BOOK REVIEWS

Divine Ideas, by Thomas M. Ward. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. iv + 72. $20.00 (softcover).

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This is a bold and delightful little monograph. It defends the view that God has ideas of all possible creatures, which ideas depend on nothing external to God (1). What's more, God is the exemplar of them all. Where others say that God is the Good, Ward adds that God is the Lion, the Eagle, and the Human (42). Where others would find God in all things, Ward finds all things in God (10, 64).

Ward introduces a central premise for the arguments to come in Chapter 1: God is totally original. Unlike human artists, who require some medium, God creates *ex nihilo*. And unlike human artists, God does not look outside for inspiration or for a guide to what is possible. Intelligible ideas exemplified in creation are themselves within God's own mind (7–8).

On these points, many theists agree. But controversy is not far off. In Chapters 2 and 3, Ward sharply contrasts his view with *abstractionism*, according to which abstract ideas necessarily exist, independently of God, and are the intelligible ideas exemplified by created things (8). The abstractionist supposes that "the place of the Lion is the eternal abstract realm, to which God goes for instruction about leonine nature" (10). Abstractionists, accordingly, must deny that God alone is the ultimate explanation of things (11–12).

Various abstracta—wisdom and redness, say—would be among the ultimate explainers, even of God. God would be wise because God exemplifies the property of wisdom. Red things would be red because they exemplify redness. And so on. These abstract properties would thus be rivals to the one true God for the privileged role of ultimate explainer and thus supremely venerable (12). Perhaps we'd do well to worship *them* instead of God—idolatry—serious charges. If correct, they'd show that pious theists would be wise to abandon any abstractionist fancies.

Turn to eternity past. God had ideas then (15). What were these ideas *about*? We could say they were about created abstracta. This view would hold on to abstracta but deny that they are independent of God. But it remains mistaken. For God must have had something in mind when creating those abstracta—which only pushes our puzzle backwards: those things God had in mind then: what were *they* about (17)? We'd do better to get rid of abstracta altogether, created or otherwise, and to say that God's ideas are about God.

God's knowledge of creatures is self-knowledge (22). How does this work? In Chapter 4, Ward considers and rejects *imitative* theories according to which God knows creatures through self-knowledge because God's self-knowledge is of all the ways in which God can be imitated. Ward favors instead a containment view according to which God contains a mighty host of creaturely natures (23).

Ward's God contains a multitude. Chapter 5 argues that such multiplicity is not in conflict with the doctrine of divine simplicity. Ward rejects a strict interpretation of that doctrine which has it that there is no real complexity of any kind within God (27). There *is* complexity within God, but acknowledging as much does no violence to the core motivations for divine simplicity (31). While God has a rich character, the richness of that character does not correspond to any real plurality of parts, constituents, or forms within God (36).

According to Ward, God's mind does contain a *plurality of ideas*, however. And the richness of God's character explains why it contains the particular ideas it does. Ward lays out his own view of how this works—"containment exemplarism"—in Chapter 6. According to this view, God's character is sufficiently rich to include all creaturely natures. It includes, for instance, the ultimate reality of what it is to be a lion. God thereby serves as the archetypical lion (41–42). God's idea of the Lion, furthermore, is simply God's idea of the divine self in its leonine aspect (47).

As Ward notes in Chapter 7, containment exemplarism requires rejection of the view that God is "wholly other" (50–53). Creatures are similar to God, indeed exactly similar, in certain respects. They resemble God "as statue to model, image to archetype" and in this way may be said to "participate" in God (53).

In Chapter 8, Ward extends containment exemplarism to issues of modality. A possible world, according to Ward, is just "a really big possible creature," whose nature is also contained within God (57). He criticizes views like Alvin Plantinga's according to which possible worlds are abstract objects, because they say possible worlds are like authorless books "dependent on God neither for their existence nor content" (59). Ward also rejects Brian Leftow's view that certain necessary truths (such as that water is H_2O) are "secular truths," having nothing to do with God (61). Rather, says Ward, "we inhabit a world that is inescapably divine" in which "everything. . .resembles its divine archetype" (62).

Thus the book's main ideas. We'll now offer some critical comments, focusing on three key arguments Ward advances, each of which targets abstractionist alternatives:

> Dependence. If abstractionism is true, then God depends on divinity for being divine. Thus, if abstractionism is true, other entities are more ulti- mate than God, and God is not *a se*. But God is *a se* and so abstractionism is unacceptable.

> Intelligibility. If abstracta exist independently of God, they (rather than God) are the ultimate source of intelligibility, or at the very least, God is not the sole ultimate source of intelligibility. But God is the sole ultimate source of intelligibility, and so abstractionism is unacceptable.

> Creation. If abstractionism is true, then abstracta supplied the paradigms that God used to create; and if so, then God depended on abstracta in creat- ing. But God created all concrete things out of nothing and without depend- ing on anything else in creating. So abstractionism is, again, unacceptable.

What can the theistic abstractionist say in reply? Plenty.

The Dependence argument can perhaps most easily be resisted. It as- sumes dependence between properties and the character of their instances; so God is divine *because* God exemplifies divinity. But note that this as- sumption is foreign to the systems here in view. Theistic abstractionists like Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen do not posit abstracta as explana- tions for the character of things at all. Perhaps the easiest way to see this is to apply van Inwagen's view of properties as assertibles: things that can be *true of* or *false of* things (Peter van Inwagen, "A Theory of Properties," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 1 (2004): 107-138). If there is any explanatory or dependence ordering here, it is the opposite of what Ward presumes. A book is not green because greenness is true of it; rather, greenness is true of the book because the book is green. So also with propositions (another kind of abstracta); the proposition that snow is white is true because snow is white; but snow is not white because that proposition is true (Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii). So also with God and divinity. God is not divine because divinity is true of God; rather, divinity is true of God because God is divine.

Ward excoriates Plantinga for critiquing St. Thomas using supplemen- tary premises that Thomas would himself reject (32). The same charge, it seems, applies to Ward and his critique of contemporary theistic ab- stractionism. Ward has saddled abstractionists with a view they explicitly reject and then critiqued the result.

A dilemma will help give shape to our replies to the Intelligibility and Creation arguments. Either abstracta depend on God, or they do not. Call the former *dependent* abstractionism (a view with which Plantinga has flirted) and the latter *independent* (á la van Inwagen).

Dependent abstractionism offers a ready reply to the Intelligibility and Creation arguments: God is the source of all abstracta and so still gets the honor of being the ultimate source of intelligibility. Creation, furthermore,

doesn't involve divine "consultation" of independent abstract ideas. Perhaps, instead, (to adapt Ward's own story) leoninity is generated by the divine mind as God self-contemplates in a leonine aspect or lionwise. Creating the Lion does not involve consulting an idea, but rather, consists in God choosing to create something that resembles God lionwise. Ward anticipates this move with two objections. First is a familiar bootstrapping problem (16): but our answer to the Dependence argument answers this objection too. If properties do not explain the character of their instances, then one need not posit abstracta that, prior to their own creation, explain, say, God's divinity. Second, a dilemma: either God just makes the abstract entities willy-nilly (rendering God's generation of them objectionably non-rational) or they end up corresponding to resources already found within God (rendering them explanatorily redundant). One of us—a nominalist—rather likes this dilemma. But we agree that the abstractionist has a way out by grasping the second horn. The main reason to believe in abstracta is not that we need them for various explanatory purposes. It is, rather, that there are many claims we take to be true (e.g., the claim that there are many claims we take to be true) that straightforwardly entail that entities such as propositions, properties, and the like exist (see, again, van Inwagen (2004)).

We'll now sketch a reply to the Intelligibility and Creation arguments for independent abstractionists. The problems here can be expressed as a trilemma: Either (i) God consults what abstract entities there are in making decisions about what to create, in which case the Intelligibility and Creation arguments land, or (ii) there is some common prior explanation for both God's thoughts and for the abstract realm being as it is, in which case, intelligibility is something prior to God, in which case the Intelligibility argument lands, or (iii) it is one hell of a coincidence that God's thoughts perfectly match the abstract objects there are, in a manner that strains credulity to the breaking point.

The independent abstractionist could reply that the notion of coincidence simply isn't apt in the realm of necessary truths, or that God needn't be the ultimate source of intelligibility after all. ("Source" and "grounds" are evocative and common enough; but what reason do we have to think that intelligibility is like a river in needing a source, or like a building in needing a foundation?) Some—perhaps van Inwagen—will find these moves satisfying. But here is another way. All three horns can be avoided by rearranging the explanatory order. Perhaps God is the source of what is intelligible and the abstract realm is structured by what is intelligible. But God in no way causally generates or grounds abstracta. It is, rather, a necessary truth that abstracta exist, and that they are structured by what is intelligible. On this view, God need not consult what abstract objects there are in order to create (all that is needed is already within God). There is also no explanation (prior to both God and the abstract realm) of both God's thoughts and the abstract realm being structured as it is. The buck stops with God. But, finally, it is no coincidence that there is a

perfect correspondence between God's thoughts and the structure of the abstract realm. Both are explained by what is intelligible, which is in turn explained by God.

Abstractionists, we conclude, whether of the dependent or independent variety, need not fear Ward's arguments.

We end on a positive note. This is a good read. It is, throughout, clear and concise. But its virtues are more than mechanical; the book is human and blessed with more than a few moments of beautiful prose. Ward blends analytic argument and attention to detail with literary allusion and devotional relevance. If you want to think more about the mind of the Maker, this is a fine place to start.