself. So, if they were being considered indistinctly, the house would be considered as operable, but when they are considered separately, the house is not being considered insofar as it is operable.⁷

Thomas then specifies that God has all four of these kinds of knowledge and investigates where divine ideas fall in this fourfold division. In doing so, he makes a distinction between the proper meaning of the term "idea" and what an idea itself is. The proper meaning of the term "idea," as Augustine says, is "form." As a form, the term "idea" extends to knowledge of that which can be formed. Such knowledge is either actually practical cognition or virtually practical cognition, the latter of which is also speculative in a certain way. If we consider what an idea itself is, an idea is the notion (*ratio*) or likeness (*similitudo*) of a thing. In this sense, the term idea also pertains to purely speculative cognition. More properly speaking, an idea relates to actually practical or virtually practical cognition. More broadly speaking, a likeness and notion relates to speculative knowledge as much as to practical knowledge.⁸

Aquinas applies this reasoning to exemplars in response to the third objection. The objector argues as we would expect given the definition of an idea. An idea, he says, is nothing other than an exemplar form. But an exemplar form can only be said of practical cognition because an exemplar is that in imitation of which another is made. Therefore, ideas relate to practical cognition only.⁹ Since the character of an idea includes the intention of the agent, we might assume that the objector has actually practical cognition in mind. There are only exemplars of that which the agent intends to make.

Thomas's reply, however, is not what we might expect. An exemplar, he says, does not imply just any respect to something outside. An exemplar implies the relation of a cause. Therefore, properly speaking, an exemplar pertains to cognition that is habitually or virtually practical, and not only to cognition that is actually practical. Something can be called an exemplar from the fact that something can be made in imitation of it, even if it is never made. An idea, strictly speaking, is the same.¹⁰

Thomas's reply is especially frustrating because it directly contradicts what he had said earlier in *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 8. Considering whether God

⁷ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 3.

⁸ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 3.

⁹ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 3, obj. 3.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3.

knows beings that neither are, were, nor will be—pure possibles—Aquinas makes a binary distinction between speculative cognition and practical cognition. The artist has speculative cognition when he knows the notions of the work without applying them to actual production through an intention. He properly has practical cognition when, by an intention, he extends the notion of the work to the end of operation. So described, practical cognition follows upon speculative cognition, the latter of which can exist without the former. Applying this distinction to God, Aquinas says that God has a quasi-practical cognition of those things that were, are, or will be, and he has a quasi-speculative cognition of those things that will never exist.¹¹ In his reply to the third objection Aquinas further specifies the consequences of this teaching to divine ideas. If idea is taken in the common usage for a form of practical cognition, he says, then there are ideas only of things that exist at some time. But if an idea is a form of speculative cognition, then nothing prohibits there being ideas of pure possibles.¹² This analysis of *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 8, is fully compatible with the definition of an idea in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, but Aquinas seems to have abandoned the position by the time he wrote q. 3, a. 3.

According to Aquinas's account of ideas as speculative and practical, then, an idea is an exemplar form that *can* serve as a principle of actually practical knowledge, but the agent need not intend to produce according to the idea. The character of an idea is entirely defined by its being a form that something can imitate. The agent's actual intention is irrelevant to the character of an idea at all. At this point, the inconsistency in Aquinas's theory is obvious. Either the agent's intention matters or it does not. In *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, Aquinas says that it matters. In *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, Aquinas says that it does not matter. The only way that these two positions would not be in conflict is if Aquinas is not using the term "intention" in a way we expect. Thus, the next step is to ask how Aquinas uses the term "intention" in the *De veritate*. This is the subject of the third section.

¹¹ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 8.

¹² Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 8, ad 3. This tension is noted in a footnote by both Lawrence Dewan, O.P., and Vivian Boland, O.P., but neither author offers a compelling account for reconciling the two. Dewan even seems to throw up his hands at the problem, merely noting that "3, 3 is the *ex professo* treatment of the divine ideas." I believe that my interpretation of the *De veritate* shows that the teaching of q. 3, a. 3, is simply mistaken, which is why Aquinas never returns to it in later writings. See: Dewan, "St. Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism: A Reply," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 228n14; Boland, *Ideas in God According to St. Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (New York: Brill, 1996), 253n98.

Intention

In his definition of an idea and the reasoning leading up to that definition, Aquinas very clearly states that the likeness between an exemplar form and an imitation must be intentional.¹³ Yet, this statement could, perhaps, be read in two ways because Thomas uses the word “intention” in more than one way. A review of the 190 occurrences of *intentio* in the *De veritate* reveals that the word is used in three distinct senses.¹⁴ In one sense, the term denotes an inclination of the will directing the means to an end toward that end.¹⁵ An intention in this sense is an act of the will and is concerned with putting certain knowledge into action to accomplish an end.¹⁶ In another sense, an intention is the content of intellectual knowledge. Thus, Aquinas says that the agent intellect takes intelligible intentions and places them in the possible intellect.¹⁷ In a third sense, the term is used to denote the true interpretation of a certain author, for instance, “according to the intention of the Commentator.”¹⁸ This third sense of the term could be considered a subset of the first sense because it refers to what the author *wants* to say. Regardless of whether the third sense should be grouped with the first, it is not relevant for our purposes here.

These differing uses of the term “intention” yield two possible interpretations of Aquinas's definition of an idea. In one way, the intention to which Aquinas refers could be to the artist's will. An idea is an exemplar form to the imitation of which the artist wants to produce. The artist has to *want* what he produces to be like his idea. He intends the end that his artifact be like his idea of it. He cannot produce something haphazardly and then realize that what he produced bears a resemblance to some exemplar. The fact that something is produced means that the artist's will has

¹³ See *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.

¹⁴ I arrive at this number using the Index Thomisticus, available at www.corpusthomicum.org/it/index.age. For more on Aquinas's use of *intentio*, see H. D. Simonin, O.P., “La notion d'*intentio* dans l'oeuvre de s. Thomas d'Aquin,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 19 (1930): 445–63.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 14: “Intentio dicitur inclinatio voluntatis ad finem.”

¹⁶ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 13.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 11. He also refers to the particular intentions or forms preserved in memory or in the imagination; see *De ver.*, q. 13, a. 3, ad 4. It is important to note that “intention is what is grasped in a concept; it is *terminus* rather than *principium* of intellectual knowledge” (Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge*, vol. 1, *Classical Roots and Medieval Discussions* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 161).

¹⁸ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 15, ad 3. See also *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 14, ad 1; *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 6 and ad 10; *De ver.*, q. 11, a. 3, ad 10; *De ver.*, q. 12, a. 5, ad 4; *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 11, ad sc 4.

given a command, and the fact that an imitation is being produced means that the artist's will has commanded that the exemplar form be imitated. It is not enough for the artist to foreknow that he could make something like the exemplar form in his mind. He must actually want—must actually will—to produce something to the likeness of the exemplar form.

In another way, the intention to which Aquinas refers could be to the artist's knowledge. Thus, the agent must foreknow the likeness that he is going to produce. Aquinas's example of the artist seems to point toward this interpretation. The artist knows that a certain picture can look like something or someone. His knowledge of the imitation precedes the actual production. The intention in his intellect points toward the artifact in advance. If the imitation occurs accidentally or by chance, then the artist's knowledge of the imitation follows the actual production; if he were to paint a certain person in a painting and then later realizes that the person he painted actually looks like someone. The issue is not any actual production, but the artist's knowledge that such-and-such a possible painting would be made in imitation of a particular exemplar form. Intention adds that an idea is a mental form, as opposed to a natural form.

This ambiguity in connection with the definition of divine ideas has been little discussed in the secondary literature. Father Louis B. Geiger, O.P., and Monseigneur John Wippel, who both focus on the way Aquinas accounts for the multiplicity of divine ideas, merely note that Thomas includes the agent's intention.¹⁹ John F. Farthing, who focuses on how divine ideas do not introduce composition or passivity in God, is content to mention that there are clearly exemplars because things happen intentionally.²⁰ James Ross, Father Armand Maurer, and Father Lawrence Dewan, O.P., who focus on the existence of possibles, make little mention of the agent's intention.²¹ The closest the trio comes is when Maurer and Dewan state that Aquinas restricts the notion of an exemplar to what God

¹⁹ L. B. Geiger, "Les idées divines dans l'œuvres de s. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. Étienne Gilson, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), 191; John F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1993), 16.

²⁰ John F. Farthing, "The Problem of Divine Exemplarity in St. Thomas," *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 183–222, at 199.

²¹ James Ross, "Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990): 171–98; Armand Maurer, "James Ross on the Divine Ideas: A Reply," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 213–20; Dewan, "St. Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism," 221–34; James Ross, "Response to Maurer and Dewan," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 235–43.

actually creates or intends to create in the *Summa theologiae*, but in the *De veritate* he had extended the notion of an exemplar to whatever could be created, regardless of whether it ever was, is, or will be created.²² Father Vivian Boland, O.P., makes a few comments in the footnotes about speculative and practical knowledge that will be important to consider below, but he does not specifically relate these comments to Aquinas's definition of an idea.²³

Gregory Doolan seems to be the only scholar who even discusses the significance of intention in Aquinas's definition of an idea. He offers some arguments that the intention of an idea is from the agent's will, but in the context of the discussion of the *De veritate*, he takes for granted that Aquinas means intention in the sense of will and declares: "The agent's will and intention are clearly made part of the very definition of exemplar ideas."²⁴ I agree with Doolan that the agent's will becomes part of the very definition of exemplar ideas, but given what Aquinas says about ideas as principles of practical and speculative knowledge, I am less sure that the agent's will does so *clearly*.

It seems to me that Aquinas's position only becomes clear after two considerations. First, a consideration of what Aquinas says in response to the question whether intention is an act of the will. Second, an application of his response to this question to Aquinas's definition of ideas.

In *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 13, Thomas takes up the question whether intention is an act of the will. In his response, he first argues that intention has to be an act of the will, and then he shows the way in which it is an act of the will. Intention has to be an act of the will because of its object. The object of an act of intention is the good that is an end. Since the good that is an end is the object of the will, intention must be an act of the will.²⁵

Having determined that intention is an act of the will, he distinguishes

²² Maurer, "James Ross on the Divine Ideas," 215–16; Dewan, "St. Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism," 228, 233.

²³ Boland, *Ideas in God*, 255n108. As will be seen below, Boland's comments suggest that Thomas understands "intention" as relating to the will, but perhaps the will's intention is that the intellect understand.

²⁴ Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 8; see also 26: "If assimilation does not occur according to an agent's intention, then it occurs merely by chance. Hence, the intentionality of an agent is an essential characteristic of exemplar causality. And what the agent intends is that the work of art be like the form that he conceives in his mind. This implies that the agent both *knows* and *wills* what he intends to produce" (emphasis original).

²⁵ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 13.

two acts of the will, one which the will has absolutely and in virtue of its own power and another that it has insofar as it is relatively posterior to reason. The first act, which belongs to the will according to its nature insofar as it tends toward its proper object absolutely, is the act of willing and loving. Willing and loving presuppose the action of reason, but the act belongs to will absolutely because it concerns the good absolutely. The second act belongs to the will according as the influence of reason is left in the will. Since it is proper to reason to order and to compare, whenever a certain comparison or ordering appears in an act of the will, such an act will not be of the will absolutely but as subordinated to reason. Intention is in the will in this way because to intend seems to be nothing other than that someone wills to tend toward something as toward an end. Thus, the two acts of the will are distinguished by willing the end absolutely and willing the means as directed to the end.²⁶ Aquinas further distinguishes intention from choice because intention is an act of the will in subordination to reason ordering those things that are for the end to the end itself, but choice is an act of the will in subordination to reason comparing those things that are for the end to each other.²⁷

Intention, then, concerns carrying out the means to a certain end. It is not merely the knowledge of possible means to an end, nor the comparing of possible means to the same end to determine which means is best. Intention is implementing the means, drawing them toward the end.²⁸ The intention is the end that be achieved by the means. Thus, Thomas frequently says that “every action or motion is from an intention for the good,”²⁹ that a wicked intention results in sin,³⁰ and that the end is prior in intention to the means but executed after the means.³¹ When evaluating Thomas’s use of the term “intention,” then, the proximity of a discussion of ends is key. If Thomas refers to intention and end, then he must be using the term “intention” to refer to an act of the will.

Equipped with the criterion of proximity of discussion of an end, we can now look more closely at the context of Aquinas’s definition of an idea in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1. We should note that Thomas’s discussion of an agent’s intention as opposed to chance is immediately followed by a discussion of the two ways that something can act for an end. In fact, this

²⁶ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 13.

²⁷ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 13, ad 16.

²⁸ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 14.

²⁹ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 5.

³⁰ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 17, a. 4, ad 8.

³¹ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 21, a. 3, ad 5.

discussion of acting for an end completes the discussion of intention by specifying the way in which we should understand the agent's intention; that is, it offers two ways in which we can understand an agent's intention and determines which one is more suitable for ideas. The end that an agent intends can either be given to it by another, or it can be determined by the agent itself. Only the latter understanding is suitable for ideas.

Moreover, the very discussion of intention in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1 implies the actual existence of an imitation. A painting would not imitate anything intentionally or accidentally if it were never painted. If there is no artifact, there is no imitation. Therefore, the discussion of intention with regard to imitation must be understood with reference to an act of the will, not the content of a concept. The agent's intention is to produce an artifact. His intention is not merely the knowledge that, if he should so will, he could produce some artifact like his knowledge. Aquinas includes intention in his definition of an idea because it adds the volition to produce the artifact. According to his definition, Aquinas thinks that the character of an idea includes an act of the will because ideas are, first and foremost, causal principles according to which an agent produces.³²

Before concluding this section, a certain objection must be considered. Boland claims, "virtual practical knowledge is included in the strict sense of *idea* since God wills his capacity to produce what remains merely possible."³³ By willing his own power, God must intend the means to his own power. Divine ideas fall under the means of divine power because they are the exemplar forms according to which he produces creatures. On this reading, the intention of the agent that Aquinas includes in his definition of an idea is the intention to be able to exercise his power. Intention still refers to the will, but it refers to the will's willing of the means to exercise his own power rather than the will's willing the production of an artifact.

This interpretation of intention seems to be the best way to defend Aquinas against inconsistency, but I think even this interpretation fails. I do not see how it can be reconciled with the definition of an idea in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1: "An idea is a form which something imitates from the intention of an agent who predetermines the end for himself."³⁴ Aquinas tells us specifically what the agent intends. The agent intends that some-

³² See Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 27–28.

³³ Boland, *Ideas in God*, 255n108. This sentence is the whole of Boland's comments on the matter. The argument that follows may not be what Boland intends. For Aquinas's claim that the will moves other powers, see *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 12: "Voluntas vult se velle et intellectum intelligere et vult animam esse et sic de aliis."

³⁴ Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.

thing imitate. The imitation is what is intended, not the agent's ability to produce it. In order for Boland's interpretation to save Aquinas from inconsistency, the phrase "from the intention of an agent" would have to modify "form," not "which something imitates." The idea would have to be form because of the agent's intention, but such a reading strains the Latin. The plain sense of Aquinas's Latin is that the agent intends the imitation. This interpretation of the definition is further confirmed by the fact that earlier in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, Aquinas discusses intention as establishing the imitation on purpose as opposed to establishing it by chance. Thus, it is inescapable that the definition of an idea offered in *De veritate* q. 3, a. 1, demands that the agent actually will the production of the artifact.

This analysis precludes any possibility of reconciling Aquinas's statement about divine ideas in *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1, and that in q. 3, a. 3. In the former text, Aquinas states that the character of an idea entails the intention to produce an artifact, but in the latter text, he denies that such an intention is necessary. Aquinas's definition of an idea should result in the conclusion that, strictly speaking, an idea is a principle of actually practical cognition, but that is not what he concludes. Thus, the *De veritate* account of divine ideas is irreparably inconsistent as written.

Later Developments in Aquinas's Account of Divine Ideas

As Thomas's career progresses, he places greater emphasis on the causal role of divine ideas. In his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus* (1266–1268), written just a few years after the *De veritate*, Aquinas argues that by knowing himself, God knows all the ways he can produce, which are called notions (*rationes*).³⁵ Not all notions deserve to be called exemplars, however. An exemplar is that in imitation of which something comes to be. But God does not actually will to produce all the things that he knows he can produce. So only those notions in imitation of which God wills to produce in existence can be called exemplars.³⁶

This text, as Doolan notes, "marks a turning point in [Aquinas's] treatment of exemplarism."³⁷ Beginning with this text, the term "exemplar" no longer refers to the knowledge of what could be produced. In the termi-

³⁵ Although the dating of this commentary was uncertain for many years, Torrell is now confident that the work was completed after March 1266 during Aquinas's stay in Rome (Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 1:460).

³⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus* 5, lec. 3, no. 665, in *S. Thomae Aquinatis In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus exposition*, ed. Ceslari Pera, O.P. (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

³⁷ Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 13.

nology of *De veritate*, Aquinas ceases to refer to principles of habitually or virtually practical cognition as exemplars. Only principles of actually practical cognition are now called exemplars. Thomas is even willing to adopt Pseudo-Dionysius's terminology and calls exemplars "willings" (*voluntates*) on occasion.³⁸ The character of an idea necessarily includes the will's intention to produce at some time.

This narrower view of exemplars is found in *Summa theologiae* I (1266–1267) as well. There, Thomas makes only three distinctions among speculative and practical cognition. Knowledge that could never lead to production is purely speculative. Knowledge which the will intends to produce at some time is practical. Knowledge of operables but not insofar as they are operable or as not willed toward actual production is partially speculative and partially practical.³⁹ He then specifies that an idea can be called an exemplar insofar as it is a principle of the making of things, and this pertains to practical cognition.⁴⁰ Therefore, ideas in the sense of exemplars pertain only to those things that are actually produced. To use the terminology of *De veritate*, there are no exemplars of what God knows by virtually or habitually practical cognition. Only the principles of actually practical cognition are exemplars.

Doolan claims that Thomas gets his narrowed view of exemplarism from Pseudo-Dionysius.⁴¹ I think Doolan is right in this regard, but I think this answer does not capture the whole reason for Aquinas's change. I think that reading Pseudo-Dionysius was the proximate cause for Aquinas to look back over his theory of divine ideas from the *De veritate*. When he considered what he had written, he realized that his prior position was inconsistent and that taking a more Dionysian approach to exemplars resolved that inconsistency. It cannot be an accident that Aquinas resolves the inconstancy of the *De veritate* the very next time he writes about divine exemplars. Aquinas never offers as complete a definition of divine ideas as he does in *De veritate*, but he also never contradicts that definition. What he does change is his understanding of practical cognition, and he changes it precisely so that it will agree with his account of ideas. An idea takes its character from an act of the intellect and an act of the will. God has knowledge of all the things that could imitate him. The notions by which God knows these possible creatures can be called ideas in a secondary or improper sense, but the divine will plays no role in their character. It is

³⁸ Aquinas, *In De div. nom.* 5, lec. 3, no. 666.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 14, a. 16 (Leonine ed., vol. 4).

⁴⁰ Aquinas, ST I, q. 15, a. 3; see also I, q. 44, a. 3.

⁴¹ Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 14.

only once the divine will acts that God has exemplars, which are ideas in the strict sense.

Conclusion

The account of divine ideas that Aquinas offers in *De veritate* contains an unresolvable inconsistency. He defines an idea as “the form which something imitates from the intention of an agent who predetermines the end for himself.”⁴² As we have seen, the agent’s intention entails an act of the will to produce. Yet, in Aquinas’s subsequent discussion of ideas as principles of speculative and practical cognition, he says that an idea in the strict sense of an exemplar is a principle of practical cognition. By a principle of practical cognition, he means a form in imitation of which the agent either does actually produce or knows he could produce, even if he never intends to do so. The inconsistency lies in the importance of the intention of the agent’s will. The definition of an idea includes the agent’s will in the character of an idea, but the discussion of ideas as principles of practical cognition denies that the agent’s will plays any role in the character of an idea. These competing claims render the account incomprehensible. The character of an idea must either include the agent’s intention or not, but it cannot be both. Thomas offers both. Therefore, the character of an idea cannot be determined with certainty from Thomas’s presentation in *De veritate* alone.

This tension can only be resolved by changing the definition of an idea or by changing what it means for a form to be a principle of practical cognition. Aquinas takes the second route, and he does so the very next time he writes about ideas as principles of practical cognition. I suggest this change means that Aquinas has seen the error in his previous teaching and sought to resolve it. My argument for Aquinas’s motivation for changing must necessarily remain probable at best, but I do think it is telling that Thomas does not repeat the inconsistency of *De veritate* in any of his later writings.

N.V.

⁴² Aquinas, *De ver.*, q. 3, a. 1.