The *Rationes Seminales* in Augustine's Theology of Creation[1*]

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> My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:15–17; KJV)

The Challenge of *Creatio ex nihilo*

The classical Judeo-Christian account of creation, *creatio ex nihilo*, serves to cement the Creator–creature distinction. God creates something that is not God, something wholly other than himself: being that is finite, tending towards non-being, lacking stability and simplicity, in a word, that which is contingent. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, then, establishes a fundamental line of demarcation between the creature and the Creator.[2] On the other hand, any account of creation must propose some account of the relation between Creator and creature. How to parse this relation? What is the character of divine action in creation? The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a stark rejection of the (only) two other ways of navigating the Creator–creature relation in creation: (1) God involves himself in time, in a realm of becoming and flux, such that he too is subject to the vicissitudes of becoming. (One variant of this position is the rather flat-footed "process theology" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.) (2)

1 I am grateful for the advice and suggestions of Fr. Guy Mansini, Hans Boersma, and the anonymous peer reviewers on an earlier draft of this essay.

2 See *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet Soskice, and William Stoeger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Creation is taken up into divine eternity, such that it is understood to be co-eternal. Here creation is an extension or profusion of the divine. This was the philosophically astute position of ancient cosmogonies, which understood finite being as an emanation and diminution of eternal being. Here one could point to a host of ancient philosophers (most famously Plotinus) and Christian theologians (most famously Origen) who understood God as a "benevolent and creative energy" who from eternity "fathers-forth whose beauty is past change."[3]

Augustine was acutely aware of the theological landmines lurking in the doctrine of creation. How to account for God's creative action in a way that avoids the Scylla of compromising divine transcendence and the Charybdis of divinizing creation? I propose that Augustine's theology of the *rationes seminales* articulated in *De Genesi ad litteram* allows him to avoid these two doctrinal pitfalls. Augustine carefully distinguishes between the *rationes aeternae*, the eternal ideas of all things that exist in the divine Word, and the *rationes seminales*. These latter *rationes* are the primordial "seeds" implanted in creation at the beginning of time. It is on account of the *rationes seminales* that the earth receives a certain "power" (*virtutem*) to produce and reproduce subsequent life. My contention is that Augustine's theology of the *rationes seminales* allows him to affirm with Genesis that creation was complete when God rested from his work. The payoff of this claim is that it avoids the first pitfall in the doctrine of creation, namely that God is immanent in his own creation. Augustine insists that God creates all things in an instantaneous moment when he implants the *rationes seminales*. This precludes an understanding of God *creating* (as a process), which would subject him to the time he creates. However, the *rationes seminales* also allow Augustine to affirm God's sustaining providential governance of his creation. God does not withdraw from his creation; through the *rationes seminales* he remains present, imbuing creation with his own life and being. After an exposition of Augustine's theology of the divine ideas (the *rationes aeternae*), I will argue that his conception of the *rationes seminales* allows him to articulate the expression of the divine ideas in time and space in a manner that neither compromises divine transcendence nor conceives of creation as a divine profusion. The *rationes seminales* express the divine teleological

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[3] Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.6; Origen, *Peri Archon* 1.4.3: "*Hic est bonus Deus et benignus omnium pater, simul et* εὐεργετικὴ δύναμις et δημιουργική" (*Origene: Traité des Principes*, 2 vols. [books 1–2], ed. Henri Crouzel and M. Simonetti, Sources Chrétiennes 252–53 [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1978], 1:169). With apologies to Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty."

governance of creation according to measure, number, and weight as well as the manner by which the creature participates in the eternal *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* of God himself.

In response to a theology of creation that would threaten to compromise divine transcendence, Augustine was categorical that in choosing to create, God does not involve himself in a temporal process. God creates time and space as wholly distinct from himself. Augustine insisted creation is not a series of actions, a construction project according to which we could imagine God daily adding to his work. God did not decide a few days into creation to include landscaping ("Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind"). Nor did God, at the end of day, lean on his shovel, look at his seedlings and declare them good. Augustine's commitment to divine simplicity and eternity could not countenance a conception of the divine action of creation as the unfolding of a temporal process. Rather, as I seek to explain below, Augustine understood creation to be an instantaneous and simultaneous movement from non-being to being.

The second theological pitfall—the divinization of creation—precludes Augustine from resorting to the standard Hellenic understanding of the relation between Creator and creature, namely, that creation is eternal; that it is a spark of the divine, a necessary profusion from God, which, like rays of light, continually issues forth from its primordial source. Involuntary emanation fails to do justice to the free prerogative of God to create and to create something *other* than God. Augustine's commitment to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* requires avoiding these two doctrinal hazards, so as neither to immanentize God in time and space nor to endow creation with divine substance.

And yet, to warn of two perennial hazards for a theology of creation is not yet to give a coherent account of creation. The challenge latent in *any* theology of creation is to account for the relation between Creator and creature. As Etienne Gilson points out, "Where we fail is in our attempt to get a clear picture of the link between time and eternity. In this case it means comparing two modes of heterogeneous duration founded on two modes of heterogeneous being, and we must add that one of these, namely that of God, escapes us almost entirely."[4] Theologians, after all, do not have the artistic license of Michelangelo. The iconic image of the Renaissance creation fresco in the Sistine Chapel depicts two sinuous index fingers, that of God and that of Adam, reaching out to one another. In the impending

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4 Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1967), 191.

touch of the infinite and the finite, God vivifies humanity. Evidently, the artist is not constrained in the manner of the theologian, who must always be mindful that God is not on the same canvas. The "heterogeneous being" that demarks Creator and creature runs all the way down. The challenge of the doctrine of creation is to provide a coherent account of how the eternal relates to the temporal and how the immutable touches the mutable in a way that does not suggest God is subject to time and space. My contention is that Augustine's account of the *rationes seminales* worked out in *De Genesi ad litteram* allowed him to affirm the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in a way that avoids both immanentism and emanationism.[5]

The Divine Ideas in *De ideis*

A consistent feature of Augustine's theology is that all things pre-exist in the divine mind according to their eternal forms. We are fortunate to have a succinct treatise, *De ideis*—question 46 in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*—in which Augustine lays out with precision his theory of the forms.[6] It is fruitful first to attend to this synopsis.[7] In *De ideis* Augustine presents (1) some historical and terminological aspects of the doctrine of the forms; (2) ontological and cosmological arguments for the forms as

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5 In arguing that Augustine's theology of creation avoids the twin errors of immanentism and emanationism, I do not mean to suggest that a carefully calibrated articulation of "emanation" is irreconcilable with Augustine. See the discussion on emanation in Augustine's theology of creation in Gerald Boersma, *Augustine's Early Theology of Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153–59.

6 Dating *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* with precision is impossible. It is written after Augustine's baptism and deals with questions considered at Cassiciacum and possibly by Augustine's monastic community at Thagaste. It was certainly complete before Augustine was elected bishop in 395. Treatment of question 46, *De ideis*, is offered by: Hans Meyerhoff, "On the Platonism of St. Augustine's *Quaestio de Ideis*," *New Scholasticism* 16 (1942): 16–45; Aimé Solignac, "Analyse et sources de la question 'De Ideis,'" in *Augustinus Magister*, vol. 1 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954), 307–15; Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 408–13 ("Excursus C"); Jean Pépin, "Saint Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas in God," in *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Moran Dermot (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 105–22.

7 Three English translations of *De ideis* are available in: David Mosher (trans), *St. Eighty-Three different Questions*, trans. David Mosher, Fathers of the Church 70 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982); Gersh, *Middle Platonism*, 403–7; Boniface Ramsey, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, Works of Saint Augustine [WSA] I/12 (New York: New City, 2008). I follow the translation offered by Gersh. (The Latin of *De ideis* can be found in PL 40.)

exemplary causes of contingent being; and (3) epistemological considerations regarding how the mind apprehends the forms and how the forms illumine the soul.[8]

Terminology of the Forms

It is Plato, explains Augustine, who first introduced the term "ideas."[9] The Latin words *formae* and *species* are literal translations of Plato's *ideai*; however, it is justifiable also to translate *ideai* as *rationes*. Admittedly, this would not be a literal translation (because the Greek word for *rationes* is not *ideai*, but *logoi*); nevertheless, the term *rationes*, explains Augustine, expresses well the reality itself (*a re ipsa*) to which the term *ideai* refers.[10] Enough about names, states Augustine abruptly, let us turn to the reality.[11]

Ontology and the Forms

Augustine proceeds to delineate the ontological and cosmological character of the *rationes*:

> For Ideas are certain primary forms [*principales formae*] or reasons of things [*rationes rerum*], stable and immutable, which are themselves not formed and therefore eternal and always self-identical, and contained in the divine intellect [*divina intellegentia continentur*]. And whereas they themselves do not come into being or perish, everything which can come into being and perish and everything which does come into being and perish is said to be

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8 See Gersh, *Middle Platonism*, 408–9.

9 Augustine, *De ideis* 1: "Ideas Plato primus appellasse perhibetur." In a delightfully anti-historicist (but perhaps slightly tautological) line of reasoning, Augustine remarks that while the word "idea" can be traced to Plato, "ideas" *themselves* existed long before Plato, because they are eternal. As such, others before Plato certainly knew about the "ideas," but ascribed different names to them. This had to be the case because wise men existed before Plato, and there is no wisdom apart from participation in these "ideas."

10 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "We can therefore call the Ideas 'forms' or 'species' in Latin so that we may appear to translate the term literally. If we should call them 'reasons,' we deviate from exactitude of translation, for reasons are termed λόγοι and not Ideas in Greek. However, if anyone should wish to use that word, he will not veer from the thing itself."

11 Augustine, *De ideis* 1: "Sed de nomine hactenus dictum sit. Rem videamus." Similarly, in the last line of *De ideis*, Augustine writes, "These reasons may be called Ideas, forms, or species or reasons, it being granted to the many to call them whatever they wish, but to the very few to see what is the truth."

formed in accordance with them.[12]

The foundational Platonic demarcation between the sensible and the intelligible is the starting point of this explanation.[13] The immaterial and intelligible is the cause of the sensible and material. The former is eternal and unchanging (*stabiles atque incommutabiles*), while the latter is marked by birth and death (*omen quod oritur et interit*). Jean Pépin points to the Ciceronian provenance of Augustine's contention (common to Middle Platonism) that the eternal rationes are "contained in the divine intellect."[14] Drawing on multiple attestations in Cicero's corpus, Pépin demonstrates that the verb *contineri* has greater specificity than simply the meaning of "being contained in." The verb implies "dependence on" something: "The content is not necessarily *in* the container, but rather is somehow consequent, conditioned or produced by the latter: in short, in some manner or other subordinate to it, and vice versa."[15] As such, Augustine's use of the phrase *divina intellegentia continentur* does not so much describe the locus of the eternal *rationes*, as it expresses the condition within which the forms cohere in a unity.[16]

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12 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Sunt namque ideae principales quaedam formae vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae formatae non sunt ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes, quae divina intellegentia continentur. Et cum ipsae neque oriantur neque intereant, secundum eas tamen formari dicitur omne quod oriri et interire potest et omne quod oritur et interit."

13 See *Phaedo* 78c. The immediate Vorlage is unlikely Plato and more likely Cicero. Pépin argues persuasively that Cicero's Orator 2.9–3.10 is the literary antecedent of Augustine's *De ideis*. Cicero describes how the sculptor, Phidias, would advert to an immaterial and eternal model in his mind as he set out to sculpt. Pépin points to the many instances of exact linguistic correspondence between *Orator 2.9–3.10* and *De ideis* and concludes: "The central fact remains that the reading of the Orator furnished Augustine, author of *De ideis*, with his most definitive inspiration. The identity of certain linguistic formulations cannot be a matter of chance" ("Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas," 113). See also Maurice Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1958), 2:18–22.

14 Augustine, *De ideis* 2.

15 Pépin, "Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas," 113–14.

16 Pépin writes: "Augustine intended in writing that the ideas *divina intellegentia continentur* . . . that their cohesion is guaranteed by the divine intelligence" ("Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas," 115). On Augustine's account, the multiplicity of forms in the eternal Word does not compromise divine simplicity. Already within Middle Platonism (in Albinus, for example) the doctrine of the forms was no longer conceived as an autonomous and eternal "realm" containing a host of discrete forms, but rather as "ideas" that exist in the simplicity of the divine mind. The *formae* are thus the thoughts of God. One can readily see how this

It is precisely because the *rationes* are coterminous with divine wisdom that the person who cannot yet directly contemplate the divine ideas, but is nonetheless imbued with *vera religio*, can perceive that the order, structure, and intelligibility of contingent being is dependent on such *rationes*:

> What man who has religion and is imbued with the true religion would dare deny, indeed would not confess, even if not yet capable of contemplating such things, that everything which exists—that is everything which is contained in its genus by a specific nature [*in suo genere propria quadam natura continentur*] in order that it should exist—was made by God the creator; that through his agency everything which lives has life; and that the universal preservation of things and the order itself by which that which is subject to change maintains its temporal course in a definite measure are contained and controlled [*contineri et gubernari*] by the laws of the highest God?[17]

The eternal *rationes* may be understood as an objective blueprint for all reality. They account for the particular "nature" of each discrete creature. The *propria natura* of each creature and the predictable cycles of ordered movement proper to the specific nature of each contingent creature lie within (*continentur*) the eternal *rationes* or *leges* of God. God does not create irrationally, insists Augustine.[18] Rather, he establishes all things according to their eternal *rationes*: "restat ut omnia ratione sint condita." The structured conditions of creaturely existence testify to their anchor in stable reality: a horse has its *rationes* and a man has his *rationes*. Each individual thing, concludes Augustine, manifests its own specific

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revised exposition of the doctrine of the forms would be amenable to Christian dress. Take, for example, the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar: "The world of the Ideas is absorbed in the unity of Christ. Their multiplicity is transformed into the wealth of the aspects of concrete Unity [which is Christ]" (*Parole et Mystère chez Origène* [Paris: Cerf, 1957], 122n26 [translation mine]).

17 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Quis autem religiosus et vera religione imbutus, quamvis nondum haec possit intueri, negare tamen audeat, immo non etiam profiteatur, omnia quae sunt, id est, quaecumque in suo genere propria quadam natura continentur ut sint, auctore Deo esse procreata, eoque auctore omnia quae vivunt vivere, atque universalem rerum incolumitatem ordinemque ipsum, quo ea quae mutantur suos temporales cursus certo moderamine celebrant, summi Dei legibus contineri et gubernari?"

18 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Quis audeat dicere Deum irrationabiliter omnia condidisse?"

(*propria*) *ratio* according to which it is fashioned.[19]

Augustine asks where (*ubi*) the eternal *rationes* exist, if not in the mind of the Creator (*nisi in ipsa mente Creatoris*). God does not look around for a model after which to create but creates by looking within himself.[20] We will see that in book 5 of *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine gives more specificity to this locution, by positing that the Word (there identified as *dei sapientia*) knows all things in himself prior to fashioning them in time and space.[21] Here, in *De ideis*, Augustine laconically summarizes:

> Thus, if these reasons of all things to be created or already created are contained in the divine mind [*divina mente continentur*], and if nothing can exist in the divine mind which is not eternal and immutable, and if Plato called these primary reasons [*rerum principales*] of things Ideas; then not only do the Ideas exist, but they exist truly [*ipsae verae sunt*] because they are eternal and remain self-identical and immutable, while it comes about by participation in them that everything which has existence exists whatever its precise nature may be.[22]

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19 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Singula igitur propriis sunt creata rationibus."

20 Again, the remote source is Plato's rendering of how the demiurge fashions the world according to the immaterial and intelligible model in his mind (see *Timaeus* 29d–31b). Nevertheless, as Gersh demonstrates in his analysis of *De ideis*, the more immediate tributaries for Augustine's treatment are Cicero, various doxographic writers, and Plotinus (*Middle Platonism*, 411–13).

21 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* [hereafter, *Gn. litt.*] 5.13.29: "So then, as regards those unchangeable and eternal divine formulae (*divinis incommutabilibus aeternisque rationibus*), this is how scripture gives us the evidence that the very Wisdom of God knew before they were made all the things that were made through her: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God is what the Word was. This was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (John 1:1–3)" (all translation from *De Genesi ad litteram* are from *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, WSA I/13 [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2002]). Similarly, see Augustine's later work (415) *Ad Orosium Contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* 8.9.224–27.

22 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Quod si hae rerum omnium creandarum creatarumve rationes divina mente continentur, neque in divina mente quidquam nisi aeternum atque incommutabile potest esse, atque has rationes rerum principales appellat ideas Plato, non solum sunt ideae, sed ipsae verae sunt, quia aeternae sunt et eiusdem modi atque incommutabiles manent. Quarum participatione fit ut sit quidquid est, quoquo modo est."

The same foundational Platonic demarcation between the sensible and the intelligible is recapitulated: the most true existents—that which is true *in itself*—are the ideas contained in the divine mind. Here the accent falls on the participatory ontology evinced. Augustine evokes the language of "participation" to explain how eternal ideas find expression according to their particular mode of being in time and space. Of course, this raises more questions than it answers. What is the precise character of this "participation"? How does that which is finite and temporal share in that which is infinite and eternal? A one-word appeal to "participation" in the divine ideas is insufficient. The challenge with which we began this study—the challenge lurking in any theology of creation—is still very much present. How to understand the divine action of creation in a way that neither subsumes God within the immanent structures of his own creation (of time, movement, and matter), nor so elevates creation that it is understood as a natural extension or profusion of the divine life? How do we affirm that finite existence participates in the divine ideas while avoiding the pitfalls of divine immanentism and creaturely apotheosis? It will await Augustine's mature theology in *De Genesi ad litteram* for these questions to be addressed in a more full-orbed manner.

Epistemology and the Forms

Unique to rational souls is the capacity for contemplation of the eternal *rationes*. However, only the mind that purifies itself is, in fact, able to do so. Only the soul that has become holy, pure, and fit for the vision of the forms can see this immaterial sight. In this respect, *De ideis* contains unmistakable echoes of the spirituality of Plotinus. Interior *askesis*, the purification of the inner eye (what Augustine calls "the intelligible face or eye"), is necessary to see the intelligible forms, for like is seen only by like.[23] Augustine writes,

> But the rational soul, among those things which were made by God, is superior to everything else. It is closest to God [*Deo proxima est*] when it is pure, and as much as it adheres to him in charity [*caritate cohaeserit*] so much is it suffused in a certain way by him with

[23] Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Et ea quidem ipsa rationalis anima non omnis et quaelibet, sed quae sancta et pura fuerit, haec asseritur illi visioni esse idonea, id est, quae illum ipsum oculum, quo videntur ista, sanum et sincerum et serenum et similem his rebus, quas videre intendit, habuerit." ("Even as far as the rational soul itself is concerned, it will not be each and every one but only that which has become holy and pure that is described as suitable for this vision, in other words that which holds that very eye by which those things are seen healthy, whole, serene, and similar to the things which it aspires to behold").

> that intelligible light and having been illuminated perceives those reasons not through corporeal eyes but through that ruling part of itself by which it excels—that is through its intellect—and becomes most blessed in the vision of them.[24]

Augustine's theology is marked by the relentless quest to know God and the soul. And, while these two are distinct, they are not separate. The presence of God is uniquely experienced in the rational soul. *Caritas* is the manner in which the pure soul fuses itself to God. While the *rationes aeternae* of all existents are logically prior to their finite iteration, the rational creature is unique in his ability to contemplate this relation. For Cicero and Plotinus, as well as for the Latin Middle Platonists on which Augustine drew, the locus of kinship between the divine and human spirit is the divine ideas.[25] The origin and nature of the soul is "contained" in these divine ideas. However, the divine ideas are not to be sought in some far off, transcendent "place"; rather, they are discovered in the depths of the human soul, because nothing is more proximate to God than the soul, which shares in God's own intelligible light. It is in contemplation of the divine ideas in the superior parts of the soul that the soul can come to share once again in this divine life. Platonic interiority (masterfully adopted and transposed in the Christian cadence of the *Confessions*) assumes a bond (*sungeneia*) between God and the human soul. The truism of Platonic spirituality, that the depths of interiority is also the site of the highest transcendence, equally holds true for Augustine.[26] It is in seeing God's own ideas and participating in his light that the rational soul understands and is illumined. By turning within itself the soul comes to the *visio beatissima* of the divine ideas.[27]

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24 Augustine, *De ideis* 2: "Sed anima rationalis inter eas res, quae sunt a Deo conditae, omnia superat et Deo proxima est, quando pura est; eique in quantum caritate cohaeserit, in tantum ab eo lumine illo intellegibili perfusa quodammodo et illustrata cernit non per corporeos oculos, sed per ipsius sui principale quo excellit, id est, per intellegentiam suam, istas rationes, quarum visione fit beatissima."

25 Of course, this idea is hardly antithetical to Christian convictions. Paul could affirm with the Stoic poet, Aratos, "Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν" (Acts 17:28).

26 Cf. *Confessions* 3.6.11: "Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo" ("But you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me").

27 See Pépin, 111: "In the eyes of Cicero—very probably a practitioner of the Middle Platonic ideology taken from Antiochus of Ascalon—conceiving the ideas as the thoughts of God does not exclude interiorizing them. In other words, when he wrote in the *Orator* that Phidias reproduced in his art an interior model, he clearly signifies that Phidias participated in the divine intelligence. It is also very probable

The Divine Ideas in *De Genesi ad Litteram*

In *De Genesi ad Litteram* Augustine's immediate appeal is to Scripture rather than to Plato. His principal proof texts for the divine ideas are: Psalm 104:24 ("In wisdom you have made them all"); Colossians 1:16 ("In him are fashioned all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible"); and John 1:3 ("What was made in him is life").[28] For Augustine, such texts evince a participatory ontology that roots contingent being in God's own being. Again, the eternal *rationes* are not discrete autonomous entities such that a host of "ideas" can be said to exist in the divine mind that correspond to distinct creatures. Rather, the eternal *rationes* are united in the simplicity of the Word as life, life that is to be realized in time and space.[29] All things are established eternally in the Word of God, explains Augustine, "in whom are the eternal ideas [*aeternae rationes*] even of things which were made in time, as in the one *through whom all things were made* (John 1:3)."[30] Creatures do not have primordial life in themselves, in their own nature, but "what is made *in him* is life." Augustine explains:

> All these were in the knowledge of the maker before they were made, and of course were better [*meliora*] there, where they were truer [*veriora*], where they are eternal and unchangeable. All this should be enough for anyone to know, or at least to believe unshakably, that God made all these things; and I do not imagine anyone could be so witless as to suppose that God made anything he did not know. Accordingly if he knew them before he made them, it

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that the two points of view are inseparable: that perhaps our access to the intelligible content of the divine intelligence is nothing if not interiorization."

28 See *Gn. litt.* 5.14.31.

29 See *Gn. litt.* 2.6.12: "The things that have been made through him, because he governs them and holds them together, are in him in one way, while the things which he himself is are in him in another. He, after all, is life, which is in him in such a way that it is he himself, since he, the life, is the light of men. So then, nothing could be created, whether before time (which does not mean co-eternal with the creator), or from the start of time, or in any particular time, of which the creation formula—if it can rightly be called a formula—was not alive with co-eternal life in the Word of God co-eternal with the Father; and that is why Scripture, before introducing each element of creation in the order in which it says it was established, looks back to the Word of God, and first puts, 'God said, Let that thing be made.' It could not, you see, find any reason for creating a thing, about which it had not found in the Word of God that it ought to be created."

30 *Gn. litt.* 4.24.41: ". . . in qua ipsi sunt principaliter conditi, in ipso Verbo Dei prius noverunt, in quo sunt omnium, etiam quae temporaliter facta sunt, aeternae rationes, tamquam in eo per quod facta sunt omnia."

> follows that before they were made they were known "with him" [*apud illum erant eo modo nota*] in such a way as to be eternally and unchangeably alive and to be life, while once made they existed in the way all creatures do, each according to its kind.[31]

This digest of the doctrine of the divine ideas does not add anything substantially new to the short treatise *De ideis*, written at least ten years earlier. Augustine simply reiterates that the forms pre-exist (or better, eternally exist) in the divine mind in a manner that is ontologically more stable, "better," and "truer" than we experience reality on the flickering screen of becoming, on which we see creatures come in and out of existence. It is up there (*ibi*) that being really exists ("sempiterne atque incommutabiliter vivunt, et vita sunt"). Again, we see the Platonic antithesis between the intelligible and the sensible as well as an affirmation of the participatory link between these realms: the intelligible causes the sensible. Nevertheless, Augustine allows the verbal refrain of Genesis to guide his questions. The repeated description of each creature being made "according to its kind" suggests to Augustine that "they were already in existence beforehand, though the account of their creation is only now being given."[32] The reference to "their kind" expresses the higher, spiritual ideas (*superiores rationes*) according to which they were fashioned.[33]

God alone is eternal and unchanging; he has "to be" within himself ("habens in se ut sit"), insists Augustine with an appeal to Exodus

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31 *Gn. litt.* 5.15.33: "omnia, priusquam fierent, erant in notitia facientis. Et utique ibi meliora, ubi veriora, ubi aeterna et incommutabilia. Quamquam sufficere debeat ut quisque noverit, vel inconcusse credat quod Deus haec omnia fecerit; non opinor eum esse tam excordem, ut Deum quae non noverat fecisse arbitretur. Porro, si noverat ea, priusquam faceret ea; profecto priusquam fierent, apud illum erant eo modo nota, quo sempiterne atque incommutabiliter vivunt, et vita sunt: facta autem eo modo, quo unaquaeque creatura in genere suo est."

32 *Gn. litt.* 3.12.18.

33 *Gn. litt.* 3.12.18: "Non frustra etiam lectorem movet utrumne passim et quasi fortuito an aliqua ratione dicatur, secundum genus, tamquam fuerint et antea, cum primo creata narrentur: an genus eorum in superioribus rationibus intellegendum est, utique spiritalibus, secundum quas creantur inferius" ("The reader may also wonder, and not without justification, whether the phrase *according to kind* comes up again and again just by chance, as it were, or whether there is some meaning in it, as though they were already in existence beforehand, though the account of their creation is only now being given. Or can it be that 'their kind' is to be understood as being in the higher, that is of course the spiritual, ideas according to which they are created lower down the scale?").

3:14.[34] God does not have new thoughts; the stability of his eternal and unchangeable nature entails that all things first exist most fully in his simplicity and stability:

> Only that, you see, really and truly and primordially is, which always is the same way, and not only never changes but is absolutely incapable of changing. So without bringing into existence yet any of the things which he has made, he has all things primordially in himself in the same manner as he is [*sicut ipse est*]. After all, he would not make them unless he knew them before he made them; nor would he know them unless he saw them; nor would he see them unless he had them with him; and he would not have with him things that had not yet been made except in the manner in which he himself is not made.[35]

The divine ideas, then, exist in the divine mind as God himself exists ("sicut ipse est")—simply, stably, and immutably.[36] Augustine's conception of divine simplicity precludes an account of God as antecedent to the divine ideas, as we are distinct and prior to our thoughts. Rather, the divine ideas exist in the manner that God himself exists: they share in the unity and simplicity of the divine nature. They are not called into being (*non factus*), but have their being as eternally begotten "in the manner in which [God] himself is not made."[37] Written into the fabric of existence, then, is a proximity, an immanence, between God and the creature that is radical (in the literal sense of the word). Although the divine substance is inexpressible, admits Augustine, it is "nearer to us than the many things which he made. *For in him we live and move and are* (Acts 17:28)."[38] If creatures exist, not only in time and space, but more truly *in God* (*apud Deum*) ("He has all

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34 *Gn. litt.* 5.16.34.

35 *Gn. litt.* 5.16.34: "Quoniam illud vere ac primitus est, quod eodem modo semper est, nec solum non commutatur, sed commutari omnino non potest; nihil horum quae fecit existens, et omnia primitus habens, sicut ipse est: neque enim ea faceret, nisi ea nosset antequam faceret; nec nosset, nisi videret; nec videret, nisi haberet; nec haberet ea quae nondum facta erant, nisi quemadmodum est ipse non factus."

36 Augustine also calls the divine ideas *rationes incommutabiles* (*Gn. litt.*5.12.28) and *divinae incommutabiles aeternaeque rationes* (*Gn. litt.* 5.13.29).

37 *Gn. litt.* 5.16.34: "nec haberet ea quae nondum facta erant, nisi quemadmodum est ipse non factus" ("He would not have with him things that had not yet been made except in the manner in which he himself is not made."). Cf. *Gn. litt.* 2.8.16: "illic non facta, sed genita" ("It was not made but begotten").

38 *Gn. litt.* 5.16.34: ". . . tamen propinquior nobis est qui fecit, quam multa quae facta sunt. In illo enim vivimus, et movemur, et sumus."

things primordially in himself in the same manner as he is"), then, concludes Augustine, God is nearer to his creatures than they can even be to each other. Augustine understands the notion of the divine ideas to underwrite the *sungeneia* between Creator and creature to which the Apostle Paul refers when he quotes the Greek poet, Aratos, "Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν" (Acts 17:28). All things exist both in God as eternal ideas and in the fluid time-space continuum that their contingent nature occupies.[39] Creation, for Augustine, lies precisely in this movement from the eternal *rationes* to the existence of mutable reality as we experience it.

But here we put our finger on the nub of the problem, namely, the process or movement from the immutability of the divine ideas to the mutability of contingent being. How are the divine ideas iterated in time and space in a way that does not challenge the fact that God is "absolutely incapable of changing" (*commutari omnino non potest*)?[40] The very language of "processes" and "movement" suggests a problem. It implies that the divine action of creation is sequential, an operation that has God involved in the distention of time. Recall that this is precisely what the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* sets up to avoid. God is not part of his creation; he is not part of the time-space continuum. God is not a builder who advances on his earlier work. It is incoherent to speak of an immutable God literally working for six days, as if he were part of the time he created.

Rationes Seminales

Augustine's first line of response is to insist that creation is not a process or movement on God's part.[41] Creation occurs at once, simultaneously, in

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39 Cf. *Evangelium Ioannem tractatus* 1.17; *De vera religione* 22.42; *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos* 1.8.13; Epistle 14, no. 4; *Gn. litt.* 5.15.33; *De Trinitate* 4.1.3. In contrast to *De ideis*, *Gn. litt.* evinces little optimism about the human capacity to contemplate (and thereby ascend to) the divine ideas: "Nor is our human mind capable of seeing them where they are with God [*apud Deum*], in the archetypes [*rationibus*] according to which they were made, so that in this way we might know how many, how great and of what sort they are, even though we do not see them with the senses of the body. The fact is they are remote from our bodily sense, being so far way, or cut off from our observation and activity by the interposition of other bodies" (*Gn. litt.* 5.16.34: "Nec idonea est ipsa mens nostra, in ipsis rationibus quibus facta sunt, ea videre apud Deum, ut per hoc sciamus quot et quanta qualiaque sint, etiamsi non ea videamus per corporis sensus. Remota quippe sunt a sensibus corporis nostri, quoniam longe sunt, vel interpositis aut oppositis aliis a nostro contuitu actuque separantur").

40 *Gn. litt.* 5.16.34.

41 Elsewhere, Augustine warns against crass, childish understandings of the creation narrative: "We are not to understand this [divine creation and rest] in a childish

an instantaneous and complete moment, in what Augustine terms an *ictus* (a sudden blow).[42] This is essential to Augustine's conception of the divine act in creation, and the recurring proof text in this regard is Sirach 18:1: "creavit omnia simul."[43] Nevertheless, in creating simultaneously God creates a world subject to constant change, diminution, and growth.[44] At this point Augustine distinguishes between the *rationes aeternae* that I have discussed thus far as eternal ideas and the *rationes seminales*, which serve as the means of navigating the ontological aperture between the eternal *rationes* in the mind of God and creaturely existence that flows in and out of being. Creation is the finite expression of the divine ideas—*rationes aeternae*—that are themselves not made but are begotten in the eternity of the Word of God.[45] Scripture delineates the simultaneous and instantaneous moment of creation by calling it a "day." At the moment ("day") of creation God implants creatures with their particular *rationes seminales*. Six times in the first chapter of Genesis this locution describing the action of creation ("day") is repeated as an accommodation of Scripture to the simple-minded.[46] God does not create in periods of time. The "days" of

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sense as though God labored at His task. For he 'spake and it was done,' with a word which was not audible and transient, but intelligible and eternal" (*De civitate Dei* 11.8 , in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998]).

42 Augustine describes the creative act taking place in an *ictus*: "in ictu condendi" (*Gn. litt.* 4.33.51). *Ictus* has particular valence in Augustine's theology. His enraptured moments of spiritual contemplation described in *Confessions* are similarly described as instantaneous and striking (*ictus*); see *Confessions* 7.1.1, 7.17.23, and 9.8.18.

43 Sirach 18:1 is quoted nineteen times in *Gn. litt.* The Septuagint reads, ἔκτισεν τὰ πάντα κοινῇ.

44 Augustine also demonstrates acute awareness of this tension elsewhere. In *Confessions* he states the problem succinctly: "And so in the Word that is coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity. . . . Yet, not all that you cause to exit by speaking is made in simultaneity and eternity" (*Confessions* 11.7.9; all English from *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991]).

45 See *Gn. litt.* 2.8.16. And yet, the *rationes aeternae* and the *rationes seminales* are related. Simon Oliver writes: "The eternal reasons that lie complete in the Word become the *rationes seminales* that are implanted in creation to unfold in due time according to the providential will of God" ("Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18 [2016]: 390). Oliver later notes: "The *rationes seminales* are created expressions of the eternal reasons that lie in the Word or God's Wisdom"(392).

46 *Gn. litt.* 4.33.52: "The one who made all things simultaneously together also made simultaneously these six or seven days, or together this one day six or seven times

creation refer to a mystical number and not to the circuit of the sun.[47]

Augustine distinguishes between two types of creatures made in the *ictus* of creation: the mutable and the immutable. Some creatures spoken into existence on that "day" share intimately in the Creator's stability and immutability (like angels,[48] the day itself,[49] the firmament, the four elements, the stars, and the human soul[50]).[51] Other creatures are manifestly unstable and mutable, namely, perceptible creation experienced all around us, which is born, develops, and then diminishes and dies. Mutable creation presents a challenge. How to account for the fact that Genesis describes God as finishing his creative work and as resting from all his labor, and the fact that new creatures are always coming in and out of being? Augustine explains that mutable creatures subject to the cycles of life are, like the immutable creation, fashioned simultaneously and instantaneously on that first moment (*ictus*/"day") of creation. However, they are created in a mode that allows for their subsequent unfolding. At the moment of creation, those creatures that grow, mature, and die are implanted with their primordial seeds, which Augustine calls *rationes causales* or *rationes seminales*.[52] These primordial causes are implanted like

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repeated. So then, what need was there for the six days to be recounted so distinctly and methodically? It was for the sake of those who cannot arrive at an understanding of the text, 'he created all things together simultaneously' [Sir 18:1,] unless Scripture accompanies them more slowly, step by step, to the goal to which it is leading them."

47 *Gn. litt.* 4.26.43.

48 *Gn. litt.* 1.9.15; 2.8.16; cf. *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 3. 6–10.

49 *Gn. litt.* 6.1.2.

50 *Gn. litt.* 7.24.35.

51 Cf.: *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 3.6–9; *Gn. litt.* 1.9.15; 2.8.16–19; 6.1.2.

52 The *rationes seminales* are an important feature of Stoic and Neoplatonic cosmogony. Marcia Colish suggests the Neoplatonic background to Augustine's treatment is overplayed and that in Augustine "this notion is fully Stoic"; see *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 204. However, it is hard to miss the clear resonances with Plotinus, such as *Ennead* 2.3.16; 2.3.18; 2.7.3; 4.3.10; 4.3.13; 4.9.5; 5.1.5; 5.9.3; 5.9.6. Aimé Solignac seems correct in noting, "Augustine uses the Plotinian categories as technical instruments which allow him to construct and formulate his own metaphysics" ("Le Double moment de la création et les 'raisons causale,'" *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 48 [1972]: 664; translation mine). For the philosophical background to Augustine's treatment of the *rationes seminales* see: Michel John McKeough, "The Meaning of the *Rationes Seminales* in Augustine" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1926); Charles Boyer, "La théorie augustinienne des raisons séminales," *Miscellanea Agostiniana* 28 (1931): 795–819; F. J. Thonnard, "Les raisons séminales selon

seeds that germinate later in time, moving the creature towards the particular end for which it was created. Augustine explains:

> The whole course of nature that we are so familiar with has certain natural laws of its own [*naturales leges suas*], according to which both the spirit of life which is a creature has drives and urges [*appetitus*] that are somehow predetermined [*determinatos*] and which even a bad will cannot bypass, and also the elements of this material world have their distinct energies and qualities [*vim qualitatemque suam*], which determine what each is or is not capable of, what can or cannot be made from which. It is from these base-lines of things, so to say, that whatever comes to be takes in its own particular time span, its risings and continued progress, its ends and its settings, according to the kind of thing [*generis*] it is. Hence the fact that beans are not produced from grains of wheat or wheat from beans, nor human being from cattle or cattle from human beings.[53]

Saint Augustin," Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of Philosophy, Brussels, August 20–26, 1953 (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1953), 12:146–52; Thonnard, "Razones seminales y formas substantciales: Augustismo y tomismo," *Sapientia* 6 (1951): 262–72; Jules M. Brady, "St. Augustine's Theory of Seminal Reasons," *New Scholasticism* 38 (1964): 141–58.

53 *Gn. litt*. 9.17.32: "Omnis iste naturae usitatissimus cursus habet quasdam naturales leges suas, secundum quas et spiritus vitae, qui creatura est, habet quosdam appetitus suos determinatos quodammodo, quos etiam mala voluntas non possit excedere. Et elementa mundi huius corporei habent definitam vim qualitatemque suam, quid unumquodque valeat vel non valeat, quid de quo fieri possit vel non possit. Ex his velut primordiis rerum, omnia quae gignuntur, suo quoque tempore exortus processusque sumunt, finesque et decessiones sui cuiusque generis. Unde fit ut de grano tritici non nascatur faba, vel de faba triticum, vel de pecore homo, vel de homine pecus." He continues here: "Super hunc autem motum cursumque rerum naturalem, potestas Creatoris habet apud se posse de his omnibus facere aliud, quam eorum quasi seminales rationes habent, non tamen id quod non in eis posuit ut de his fieri vel ab ipso possit. Neque enim potentia temeraria, sed sapientiae virtute omnipotens est; et hoc de unaquaque re in tempore suo facit, quod ante in ea fecit ut possit. Alius ergo est rerum modus quo illa herba sic germinat, illa sic; illa aetas parit, illa non parit; homo loqui potest, pecus non potest" ("But over and above this natural course and operation of things, the power of the creator has in itself the capacity to make from all these things something other than what their seminal formulae, so to say, prescribe—not however anything with which he did not so program them that it could be made from them at least by him. He is almighty, for sure, but with the strength of wisdom, not unprincipled might; and he makes from each thing in his own time what he first inscribed in it that he could make from it. So then there is one standard for things according to which this plant germinates in

Augustine describes the innate structures or "natural laws" woven deeply into the fabric of creaturely existence. One could look at these "laws" as "deterministic," but they are simply expressive of the constitutive dimensions of a particular creature's mode of existence. It is according to this instinctive and determinate "programming" that a fledgling takes up its wings or that a caterpillar blossoms into a butterfly. Simon Oliver expresses Augustine's thesis on the *rationes* well:

> The *rationes seminales* establish the general direction of a creature's motion towards a particular goal or purpose; by means of its *rationes seminales*, an acorn is set in motion towards the oak tree, the chick towards flight, the child towards learning and knowledge, and so on. Because these seeds are a creature's principle and contain in potential form its telos, they are also the basis of creation's intelligible motion in time because they establish a beginning and end. The potentialities within creatures are always defined by their orientation towards an actuality that is eternally established in the Word.[54]

The implantation of the *ratio seminales* in creaturely beings is distinct from the origin of the eternal *rationes* in the divine mind.[55] Unlike the divine ideas, the *rationes seminales* are definitively *creatures*, distinct from the Creator. They allow for the unfolding of contingent being according to its nature and teleology. The *rationes seminales* give specificity to the mode of God's sustaining providence, his ordered governance of creation:

> But these things too carry within them a repetition, so to say, of their very selves, invisible in some hidden power of reproduction, derived from those primordial causes of theirs, in which they were

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this way, that one in that, this age gives birth, that one does not, a human being can speak, an animal cannot").

54 Oliver, "Augustine on Creation," 387–88.

55 See Cornelius Myer, "Creatio, creator, creatura," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer et al., 5 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1986–), 2:88: "Among the terms used by Augustine, *ratio* with the attribute *causalis* is the most appropriate, because it already indicates the conceptual proximity of the primeval seeds or the primordial seeds to the transcendent *rationes aeternae*, which in this way work into the world. The *rationes causales* are thus the objective correlates of the unchangeable ideas immersed in matter in the manner of shadowing (*umbra*), which, as created forces and energies, drive the development of organisms according to the programs inherent in them" (translation mine).

> inserted into the world that was created "when the day was made," before they ever burgeoned into the visible manifestations of their specific nature.[56]

Creation is good, but unfinished.[57] The *rationes seminales*, then, are the principles by which God's animating presence (or *creatio continua*) directs each element of creation, "from within," towards its particular and proper end.[58] As such, the *rationes seminales* are not material realities. They are not physical seeds implanted in an organism. Rather, they are intelligible causes responsible for the structural laws evident in creation. The *rationes seminales* explain the diversity, integrity, and intelligibility of all creation, which moves in predictable, orderly patterns of spatial and temporal development.[59] Augustine is intent on eradicating any material conception of the *rationes seminales*. He admits that it is hard to conceptualize creation as first established *invisibly* in the *rationes seminales* and later *visibly* expressing itself as it unfurls in its particular created manner. The *rationes seminales* are in important ways different from a fetus or a seed: they are not any sort of physical datum, but an immaterial *explans* of causality: "Seeds do provide some sort of comparison [*similitudo*] with this, on account of the growth to come that are bound up with them; before all seeds, nonetheless are those causes."[60] Fundamentally, the *ratio-*

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56 *Gn. litt.* 6.10.17: "Sed etiam ista secum gerunt tamquam iterum seipsa invisibiliter in occulta quadam vi generandi, quam extraxerunt de illis primordiis causarum suarum, in quibus creato mundo cum factus est dies, antequam in manifestam speciem sui generis exorerentur, inserta sunt."

57 Rowan Williams writes, "Creation is the constant process of realizing potential goods" ("'Good For Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994):18.

58 The *rationes seminales* allow Augustine to affirm that God does not create the world as a "place" outside of himself. They are the means of the divine *creatio continua*, of God's ongoing creative work: "Some people think of God as if he were a human being or a power immanent in a vast mass which, by some new and sudden decision external to itself, as if located in remote places, made heaven and earth" (*Confessions* 12.27.37). But God does not create the world as "external" to himself. Unlike a human carpenter, explains Augustine, who fashions a chest external to himself, God creates the world from within: "God is present in the world he is fashioning, he does not stand aside from it and handle the matter he is working on, so that say, from the outside. He makes what he makes by the presence of his majesty; by his presence he governs what he has made" (*Evangelium Ioannem tractatus* 2.10, in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, WSA I/40 (New York: New City, 2009).

59 See Mayer, "Creatio, creator, creatura," 2:86.

60 *Gn. litt.* 6.6.11: "Neque enim vel tale aliquid homo iam erat, cum in prima illa sex

nes seminales are immaterial and, as such, invisible.[61]

To recapitulate, Augustine understands mutable creation—the expression of the divine ideas (or the *rationes aeternae*) in time and space—to be a two-step process (not temporally, but logically). On the "day" of creation, God fashions creatures in their *rationes seminales*, the primordial causal potencies of all things, so that mutable creatures are first established by God "from within," according to their *rationes seminales*, "invisibly, potentially, in their causes, in the way things are made when they have not yet been made in actual fact."[62] Second, God providentially governs, "from without," the unfolding of times and seasons by which we experience the created order:

> All species, whether animals or grasses or trees, take their rise, to run through their time-governed measures and numbers [*agant temporales numeros*] as allotted to their particular natures [*naturis propriis*]. All the primordial seeds, I mean to say, from which every kind of flesh or fruit is born, are moist and grow and develop out of

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dierum conditione factus erat. Datur quidem de seminibus ad hanc rem nonnulla similitudo, propter illa quae in eis futura conserta sunt; verumtamen ante omnia visibilia semina sunt illae causae." The comparison (*similitudo*) of a seed and its germination is something to which Augustine often resorts: "Now just as all these elements, which in the course of time and in due order would constitute a tree, were all invisibly and simultaneously present [*invisibiliter erant omnia simul*] in that grain, so too that is how, when God created all things simultaneously [*simul omnia creavit*], the actual cosmos is to be thought of as having had simultaneously all the things that were made in it and with it *when the day was made* (Gen 2:4). This does not only mean the sky, with the sun and the moon and the stars . . . and the earth and the deeps of the abyss. . . . It also includes those things that water and earth produced potentially in their causes [*produxit potentialiter atque causaliter*], before they could evolve (*exorerentur*) through intervals of time, as they are now known to us in the works on which God is continuing to *work until now* (John 5:17)" (*Gn. litt.* 5.23.45).

61 Cf. Mayer, "Creatio, creator, creatura," 2:88. Augustine describes the *rationes seminales* as "absconditae causales rationes omnium rerum naturaliter oriturarum" ("The causal formulae of all things that are going to take their rise in a natural way are hidden"; *Gn. litt.* 9.18.34). He writes: "In quibus omnibus ea iam facta modos et actus sui temporis acceperunt, quae ex occultis atque invisibilibus rationibus, quae in creatura causaliter latent" ("In all these cases things already made received the characteristic activities of their own proper time, which came forth in manifest forms and natures from the secret formulae that are causally latent in creation"; *Gn. litt.* 6.10.17).

62 *Gn. litt.* 6.6.10: ". . . invisibiliter, potentialiter, causaliter, quomodo fiunt futura non facta."

> moisture. But they have within them the most efficacious numbers, which bring along with them potentialities consequent upon those perfect works of God, from which he rested on the seventh day.[63]

There is a "being made" that continues after the initial, invisible, simultaneous establishment of all creatures. This *creatio continua* is the unfolding of creatures according to their *rationes seminales*.

The two distinct creation narratives of the first two chapters of Genesis invite this account of the two-step process of creation through the unfolding of the *rationes seminales*. The drumbeat of the first narrative (Gen 1:1–2:3) with its tripartite formula ("And God said, 'Let it be made'"; "And thus it was made"; "And God saw it was good") refers to the simultaneous and instantaneous creation of that "day."[64] The second narrative, which begins when "no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up" (Gen 2:5), relates the burgeoning of the *rationes seminales* in their particular mode of existence coming "out of the ground" (Gen 2:7; 2:9; 2:19).[65]

Throughout *De Genesi ad Litteram* Augustine pairs two seemingly opposed texts: first, that "heaven and earth and all their arrangements were finished. . . . And God rested from all his works" (Gen 2:1–3) and, second, that God "is working until now" (John 5:17). The *rationes seminales* allow Augustine to affirm both sides of this equation: God completed his work of creation and continues to create by the providential unfolding of the original works of creation. He writes,

> God worked in one way with all creatures at their first establishment [*prima conditione*], works from which he rested on the seventh day, and in another at their management and regulation [*administrationem*] at which *he is working until now* (John 5:17), that is, that he then worked at making all things simultaneously [*simul*)], without any intervals or periods of time between, while now he works through periods of time.[66]

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63 *Gn. litt.* 5.7.20: "Et recte ab eo coepit elemento, ex quo cuncta genera nascuntur vel animalium, vel herbarum atque lignorum, ut agant temporales numeros suos naturis propriis distributos. Omnia quippe primordia seminum, sive unde omnis caro, sive unde omnia fruteta gignuntur, humida sunt, et ex humore concrescunt. Insunt autem illis efficacissimi numeri, trahentes secum sequaces potentias ex illis perfectis operibus Dei, a quibus in die septimo requievit."

64 See *Gn. litt.* 2.6.11–12.

65 See *Gn. litt.* 5.4.7–11.

66 *Gn. litt.* 5.11.27: "Aliter operatum Deum omnes creaturas prima conditione, a

At the first moment of time, God implanted the *rationes seminales*, the "power" (*virtutem*) by which life is generated and reproduced according its kind: "Things which were going to be realized in the course of time had already been made, if I may so put it, in the roots of time."[67] Mutable creation, which is subject to time, is rooted in *seminales* "before" time.

Thus, in that "day" when creation was fashioned simultaneously it was, in one sense, complete ("he set up no new kind of nature"), but also still needing completion ("directing the ones which he had already set in place"), in that it was only just set in its course of motion.[68] Augustine writes:

> Completely finished [*consummate*], indeed, because they have nothing in their natural manner of running their courses in time which was not made causally in that primordial creation; started off [*inchoata*], however, since they were seeds in a sense of future realities [*quasi semina futurorum*] determined to germinate in the suitable places from hidden obscurity into the manifest light of day through the course of the ages.[69]

In short, the very same works of God were both finished and started on that "day."[70] Augustine can conclude that it is true both that God rested on the seventh day from work he completed—there was nothing further to create—and started his work of creation by implanting the causes to be unfolded.[71]

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quibus operibus in die septimo requievit; aliter ista eorum administrationem, qua usque nunc operatur: id est, tunc omnia simul sine ullis temporalium morarum intervallis; nunc autem per temporum moras." Cf. *Gn. litt.* 4.12.23; 5.4.11: "But he creates these things now from those that are already there, while then things were created by him when they had been absolutely non-existent, when that day was made which had also itself been absolutely non-existent, namely the spiritual and intellectual creation."

67 *Gn. litt.* 5.4.11: "In ea quippe iam tamquam in radicibus, ut ita dixerim, temporum facta erant, quae per tempora futura erant."

68 *Gn. litt.* 4.12.23.

69 *Gn. litt.* 6.11.18: "Consummata quidem quia nihil habent illa in naturis propriis, quibus suorum temporum cursus agunt, quod non in istis causaliter factum sit; inchoata vero, quoniam quaedam erant quasi semina futurorum, per saeculi tractum ex occulto in manifestum locis congruis exserenda."

70 *Gn. litt.* 6.11.18: "Nam et consummata ea dicit et inchoate."

71 *Gn. litt.* 6.11.19.

The *Rationes Seminales*: Expressions of Measure and Number and Weight

Wisdom 11:20 is the axial text for Augustine's account of the *rationes seminales*: "You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight."[72] However, the relation between the *rationes seminales* and Wisdom 11:20 has received little scholarly attention. *Mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* function as the register of the *rationes seminales*, expressing the particular mode of each form of creaturely existence. Measure gives a species its limit; it delineates the boundaries of a particular nature, establishing its mode of being in the world. *Mensura* is thus what determines a chickadee as a chickadee. The "measure" inscribed in the *rationes seminales* precludes the scene imagined by Dr. Seuss in which the elephant Horton faithfully broods on an abandoned egg. Horton is shocked to discover that he has hatched an elephant-bird![73] Rather, *mensura* ensures continuity of species within the changes of time: cows give birth to cows, dogs to dogs, and orangutans to orangutans. *Mensura* proper to the *rationes seminales* is analogous (but in an immaterial mode) to the shared DNA of a species: it is "the secret formulae that are causally latent in creation."[74] "Number" refers to the harmonious order and proportion of a creature. It suggests a deep-seated coherence, a fundamental congruency of the creature's parts in relation to the whole. *Numerus* is the predictable, patterned character of creaturely existence, providing order to creation and allowing for both scientific investigation and aesthetic admiration.[75] Finally, "weight" is the *pull* of all things to their proper end. *Pondus* refers to the teleological character of creaturely existence, that is, the innate desire of each thing to seek "rest"

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72 See: *Gn. litt.* 2.1.1; 4.3.7–4.5.11; 9.15.24. See the following discussion: W. J. Roche, "Measure, Number and Weight in St. Augustine," *New Scholasticism* 15 (1941): 350–76; Rowan Williams, "Good for Nothing"; Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon , 1992), 101–10; Scott Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 92–99.

73 See Dr. Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* (New York: Random House, 1940).

74 *Gn. litt.* 6.10.17: ". . . quae ex occultis atque invisibilibus rationibus, quae in creatura causaliter latent."

75 See *Gn. litt.* 5.5.14: On the third day of creation vegetation is established "by receiving in itself all their numbers, which it would extrude through the periods of time proper to each kind of plant." So too, the animals that swim and fly, mentioned on the fifth day, were established "potentially in their numbers, which were to be extruded through suitable timed moments." Finally, the land animals were called forth, "but still nonetheless potentially, for their numbers to be visibly unfolded by time later on."

or stability in its end.[76] For rational creatures, Augustine famously notes, *pondus* is *amor*; love is the weight by which we are pulled to whatever we desire. The will seeks rest, peace, and stability in that which it loves.[77]

In *De Trinitate* 3.16 Augustine provides a rich summation of his understanding of the place of *rationes seminales* in the work of creation:

> It is one thing, after all, to establish and administer creation from the inmost and supreme pivot of all causes [*intimo ac summo causarum*], and the one who does that is God the sole creator; it is another matter to apply activity from outside, in virtue of power and capacities distributed by him, so that the thing being created turns out like this or like that. All things around us have been seminally and primordially created in the very fabric, as it were, or texture of the elements; but they require the right occasion actually to emerge into being. For the world itself, like mothers heavy with young, is heavy with the causes of things that are coming to birth; but these things are only created in it by that supreme being in which nothing is born or dies, nothing begins or ceases to be. But to apply secondary causes to things from outside, which even if they are not natural are applied all the same according to nature, and so to make things which lie hidden and secreted in nature's bosom burst forth and be created openly, by unfolding the measures and numbers and weights—which have been secretly assigned to them by him who *has arranged all things in measure and number and weight* (Wis 11:20)—this is something which bad men can do no less than bad angels, as I have showed above in the case of agriculture.[78]

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76 *Pondus* attests to Aristotle's claim that all things "must be for the sake of something" (*Phys*. 198b32–199a8). Simon Oliver writes, "The 'weight' of creatures is their desire for the fulfilment of their formal natures; that 'weight' carries them to particular ends. Through form, they constantly seek stability, order and rest within the complex negotiations of creaturely motions within the cosmic order." Oliver, "Augustine on Creation," 396.

77 Cf. *Gn. litt*. 4.3.8 and *Confessions* 13.9.10.

78 *De Trinitate* 3.16: 16: "Aliud est enim ex intimo ac summo causarum cardine condere atque administrare creaturam, quod qui facit solus Creator est Deus; aliud autem pro distributis ab illo viribus et facultatibus aliquam operationem forinsecus admovere ut tunc vel tunc sic vel sic exeat quod creatur. Ista quippe originaliter ac primordialiter in quadam textura elementorum cuncta iam creata sunt sed acceptis opportunitatibus prodeunt. Nam sicut matres gravidae sunt fetibus, sic ipse mundus gravidus est causis nascentium quae in illo non creantur nisi ab illa summa essentia ubi nec oritur nec moritur aliquid nec incipit esse nec desinit. Adhibere autem forinsecus accedentes causas quae tametsi non sunt naturales

As in *De Genesi ad litteram* (but with more specificity), Augustine distinguishes here between the initial establishment of all things at the moment of creation and their subsequent unfolding according to their *rationes seminales*. In *De Trinitate* 3.16 we see Augustine distinguish two modes of divine causality. God creates "from within," so to speak, at the instantaneous and simultaneous moment of creation. However, by endowing creation in their *rationes seminales* with certain powers and capacities (*viribus et facultatibus*), rational creatures are able to perceive the nature, order, and purpose of creation and "from without" (*forinsecus*) use and apply each creature's divinely ordained measure, number, and weight.[79] By discovering and harnessing these innate "powers and capacities" in nature, humanity can work towards "the relief of man's estate." The world "is heavy with the causes of things," notes Augustine. These "causes" are the innate intelligibility, order, and purpose latent in the very "fabric" of the elements, which allows human beings to use, produce, and work with that which nature provides. (Augustine gives the example of agriculture.) The *rationes causales*, latent in creation, can be discovered and used (for good or ill) to serve human ends (e.g., the

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tamen secundum naturam adhibentur ut ea quae secreto naturae sinu abdita continentur erumpant quodam modo et foris creentur explicando mensuras et numeros et pondera sua quae in occulto acceperunt ab illo qui omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuit, non solum mali angeli sed etiam mali homines possunt sicut exemplo agriculturae supra docui" (Latin from Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 50; English from *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, WSA I/5[Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1991).

79 See *Gn. litt.* 8.26.48, where Augustine similarly explains that the immutable and eternal God creates *internally* outside of time that which he moves *externally* within time: "By such movement he administers outwardly the natures which he set in place inwardly" ("ut eo motu naturas quas intrinsecus substituit, etiam extrinsecus administret"). Creation is providentially governed in time and space according to *rationes aeternae* outside of time and space in God's eternity ("eo tempore ac loco cuius ratio in ipso Deo vita est sine tempore ac loco"). Augustine continues: "But we should realize that in the operation of divine providence these things do not happen in the operation by which he creates natures, but in the one by which he also administers externally the natures he has created internally. This is because by his immutable and surpassing power, not in any local or spatial sense, he is both interior to every single thing, because *in him are all things* (Rom 11:36), and exterior to every single thing because he is above all things" ("sed in opere divinae providentiae ista cognoscere; non in illo opere quo naturas creat, sed in illo quo intrinsecus creatas etiam extrinsecus administrat, cum sit ipse, nullo locorum vel intervallo vel spatio, incommutabili excellentique potentia et interior omni re, quia in ipso sunt omnia, et exterior omni re, quia ipse est super omnia").

internal-combustion engine, the electric grid, the bicycle, etc.).[80]

Augustine's account of causality extends far beyond the simple recognition that God sets the world in motion; rather, God implants and then sustains such *motio* in an ordered teleological manner (in measure, number, and weight). The language of motion is critical. In *De Genesi ad litteram* 5.20.41 Augustine describes the *rationes seminales* as the "hidden power" by which God "sets the whole of creation in motion."[81] Constellations circle, winds blow, water is stirred, greenage grows, animals reproduce. All manner of creaturely existence is "whirled around with that movement"; but whirled in an ordered, purposeful, and intelligible manner according to the measure, number, and weight implanted in their *rationes seminales*.[82] The *rationes seminales* provide the teleological ordering of movement along what Augustine describes as "tracks" (*cursus*) by which God "unwinds the ages which he has as it were folded into the universe when it was first set up."[83]

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80 Augustine, like Francis Bacon, speaks of accessing nature's secrets. The inherent intelligibility (*numerus*) of the created order awaits discovery, which can be harnessed to serve human ends. For Bacon, such knowledge is equivalent with power: the *novum organum* (the "new instrument") is the scientific method that will at last realize humanity's totalizing control over nature. Bacon intends the *novum organum* to replace the cumbersome metaphysical and teleological scientific method inherited from Aristotle. Bacon (in-)famously describes this method as putting nature on the rack to force out her secrets. Augustine also describes nature containing secrets hid in her womb, which, when uncovered, burst forth with utility. However, unlike Bacon, Augustine retains a richly textured metaphysical and teleological substructure in his account of nature. The *novum organum* only takes *efficient* causality within its purview. By contrast, Augustine's theology of creation not only recognizes the utility of nature's intelligible structures (i.e., *numerus*), but also attends to nature's *formal* cause (i.e., *mensura*), which gives expression to its particular nature and its final cause (i.e., *pondus*), whereby nature expresses its telos. Further, Augustine's participatory ontology remains cognizant of the fact that creaturely causality is dependent on (and answerable to) God's creative causality. Creaturely measure, number, and weight is the mode of participation in the eternal measure, number, and weight that is the Holy Trinity. In short, while both Augustine and Bacon speak of discovering and using nature's secrets, Augustine's understanding of the place of the *rationes seminales* in creation entails a richer account of causality and an account of created nature that is less mechanistic and better metaphysically informed than that of Bacon.

81 *Gn. litt.* 5.20.41.

82 *Gn. litt.* 5.20.41.

83 *Gn. litt.* 5.20.41: "And so by his hidden power [*occulta potentia*] he sets the whole of his creation in motion, and while it is whirled around with that movement, while angels carry out his orders, while the constellations circle round their courses, while the winds change, while the abyss of waters is stirred by tides and

The *Rationes Seminales* and Participation

I noted at the outset that the challenge for any traditional account of creation is how to parse the Creator–creature relation in a way that neither results in subsuming God into his creation (immanentism) nor divinizes creation such that it is understood to be an extension of the divine life (emanation). Augustine navigates this impasse through an account of participation to which the *rationes seminales* offer precision: the *rationes seminales*, inscribed at the moment of creation, express the measure, number, and weight of the creature, whereby it shares in the measure, number, and weight of God himself. In this respect, Augustine's account of created ontology goes beyond a simple appeal to "participation." Augustine gives Trinitarian specificity to how the *rationes seminales* participate in and express the *rationes aeternae* of the divine mind. Augustine made this connection very early in his thinking on Genesis. Already in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388) Augustine points to unattractive creatures (mice, frogs, flies, and worms) and insists that they too disclose and participate in divine structure, intelligibility, and finality: "There is not a single living creature, after all, in whose body I will not find, when I reflect upon it, that its measures and numbers and order are geared to a harmonious unity. Where these should all come from I cannot conceive, unless it be from the supreme measure and number and order which are identical with the unchanging and eternal sublimity of God himself."[84] Creaturely coherence,

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agitated by cyclones and waterspouts even through the air, while green things pullulate and evolve their own seeds, while animals are produced and lead their various lives, each kind according to its bent, while the wicked are permitted to vex the just, he unwinds the ages which he had as it were folded into the universe when it was first set up. These, however, would not go on being unwound along their tracks [*cursus*], if the one who set them going stopped moving them on by his provident regulation."

84 *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos* 1.16.26: "Non enim animalis alicuius corpus et membra considero, ubi non mensuras et numeros et ordinem inveniam ad unitatem concordiae pertinere. Quae omnia unde veniant non intellego, nisi a summa mensura et numero et ordine, quae in ipsa Dei sublimitate incommutabili atque aeterna consistunt." (trans. Edmund Hill in WSA I/13). Towards the end of the same paragraph Augustine repeats this formula: "In all of them, though, when you observe their measures and numbers and order, look for the craftsman; and you won't find any other but the one with whom the supreme measure and supreme number and supreme order is to be found, and that is God, about whom it says what is so absolutely true, that he has *arranged all things in measure and number and weight* (Wis 11:20)" ("Non enim animalis alicuius corpus et membra considero, ubi non mensuras et numeros et ordinem inveniam ad unitatem concordiae pertinere. Quae omnia unde veniant non intellego, nisi a summa mensura

intelligibility, and finality are causally predicated—they are reflective of the divine life in which they participate.

In Augustine's thought, each of the divine persons is identified with measure, number, or weight.[85] The Father is the origin and end of all things; he is identified with measure. The Son, as the eternal Word in whom all things are created, is identified with number. The harmonious proportion, structure, and intelligibility of creation are the finite expression of the divine ideas eternally "numbered" in the Word. Finally, the Holy Spirit, as the presence of God animating and directing creation, is the "weight" guiding each creature to the ends for which it is made. For rational creation, love is the *pondus* by which the Holy Spirit draws the creature to rest in God.

This is, of course, not to suggest that both God and the creature "have" measure, number, and weight: God *is* the measure, number, and weight that the creature *has* or (better) in which he participates. God endows his creatures, through the *rationes seminales*, with a participation in the measure, number, and weight that is the divine life itself. Thus, while creation is divinely arranged according to measure, number, and weight, originally these three are themselves not arranged (*disposita*).[86] They are not qualities God "has." Rather, God *is* the *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus*, which defines, forms, and directs all things:

> Insofar as measure sets a limit to everything, and number gives everything its specific form, and weight draws everything to rest and stability, he is the original, true and unique measure which defines for all things their bounds, the number which forms all things, the weight which guides all things.[87]

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et numero et ordine, quae in ipsa Dei sublimitate incommutabili atque aeterna consistunt").

85 See: Oliver, "Augustine on Creation," 395; Dunham, *Trinity and Creation*, 95–99; Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation*, 109, and Olivier du Roy, *L'Intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon Saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniènnes, 1966).

86 *Gn. litt.* 4.4.10: "Non itaque dubitandum est illa esse extra ea quae disposita sunt, in quibus omnia disposita sunt" ("So then there can be no doubt that these three in which all things were arranged were not themselves among the things that were arranged").

87 *Gn. litt.* 4.3.7: "Secundum id vero quod mensura omni rei modum praefigit, et numerus omni rei speciem praebet, et pondus omnem rem ad quietem ac stabilitatem trahit, ille primitus et veraciter et singulariter ista est, qui terminat omnia et format omnia, et ordinat omnia."

The relation between creaturely measure, number and weight and the *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus* that is God himself is a causal relation:

> But the measure without measure is the standard for what derives from it, while it does not itself derive from anything else; the number without number, by which all things are formed, is not formed itself; the weight without weight to which are drawn, in order to rest there, those whose rest is pure joy is not itself drawn to anything else beyond it.[88]

To say that the relation proper to the act of creation is "causal" entails a necessary degree of likeness within a much greater degree of unlikeness.

It is Augustine's account of participation—more particularly, creaturely participation through the *rationes seminales* in the divine *mensura*, *numerus*, and *pondus*—that affirms creaturely likeness within an infinitely greater unlikeness and thereby avoids both immanentism and emanation. God is not in the same "system" as his creatures; the ontological gulf between Creator and creature is infinite. Nevertheless, the measured, numbered, and weighed character of creation is a derived reflection of measure, number, and weight itself. God and the creature do not share essential features. Nevertheless, the language of cause and effect invites a discourse (subsequently termed "analogy") that takes the intelligible and purposeful character of creation as disclosing something truthful about the divine nature and the divine act of creation. Augustine's account of the *rationes seminales* enable him to affirm both the underlying principle of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, namely, that the Creator and the creature do not share a univocal predication of being, and the fact that God is intimately present to his creatures. In Augustine's phrasing God's creative presence is *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.[89] N:V

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88 *Gn. litt.* 4.4.8: "Mensura autem sine mensura est, cui aequatur quod de illa est, nec aliunde ipsa est: numerus sine numero est, quo formantur omnia, nec formatur ipse: pondus sine pondere est, quo referuntur ut quiescant, quorum quies purum gaudium est, nec illud iam refertur ad aliud."

89 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11.