

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA
ON
WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE**

BY JASPER HOPKINS

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To the memory of my brother

William Eugene Hopkins
(March 1, 1938 - March 31, 1983)

Ph.D. in Philosophy
University of California, Berkeley
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COMPENDIUM
(Compendium sive Compendiosissima Directio)
by
NICHOLAS OF CUSA

(Codex Cusanus Latinus 219, ff. 163^r - 169^v)

COMPENDIUM

CHAPTER ONE

Receive [this] short *Compendium*, which contains things on which your attention ought to be centered.¹ If you desire to make progress, then—first of all—assure yourself of the truth which the sound mind of every man acknowledges: viz., that the singular is not plural and that the one is not many; and so, in *many* things the *one* cannot be present singularly and as it is in itself but [can be present only] in a way that is communicable to many.² Moreover, we cannot deny that by nature a thing exists before it is knowable. Therefore, neither the senses, the imagination, nor the intellect attains unto the mode-of-being, since the latter precedes all these.³ Now, all the things that are arrived at by whatever manner of knowing signify only that antecedent mode-of-being. And, hence, they are not this reality itself⁴ but are likenesses, forms, or signs of it. Therefore, there is no knowledge of the mode-of-being, although there is most certainly seen to be such a mode.⁵

- 2 Therefore, we have mental sight that looks unto that which is prior to all cognition. Hence, if someone endeavors to find in [the realm of] cognition that which he sees in the foregoing [mental] way, he strives in vain, just as would someone who attempted to touch with his hand a *color*—something which is only *visible*. Therefore, the mind's sight is related to that mode-of-being in something like the way that perceptual sight is related to light: [perceptual sight] sees most certainly that there is light, but [perceptual sight] does not have knowledge of light, for light precedes all the things that can be known by means of such sight.⁶ Moreover, things that are known by perceptual sight are signs of the light. (For example, colors, which are known by sight, are signs and end-points-of-light in a transparent medium.)⁷ Therefore, postulate that the sun is the father of perceptual light; and conceive, in likeness thereto, (1) that God the Father of things is a Light inaccessible by any cognition but that (2) all things are reflected brightnesses of this Light—to which reflections the mental seeing is related as perceptual seeing is related to sunlight. And here halt your consideration about the mode-of-being that is situated beyond all cognition.

CHAPTER TWO

Therefore, insofar as a thing falls within the scope of knowledge

it is apprehended by means of signs. Accordingly, the various modes of knowing must be sought by you in and through various signs. For since no sign designates the mode-of-being as fully as it can be designated: if we are to arrive at knowledge in the best way in which this can be done,⁸ then we must do so by means of a variety of signs, in order that from them knowledge can better be had (just as from five perceptual signs a perceptual object is better known than from one or two perceptual signs). Now, the fully developed being of some things requires that they be able to know: in particular, since a fully developed animal cannot live without nourishment, an animal must recognize its food. Since its food is not found in every location, then the animal will have to have a way of moving itself from place to place and a way of seeking [food]. Hereupon there follows that the animal possesses all its [five] senses in order to acquire suitable food by means of seeing, hearing, scenting, tasting, and feeling.

4 And since animals of the same kind mutually nurture and assist one another in order to live better, they must recognize their own kind and must heed and understand one another to the extent that the perfection of the species requires. For example, a rooster summons its hens with one tone of voice when it has found food; and with another tone of voice it warns them to flee from a bird of prey which, from its shadow, is perceived to be present. And inasmuch as greater knowledge is needed by more noble animals, in order to be well-off: among all animals man needs to have the greatest knowledge. For without the mechanical and the liberal arts, and without the moral sciences and the theological virtues, a man does not live happily and well. Therefore, since knowledge is more necessary to man than to other [animals], all men by nature desire to know.⁹ A tradition of instruction is befitting to men, in order that the unlearned may be informed by the more learned. Since this instruction is possible only by means of signs, let us focus particularly on [the topic of] our knowledge of signs.¹⁰

5 All signs are perceptible,¹¹ and they designate things either naturally or by convention: [they do so] naturally, insofar as they are signs through which an object is designated on the basis of a perception [of it];¹² but [they do so] by convention insofar as spoken words and written characters (and everything that is grasped by hearing or by seeing) designate a thing according as has been established by convention. Natural signs are known naturally, without any other teacher. For example, [there is a natural sign when] a sign designating a color is

understood by all who see it and [when] a sign designating a sound is understood by all who hear it (and similarly regarding the other senses). Additionally, a sound of gladness, e.g., a laugh, [is a natural sign]; and a sound of sadness, e.g., a moan, [is a natural sign]—and other such things [are natural signs]. By contrast, other signs, which have been arbitrarily and conventionally instituted for designating [objects], are made known (to those to whom the convention is foreign) only by means of contrivance or instruction. And since all signs by means of which knowledge is to be handed down must be known to both teacher and student, the first instruction will be about a knowledge of such signs. This instruction is first because without it no [knowledge] can be handed down and because in the perfection of the knowledge of signs there is included all [knowledge] that can be handed down.

6

CHAPTER THREE

Now, our first parents, who were created in a perfect way, had to have had from God not only a perfection-of- nature but also a perfection of the knowledge of such [natural and conventional] signs. Through these signs they disclosed to each other their thoughts; and this knowledge they could hand down to their children and posterity. Hence, we observe that young children, as soon as they can articulate distinct sounds, are capable of the art of speaking, because [this] knowledge is primary and is of greater necessity for thriving. Moreover, the following does not seem absurd: viz., our believing that the original human art-of-speaking was so replete with synonyms that in it were contained all the languages that were later separated out. For all human languages derive from that first language of our parent *Adam*, i.e., *man*.¹³ And just as there is no language which man does not understand, so too Adam, who was the same as man, would not have failed to understand any language, were he to have heard it. (For we read¹⁴ that he imposed names; and so, no name belonging to any language was originally imposed by anyone else.) Furthermore, we ought not to be amazed at Adam; for, assuredly, by the gift of God many [other] men have had an immediate knowledge of all languages. Moreover, man has no art more natural and easy than that of speaking, for no fully developed human being lacks this art.

7

Then too, we must not doubt that our first parents also had the art of writing down words, i.e., the art of designating [with words].

For that art confers many benefits on the human race. For by means of it things past and things absent become present. Hence, just as our first knowledge is that of designating things with words that are perceived with the ear, so our second knowledge [is that of designating things] by means of visible signs for [oral] words—signs which are perceived by the eyes. This second knowledge is more distant from our nature; young children arrive at it more slowly and only when in them intellect begins to become active. Therefore, [this knowledge] depends on the intellect more than does [that] first knowledge. These [two] arts¹⁵ fall in-between nature and intellect (intellect being the creator of the arts): the first of these arts is closer to our nature; the second of them is closer to our intellect. However, in the case of man, the intellect constructs that first art by means of a perceptible auditory-sign, i.e., by means of a sound; for our animal nature attempts to disclose its affections naturally, by means of that [kind of] sign.¹⁶ Hence, [this first] art voices a confused sign and varies it, in order better to communicate the various desires. In this way [the art] assists the nature. And since the signs in which this art is set down cease with the utterance and lapse from memory and do not attain unto distant objects, the intellect added remedies from another art, viz., the art of writing, and has located that art in perceptible signs that pertain to sight.

8

CHAPTER FOUR

One who considers how it is that perceptible signs come from an object to the senses will find that material objects actually or by tendency emit brightness: [they do so] actually insofar as they are things lucid; [they do so] by tendency insofar as they are things colored. Moreover, it is not the case that any material object is altogether devoid of light or of color, which derives from light. Nevertheless, unless color is aided by light it does not send forth from itself a brightness that is perceptible by our sight. Now, brightness is projected quickly, and from very distant objects, along a straight line; our sense of sight is naturally adapted for perceiving it. By contrast, sound is diffused from distant objects in a circular manner; our sense of hearing was created for perceiving it. But a scent is diffused from a shorter distance and is perceived by the sense of smell, whereas tangible objects are nearer [and are perceived] by the sense of touch, and a flavor is [still] nearer [and is perceived] by the sense of taste. Through

a wondrous providence of nature these [conditions] have been thus ordained for the well-being of animals. For since no thing is replicable as it is in itself, and since to have a knowledge of things conduces to the good of an animal's being, it is necessary that objects, which cannot in and of themselves enter into another's knowledge, enter by means of our designations for them. Therefore, between the perceptible object and the senses there has to be a medium through which the object can replicate a form of itself, or a sign of itself.¹⁷ And since these [forms, or] signs are replicated only while the object is present: unless they were able to be noted down in such a way that they remain assigned even when the object is no longer present, a knowledge of

9 them would not persist. Therefore, the designated objects remain in our inner imaginative power by means of these designating signs (just as words remain written on paper after the verbal utterance has ceased). This remaining can be called memory.

Therefore, in the imagination the signs of objects are signs of the signs that are in the senses.¹⁸ For there is in the imagination nothing that was not previously present in the senses.¹⁹ And so, a man blind from birth does not have an image of color and cannot imagine color. Therefore, although perceptual *signs* are more abstract than are perceivable *material objects*, they are not altogether separated [from material objects]. And so, even sight is to some extent colored. But the imagination of color is completely free of color. Therefore, in the imagination²⁰ the signs of things are farther removed from matter and are more formal; hence, with respect to perceptible things they are less perfect signs, and with respect to intellectual things they are more perfect signs. Nevertheless, they are not altogether abstract; for although

10 an imagining of a color possesses nothing of the quality of the color, nevertheless it is not entirely free of connoting what is perceived. For the imagination can imagine nothing which is not either moved or at rest and which is not quantitative, i.e., is not either large or small. Nevertheless, [the imagined object] is without such a boundary as is found in perceptible objects. For nothing can be so small that the imagination cannot imagine half of it or so large that the imagination could not imagine it as twice as large. In the case of all fully developed animals we come upon these signs in the imagination (these are signs of the signs in the senses), so that suitable knowledge is not lacking to animals. But only man seeks a sign that is free of all material connoting and that is altogether formal, representing the simple form of a thing, which form gives being [to that thing]. This [formal] sign is

very distant with respect to perceptible objects, but it is very near with respect to intellectual objects.

11

CHAPTER FIVE

However, you must take note of the fact that a perceptible sign²¹ is confused and generic prior to becoming proper and specific. For example, the sign that is a word is, first of all, a sign that is a sound—when the vocalization is heard by those who are far off. Thereafter, when it is heard at closer range, it becomes a sign that is an articulated sound, which we call a voice.²² Next, when it is still closer, it becomes a sign that is a voice belonging to a language. Finally, it becomes a sign that is a specific word. The case is similar regarding all [perceptible signs]. Although the [foregoing] intervals of time are oftentimes not detected, because of their amazing swiftness, nevertheless a sign cannot be perfect unless it passes from what is confused to what is specific. Therefore, of one and the same unreplicable object there are various characteristics and signs through which the object is known—viz., generic and specific signs, in-between which some intermediate signs are more generic, whereas others are more specific. However, since the perfection of signs admits of degrees, it will never be the case that any sign is so perfect and specific that it cannot be more perfect. Therefore, there is no givable sign of singularity, which does not admit of degrees. And so, what is singular is not knowable *per se* but only *per accidens*.²³ For example, Plato, who does not admit of degrees [of being Plato], is seen only *per accidens*, by means of the visible signs that happen to characterize him.²⁴

12

Therefore, since whatever is arrived at by the senses or by the imagination is known only by means of signs, which admit of more and less, it is not the case that apart from signs of quantity anything is arrived at [by the senses or the imagination]. Therefore, signs of quality that reach the senses cannot be present apart from signs of quantity. However, [perceptual] signs of quantity are in perceptible objects not *per se* but *per accidens*, since there cannot be quality apart from quantity.²⁵ Yet, signs of quantity do not require signs of quality; and so, the former can exist without the latter. Therefore, an object that is quantitative comes into our knowledge by means of a [perceptual] sign of its quantity, and in this way that which is unknowable *per se* is known *per accidens*. Therefore, if magnitude and multitude are removed, it is not the case that anything is known.²⁶

13 It also seems useful to repeat the following: viz., that since no particular (whether it be a substance or a quantity or a quality) is replicable,²⁷ there cannot be a singular *natural* sign,²⁸ or *natural* representation (*species*),²⁹ of *this* particular quantity. Therefore, although there is a [natural] representation and sign of *quantity*, there is not [such a sign, or representation,] insofar as it is [a sign, or a representation,] of *this* quantity. Therefore, instances of quantity are individually taken note of, and known, by means of a sign that has to do with quantity in general. Likewise, instances of red [are] individually [known] by means of a sign that has to do with universal redness. Hence, since no one thing is of the same quantity or quality as is another, and since of each particular thing there is a particular quantity, quantity is something general not in the object but rather in our knowledge [of the object] or in the representation and the sign [that relates to the object].³⁰ Therefore, there are representations of the large and of the small, although there are no representations of *this* instance of small and of *this* instance of large—instances which are individual quantities. Nonetheless, by means of a representation, or a sign, of large, *this* instance of large is known; and by means of a representation, or a sign, of small, *this* instance of small is known.

14 Natural signs, then, are representations of signified particulars. These representations are not forms that form but are forms that inform.³¹ Now, insofar as those who are informed are *informed*, they admit of more and less. For one [man] is more informed than is another; and [one-and]-the-same [man] is informed now *less* and later *more*. Therefore, such forms can be present in many [subjects], since it is not required that they be present—in these [subjects]—with the same mode of being. (This mode is not replicable.) Rather, [they are present] in various [subjects] in various ways, as a single art of writing is present in various ways in various writers.

Moreover, it is evident from the aforesaid that since a determinate number (say, three or ten or the like) does not admit of more and less (because of its singular determination), such numbers have only indeterminate representations—just as by means of the representation *indeterminate multitude*, which can be called an enumeration, a determinate multitude is known. And by means of the representations *multitude* and *magnitude* a large determinate number is known. And, likewise, by means of the representations *multitude* and *smallness* a small [determinate] number [is known]. And *similar* colors [are known] by means of the representations *similarity* and *color*; and dis-

similar [colors are known] by means of the representations *dissimilarity* and *color*. And harmonious voices [are known] by means of the representations *harmony* and *voice*, and disharmonious [voices are known] by means of the representations *disharmony* and *voice*. And the case is similar with regard to all other things.

- 15** However, since in the foregoing way a knowledge of an object is formed in us from signs and from conceptual representations,³² an object that is thus known cannot be known as existing distinctly from another object unless the knowledge [of it] is formed by distinct marks and distinct representations. Hence, just as each thing is particular, so also our knowledge of it contains something that is not found in our knowledge of another thing. (By way of illustration: if one word is composed of six letters and another word is also composed of six letters, then although [the two words] agree in number, they would nonetheless have to disagree in configuration and location, so that they would be different, just as the things for which they are words are different.) And the difference between the conceptual representations leads us to a knowledge of a difference between the things. And although two individual objects seem to agree in many aspects, nevertheless it is not possible that they not be different in some of their aspects.³³

16

CHAPTER SIX

Accordingly, you must take note of the fact that there is no need for a mole to have sight; for it does not need a knowledge of visible signs,³⁴ since that which it seeks it finds in the earth's darkness. So too, something similar must be said about all [living] things: viz., that all living things take in from perceptible objects as many [perceptual] forms as are necessary for them to fare well. Therefore, it is not the case that all fully developed animals, even where they agree with respect to the number of their senses, also agree with respect to the number of [received perceptual] forms and [received] signs. An ant takes in [perceptual] forms in one way, a lion in another way, a spider in another, and a cow in [still] another—even as different trees take in from the same earth different nutrients, each tree [taking in] what is suitable to its own nature. Moreover, the imaginative power of one animal makes from the [perceptual] forms received through the senses an image-in-the-imagination that is different from [that which] another [animal makes]. And [the one animal makes] a judg-

ment about friendship or enmity, and about what is suitable or what is unsuitable, that is different from [what] the other [animal makes]. Hence, man takes in from perceptual signs [perceptual] forms that befit his own nature. Since he is of a rational nature, he takes in [perceptual] forms that are suitable to that nature, in order by means of them to be able to reason well and to find suitable food—not only material food for his body but also spiritual food for his spirit, or intellect. (For example, there are ten different sorts of categories,³⁵ five different sorts of predicables,³⁶ four different sorts of cardinal virtues,³⁷ and different sorts of many such things that befit man, who lives by way of reason.)

17 Moreover, man takes in more [perceptual] forms through sight than does a brute animal—(1) primarily because the sense of sight [takes in the perceptual] forms of colors, by means of which it attains unto the differences of colored objects qua colored objects, and (2) secondarily because the sense [of sight takes in the perceptual] forms of magnitude, length, width, shape, movement, rest, number, time, and place. Only man, who uses reason, takes in so many [perceptual] forms through sight. Likewise, through hearing, [man takes in the perceptual] forms of different sounds (bass sounds, treble sounds, intermediate-range sounds, sounds of singing voices, of musical notes, and other such sounds), as well as [taking in] the nine other aforementioned³⁸ [perceptual] forms that pertain to the communal sense.³⁹ The situation is similar regarding the other senses. Furthermore, from all these perceptual forms the rational power draws up the different kinds of arts, through which it compensates for the deficiency of the senses, of the members [of the body], and of [the body's] infirmities, and through which it helps itself (1) to resist physical ills, (2) to expel ignorance and dullness of mind, and (3) to strengthen the mind, in order that man may advance and become a contemplator of God. Moreover, [man has] the innate [intellectual] forms⁴⁰ of the imperceptible virtues of justice and of equality, in order that he may know what is just, what is right, what is praiseworthy, what is beautiful, what is delightful and good (and may know the opposites of these), and may choose good things and become good, virtuous, prudent, chaste, courageous, and just.

18 All the [foregoing] matters are evident to one who considers the things that have been discovered by man—discovered by means of the mechanical and the liberal arts and by means of the moral sciences.

For only man has discovered how to compensate for the lack of light by using a burning candle in order to see, and how to assist failing sight by means of eye-glasses made of beryl stone,⁴¹ how to correct errors of vision by means of the art of perspective, how to adapt raw food to his taste by means of cooking, how to repel foul odors by means of fragrant perfumes, how to repel the cold by means of garments and fire and housing, how to overcome slowness by means of transports and ships, how to strengthen defense through the use of weapons, how to increase memory through writing and the art of record-keeping. A brute animal is ignorant of all the foregoing things and of many more such things. For man qua man is to the brute as a learned man is to an unlearned man. For both the learned man and the unlearned man see the letters of the alphabet. But from the various combinations of these letters the learned man forms syllables, and from the syllables he forms words, and from the words he forms sentences. The unlearned man cannot do these things, because he lacks the art which is present in the learned man—an art acquired [by the learned man] from having made use of his intellect. Therefore, man has from his intellectual power the ability to compound and to divide the natural [perceptual] forms and to make from them intellectual forms and contrived forms and conceptual signs. By means of this power man excels brute animals; and the learned man excels the unlearned man because the learned man has an intellect that has been exercised and restructured.

19

CHAPTER SEVEN

It is not surprising that some man, by means of such prolonged exercise [of his intellect] was able or is able to make such progress that the following occurs: he elicits a representation⁴² from a variegated combination that includes many arts; and by means of this representation he comprehends and understands many things at once. For example, by means of a representation that he calls movement [he understands] a variety of natural [events], since he has seen that nothing happens without movement and that natural movement is distinguished from forced movement. Consequently, [he understands] that a natural movement does not derive from an extrinsic beginning, as in the case of a forced movement, but from a beginning that is intrinsic to the [moving] object. (The case is similar regarding other examples.) However, an even more precise and more richly suggestive repre-

sensation would be able to be found by another man—for example, a man who endeavored to elicit from the nine kinds of beginning⁴³ a single representation for the general art of all knowable things.

Now, more than all [other men the one] who included everything intelligible—included it within a single representation which he called a word—apprehended this point most precisely. For [the word] is a representation of an art-that-forms-all-things. For what is it that can be conceived of or spoken of or written about apart from this representation? For the word is that without which nothing is made or can be made, since it is an expression both on the part of an expresser and with respect to what is expressed. Similarly, both the articulating of an articulator and what he articulates are a word; and both the conceiving on the part of a conceiver and what he conceives are a word; and both the writing of a writer and what he writes are a word; and both the creating on the part of a creator and what he creates are a word; and both the forming on the part of a former and what he forms are a word; and, in general, both the deeds on the part of a doer and what is done are a word. For the word makes to be perceptible both itself and all other things. And so, it is also referred to as light, which makes to be visible both itself and all other things. It is also referred to as equality. For it stands in equal relation to all things, since it is one thing as much as it is another thing. It gives equally to all things the fact that they are that which they are and are not something more or something less. Therefore, since both the knowing on the part of a knower and what is known are a word: he who turns toward the word will quickly find that which he desires to know.

Therefore, if you wish to elicit a representation of the way in which all things are made, consider how a vocal word is made. First of all, [consider] the fact that without air a vocal word cannot at all be made audible. But air qua air is not attained unto by any of the senses. For example, sight does not see air but sees only colored air. (For example, we experience that the air seems colored when a ray of sunlight passes through a plate of colored glass.) Nor does hearing attain unto air [as such] but attains only unto resonant air. And the sense of smell [attains] only unto [air] that is odorous. And the sense of taste [attains] only unto air that has a taste. (E.g., when [the air] is made pungently bitter from the grinding of absinthe, the [bitter air] is perceived in our taste.) Moreover, the sense of touch [attains] only unto hot air or cold air or air that alters the sense in some other way. Therefore, air qua air is not attained unto by any of the senses; rather,

air comes into our perceptual knowledge *per accidens*. Nevertheless, air is so necessary for hearing that without it nothing can be made audible. Therefore, you need to consider, in an analogous way, that everything which is presumed actually to exist (whether it be something perceptible or something intelligible) presupposes something else without which it does not exist and which, in and of itself, is neither something perceptible nor something intelligible. And because this [presupposed thing] lacks a perceptual form or an intelligible form, it cannot be known, unless it becomes formed; and it has no name. Nevertheless, it is called *hyle*, matter, chaos, possibility, the capability-to-be-made, or subject—and is [also] called by other names.

- 20 Next, you must note that although sound is not rendered perceptible apart from air, nevertheless air is not of the nature of sound. (Analogously, *hyle* is not of the nature of any form, nor is *hyle* the beginning of form; instead, the beginning of form is the form-er.) Therefore, although apart from air no sound can be made, sound is not therefore of the nature of air. Indeed, fish and men perceive sound [when they are] in water and out of the air; this perceiving would not occur if sound were of the nature of air.

Next, you must note, with regard to man's being a former of a vocal word, that man does not form a word as does a brute animal but as does an animal who has a mind, which brute animals lack. Therefore, since mind—the former of a word—forms a word only in order to disclose itself, a word is only a disclosure of the mind. Moreover, a variety of words is nothing other than a variegated disclosure of a single mind. Now, the conception by which the mind conceives itself is a word begotten from the mind—i.e., is the mind's knowledge of itself. But a *vocal* word is a disclosure of this [conceptual] word. And anything that can be said is only a word.

- 21 In the foregoing manner, make a conception of the Former-of-all-things, even as [you made a conception] of mind; and [conceive] that He knows Himself from the Word begotten from Him. In creatures, which are signs of the Uncreated Word, the Former reveals Himself in various ways in the various signs; and there cannot be any [created thing] that is not a sign of the manifestation of the Begotten Word. And just as a mind that is no longer willing to disclose itself ceases from uttering a vocal word, and the word cannot continue to exist unless the mind utters it unceasingly, thus too the creature stands in relation to the Creator. But all [those] other things which have been or-

dained for the sake of the vocal word (and which are called Muses) and without which the vocal word cannot be well produced, serve to disclose the mind. They too are creatures that are indicators and manifestations of the inner word, and they are creatures that serve the inner words in order to disclose them.

22

CHAPTER EIGHT

Therefore, a completely developed animal in which there is both sense and intellect is to be likened to a geographer who dwells in a city that has the five gateways of the five senses. Through these gateways messengers from all over the world enter and report on the entire condition of the world, [doing so] in the following order: those who bring news about the world's light and color enter through the gateway of sight; those who [bring news] about sounds and voices [enter] through the gateway of hearing; those [reporting] about odors [enter] through the gateway of smell; those [reporting] on flavors [enter] through the gateway of taste; and those [bringing news] about heat and cold and other tangible things [enter] through the gateway of touch. Suppose the geographer to be seated and to take notice of every report, in order to have within his city a delineated description of the entire perceptible world. Now, if a gateway to his city—say, sight—always remained closed, then because messengers with news about visible objects would have no entrance, there would be a defect in the [geographer's] description of the world. For the description would not make mention of the sun, the stars, light, colors, the shapes of men, of brute animals, of trees, of cities, and—in greater part—would not make mention of the world's beauty. Likewise, if the gateway of hearing remained closed, the [geographer's] description would not contain anything about speeches, songs, melodies, and the like. The case is similar regarding the other senses. Therefore, [the geographer] endeavors with all his effort to keep all the gateways open and to continually receive the reports of ever-new messengers and to make his description ever more accurate.

23

At length, after he has made in his city a complete delineation of the perceptible world, then in order not to lose it, he reduces it to a well-ordered and proportionally measured map. And he turns toward the map; and, in addition, he dismisses the messengers, closes the gateways, and turns his inner sight toward the Creator-of-the-world, who is none of all those things about which the geographer has

learned⁴⁴ from the messengers, but who is the Maker and Cause of them all.⁴⁵ He considers this Maker to stand antecedently in relation to the whole world as he himself, as geographer, stands in relation to his map. And from the relation of the map to the real world he beholds in himself, qua geographer, the Creator of the world—[beholds Him] when he contemplates the reality by means of its image and contemplates, by means of its sign, that itself which is signified. During his speculation he notices that no brute animal—although it seems to dwell in a similar “city” and to have “gateways” and “messengers”—could have made such a map. And, hence, he finds in himself the first and nearest sign of the Creator. In this sign the Creative Power shines forth more than in any other known animal. For an intellectual sign is the first and most perfect sign for [signifying] the Creator of all things, whereas a perceptible sign is the last [and farthest-removed sign for signifying the Creator of all things]. Therefore, the geographer withdraws himself, as best he can, from all perceptual signs [and turns] toward intellectual and simple and formal signs.

24 With the full sharpness of his mental sight [the geographer] takes very intent note of how the Eternal and Inaccessible Light shines forth in these [intellectual, formal signs]. Thus, he sees that the Incomprehensible cannot be seen to exist otherwise than in an incomprehensible mode of being and that this mode, which is incomprehensible in terms of every comprehensible mode, is the Form-of-being of all existing things. This Form, while remaining incomprehensible in all existing things, shines forth in intellectual signs—as light shines forth in darkness, which does not at all comprehend it.⁴⁶ By way of illustration: a single face which appears in different ways in different polished mirrors is not so incorporated⁴⁷ into any mirror (however highly polished) that from both the face and the mirror a single composite is made, whose form is the face and whose matter is the mirror. Rather, while remaining singular in itself, the face manifests itself in different ways—even as a man’s intellect, while remaining singular and invisible, manifests itself visibly and variously in its different arts and by means of the various products of the arts, even though in all these [arts and products] the intellect remains altogether unknown to any of the senses.

By means of the foregoing speculation a contemplator arrives most delightfully at the Cause, the Beginning, and the End of both himself and all other things, so that he reaches a happy conclusion.

25

CHAPTER NINE

The foregoing few points are easy, and they suffice for your speculation, since you are not someone learned. But if you propose to investigate more subtle matters with regard to the elements, then look unto the parts of a sound and unto the letters designating those parts. Some of these letters are voiced; others are unvoiced or semi-voiced or liquid. Observe how it is that from these letters there is made a combination of syllables and of words, from which a sentence is made; and observe that the sentence is the intended goal. (In an analogous way, those things that come from nature proceed from the elements toward nature's intended goal.) For the designation or the definition of a thing is a sentence. In this fourfold way⁴⁸ [the sound] is brought from an imperfect state to a perfect state. Now the points that can be dealt with philosophically, as concerns our present topic, will be able to be sufficiently detected in the course of [examining] this art [of discourse]. For example, in nature there are found combinations that are beautiful, lovely, and pleasing to men—and so too in both the art of discourse and a harmony of voices. But in both [nature and the art] certain [combinations] exist in the opposite way.⁴⁹ Accordingly, man makes deliberations about such matters; and from [the use of] *signs* and *words* he formulates a systematic knowledge of things—even as from *things* God [formed] the cosmos. Furthermore, from the loveliness, harmony, beauty, strength, and power of discourse man adds to words the [various] arts, in imitation of nature. Likewise, to grammar he adds rhetoric, poetry, music, logic, and the other arts, all of which are signs of nature. For just as the mind found sound in nature and added art, so that the mind placed in sound all the signs for things, so likewise to the harmony-of-sounds that the mind found in nature it added the art of music—the art for designating all harmonies. The case is similar regarding the other [arts].

26

The considerations that wise men of [reflective] leisure found to hold true of nature they attempted to apply—by parity of reasoning—to the development of a common art. For example, they discovered the harmonies among certain notes—discovered them from the relation of these notes to the weights⁵⁰ of mallets when mallets make harmonious notes on a metal pallet. And, eventually, they discovered the same fact about pipe organs and about proportionately long and short chords; and they applied to their art the harmonies and the disharmonies that are present in nature. And, therefore, since this art [of

music] imitates nature quite openly, it is quite pleasing.⁵¹ And it arouses an inclination of our nature, and it aids our nature in its vital movement, which is a movement of harmony and of pleasantness and which is called delight. Therefore, every art is based upon a consideration that is found by someone wise to hold true in nature. [The respective wise man] “presupposes” this consideration, inasmuch as he does not know the reason why it obtains. And to what he has found he adds art, amplifying it by a kind of likeness, which is the basis of the art’s imitating nature.

28

CHAPTER TEN

Now ascertain the following: If you invented an art and were attempting to pass it on to others in writing, you would need to envision words suited for the purpose, and you would explain their significations in conformity with your thoughts. Indeed, the [explaining of your thoughts] is the principal thing. And since the [mental] word that is indicated by those [written] words is the art that you are proposing to disclose, your every effort will center on teaching—by means of words and as precisely as you can—that which you have mentally conceived. For the definition, which affords knowledge, is the unfolding of that which is enfolded in the [meaningful] word.⁵² And for this reason in any studying of books take it as your chief task to arrive at an interpretation-of-the-words that accords with the writer’s thoughts, and you will easily apprehend all things and will harmonize the writings that seemed to you to contradict themselves. Hence, the distinguishing of terms contributes greatly to harmonizing the various writings, provided that the one doing the distinguishing does not err. And he [who errs] errs less when he endeavors to arrive at an equality.⁵³

29

I will mention to you one further consideration which I had regarding the kind of knowledge [that we have] of the Beginning. The Beginning must be that than which nothing is earlier or more powerful. Only *power that begets precise equality with itself* cannot be greater. For it unites in itself all things. Accordingly, I will take under consideration four terms: viz., “the Capable,”⁵⁴ “the Equal,” “the One,” and “the similar”. By “the Capable” I mean “that than which nothing is more powerful”; by “the Equal” I mean “that which is of the same nature”; by “the One” I mean “that which proceeds from Capability and Equality”; and by “the similar” I mean “that which is *representative* of its Beginning.” It is not the case that anything can

be earlier than Capability. For what thing could precede Capability if that thing were not capable-of-preceding? Therefore, assuredly, Capability, than which nothing is able to be more powerful or earlier, is the Omnipotent Beginning. For it is prior to being and to not-being.⁵⁵ For unless a thing is able to exist, it is not the case that it does exist; and unless a thing is able not to exist, it is not the case that it does not exist.⁵⁶ Moreover, Capability precedes both making and being made. For it is not the case either that anything makes that which it is unable to make or that anything is made which is unable to be made. So you see that Capability is prior to being and to not-being, prior to making and to being made—and likewise for all other things.

Now, none of all the things that are not Capability itself are able either to exist or to be known apart from it. Therefore, whatever things are able either to exist or to be known are enfolded in Capability itself and are of it. Now, since Equality is unable to exist unless it is of Capability,⁵⁷ it will be prior to all other things, even as is Capability, of which Equality is the equal. In Equality-with-Capability-itself, Capability manifests itself as most powerful. For it is characteristic of power to be able to beget from itself supreme equality with itself. Therefore, Capability—which stands in equal relation to contradictories, so that it is able to do one thing as much as another—stands in this equal relation by virtue of its own Equality. But from Capability and Equality-with-Capability there proceeds a most powerful Union, for a power⁵⁸ is stronger if it is unified. Therefore, the Union of (1) That than which nothing is more powerful and (2) its Equality is not less great than are those from which it proceeds. In this way, the mind sees that *Capability*, *Equality-with-Capability*, and the *Union of both* are a singular most powerful, most equal, and most united Beginning.⁵⁹

It is sufficiently evident that Capability unites, enfolds, and unfolds all things equally. Therefore, whatever Capability makes, it makes through Equality; and if it creates, it creates through Equality; and if it manifests itself, it does so through Equality. But Capability does not make *itself* through Equality, since Capability is not prior to itself; nor does it make, through Equality, that which is *dissimilar*. For Equality is not the Form of dissimilarity and of inequality. Therefore, that which it makes is that which is *similar*. Therefore, whatever exists but is not the Beginning must be a likeness of the Beginning, since Equality (which does not admit of more and less) is not replicable or variable or alterable, even as what is singular is not [replicable or vari-

able or alterable]. For it is not the case that singularity is something other than Equality.

32 Therefore, the object of all cognitive power can be only Equality itself, which can manifest itself in a likeness of itself. Hence, the object of perceptual knowledge is nothing but an equality⁶⁰—and similarly as regards the object of cognitive imagination and also as regards the object of intellectual knowledge. By nature a [cognitive] power knows its own object. Yet, knowledge occurs by means of a likeness.⁶¹ Hence, the object of every cognitive power is an equality; and a likeness of the equality actualizes every cognitive power. Those who flourish naturally by means of their intellect see that equality exists, whose likeness is present in the intellect—even as sight sees that something colored exists, whose likeness, or [perceptual] form, is present in sight. But every likeness is a form of, or a sign of, equality.

33 Equality is encountered by sight; it is seen in the [perceptual] form of color; and, in the case of hearing, it is heard in the [perceptual] form of sound—and so on. But equality [is seen] more closely in the imagination, because equality is *imageable* not under the form of quality but under the form of quantity;⁶² and this latter form has a closer likeness to equality. But in the intellect equality is arrived at not through a likeness that is enfolded in the forms of quality and of quantity but rather through a simple and pure intelligible form, i.e., through a plain likeness. And equality is seen to be something singular which is, for all things, the form of their being and their being known; and equality is seen as appearing in various ways in a variety of likenesses. Moreover, the human mind naturally beholds in its own self—its own self as a living and intelligent manifestation of Equality—a singular manifestation of Equality, a manifestation which we call a singular thing [constituted] in Equality's resplendent reflection. For the human mind—as being the first manifestation of the knowledge which the Prophet calls the light-of-God's-countenance emblazoned upon us—is nothing but a sign of that [divine] Co-equality.

34 Hence, man naturally knows⁶³ the good, the equal, the just, and the right, because they are resplendent reflections of Equality. He praises the law “What you wish to have done unto you, that do unto others” because it is the resplendent reflection of Equality. For the nourishment of our intellectual life is derived from such virtues. Therefore, man is not ignorant of this restorative strength, which comes from his [intellectual] food. As perceptual sight stands in rela-

tion to perceptible light, so the mind's sight stands in relation to this intelligible light. For perceptible light, which is the image of that intelligible light, bears a likeness to Equality, since in perceptible light there is seen to be nothing unequal. Herefrom it is certain that [the following parallel holds]: Perceptual sight perceives nothing except light and the manifestation of light in [illuminated objects, which are] signs of light; and sight does not deem anything else to exist [except light and illuminated objects]; but, rather, sight continually affirms that if light is removed, then nothing at all remains; for seeing is nourished from these factors. In a parallel way, the mind's sight perceives nothing other than (1) intelligible light, or intelligible equality, and (2) the manifestation of intelligible light in [intelligible objects, which are] signs of it; and the mind's sight professes most truly that if intelligible light is removed, then nothing can either exist or be understood. For if equality were removed, how could there remain intellect, whose understanding consists of adequation,⁶⁴ which surely would cease to obtain if equality were removed? Would not truth itself be removed—truth, which is the adequation of the thing to the intellect, or, rather, the adequation of both the thing and the intellect? Therefore, if equality were removed, nothing would truly remain, since in truth itself nothing is found other than equality.

In order to see that the sensitive soul is not the intellect but is the intellect's likeness or image, take note of the fact that in the-one-who-sees there are two forms—one that informs and is a likeness of the object and another that forms and is a likeness of the intellect. (Forming and informing are a kind of doing. But since nothing is done without a reason, intellect is the initiator of acts which are directed toward an end. Now, intellect accomplishes all things either through itself [directly] or through [the intermediacy of] nature; and so, the work of nature is the work of intellect.⁶⁵ Hence, when an object informs by means of its likeness, this informing is done naturally—i.e., through intellect by the intermediacy of nature. But when intellect forms, it does this forming through its own likeness.⁶⁶) In the one who sees, then, there are two likenesses—the one being of the object and the other being of the intellect. (Without these likenesses no seeing occurs.) The likeness of the object is superficial and extrinsic; the likeness of the intellect is central and intrinsic. The likeness of the ob-

36 ject is the instrument of the likeness of the intellect. Therefore, the likeness of the intellect perceives or knows by way of the likeness of the object. Therefore, perceiving requires both the sensitive soul (which is the likeness of the intellect) and the [perceptual]-form-of-the-object (which is the likeness of the object). Therefore, the sensitive soul is not the intellect, since it does not perceive in the absence of the likeness of the object. By contrast, the intellect does not depend on anything else in order to understand intelligible things; and it does not need any instrument other than itself, since it is the initiator of its own acts. For example, it understands the judgment “Each thing either is or is not” without any intermediary or instrument. A similar thing holds true regarding all intelligible objects. The intellect does not understand perceptual objects, because they are perceptual, not intelligible. Therefore, perceptual objects must be made intelligible objects before they are understood—even as nothing is perceived unless it is made perceptual.

37

CHAPTER TWELVE

Moreover, in order that you may consider equality in the case of perceptual objects: Is not a plane surface one thing, a round surface another, and an in-between surface something else? If you mentally view either a plane surface or a round surface, assuredly [you will see that] each has nothing that is unequal. What is a plane [qua plane] other than an equality? So also, roundness is an equality. For [each part of] the surface of something round is equally distant from the center;⁶⁷ and, of necessity, the surface is everywhere equal, being nowhere different. And a plane [qua plane] is everywhere the same. But if you consider that plane than which none more equal can be posited, then since every plane surface is something splendid, assuredly that plane would be maximally splendid. Likewise, too, a round surface will be something splendid; and it will be moved—as is evident in my book *De Globo*.⁶⁸ But in-between surfaces cannot at all be devoid of all equality, since they fall in-between a plane surface and a round surface. Similarly, between a straight line and a circular line each of which is respectively equal [throughout], there cannot be a line that is [altogether] without equality.⁶⁹

38

The case is similar for numbers, no one of which is without equality, since in them is found only a progression of oneness;⁷⁰ and there is no one of them that is variable or that admits of more or less. This

fact must be due to nothing other than to equality. Moreover, in the case of health or life or any such things, is anything other than equality found to be truly present? If equality is removed: there will remain neither senses nor imagination nor comparison nor proportion nor intellect; and, likewise, neither love nor harmony nor justice nor peace will persist, nor will anything be able to continue.

39

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Now that we have considered the First Beginning I will go on to infer, from what was said, something about the soul. From the aforesaid, take cognizance of the fact that air is not detected by any of our senses unless it is modified.⁷¹ Herefrom it is evident that if air were alive with a perceiving life, it would perceive within itself the forms of qualities. Now, air is either rarefied or dense or in-between rarefied and dense. (Ether is rarefied air.) Therefore, the sensitive soul must enliven the air that is associated with it. [It must enliven the air] in order to be able to perceive, in the enlivened air, the [perceptual] forms of objects—for example, in order to be able to perceive, in living air that is rarefied and transparent, the form of what is visible; in ordinary air, the form of sound; in dense and changed air, the forms that are related to the other senses. Therefore, the sensitive soul is neither earth nor air nor ether nor fire but is a spirit that enlivens the air in the aforesaid manner. And it senses the association of spirit and air—an association brought into actuality by the perceptual form. Therefore, air serves as a “body” for our sensitive spirit’s life. By means of air the sensitive spirit enlivens the whole [human] body and perceives objects. Yet, the sensitive spirit is not of the nature of any perceptible object but is of the nature of a simpler and higher power.

40

Perceiving is a certain undergoing.⁷² Therefore, the [perceptual] form acts upon the just-mentioned instrumental body. Hence, although the [perceptual] form acts upon the body, it is not corporeal but, with respect to that instrumental body, is an “[in-]forming spirit.” And because the perceptual form is sensed, the living and pure [instrumental] body⁷³ will lack any perceptual form. But the [sensitive] soul—which enlivens the body and whose prerogative it is to perceive and which is simpler and more abstract than any body at all and any [perceptual] form at all—does not know unless it pays attention [to the object]. Therefore, it always has an enlivening power and a cognitive power, both of which it uses (when motivated) in order to pay atten-

tion. In the sensitive soul, then, there is (in addition to an enlivening power) a certain cognitive power (being the image, as it were, of the intellect). In us the cognitive power is associated with the intellect.

You see that a ray of the sun penetrates colored glass and that a color-image appears in the air. You see that the air is colored by that brightness (which is the brightness of the glass's color), after the fashion of the glass. Now, the color of the glass is as a body, and the color of the air is as a representation and a spirit in relation to that body. But the [perceptual] form of this representation (being still more rarefied and more spiritlike, because it is the brightness of the representation) is sensed in sight—viz., in the living, airy transparent medium of the eye.

- 41** Therefore, the sensitive soul, which enlivens the transparent medium, is so spiritlike that it senses the brightness of that brightness which is present in its own very pure transparent medium.⁷⁴ For it perceives that the altogether uncolored surface of its transparent medium is imbued with a likeness [of the color]. And turning toward the object from whence the brightness comes, it knows the object by means of the brightness that it senses on the surface of its own transparent “body”. Accordingly, since no seeing occurs unless the one who sees attends to the brightness, or representation (for example, we do not notice passers-by if we are inattentive), it is evident that seeing arises from both the representation of the color and the attention of the perceiver.
- 42** And if you consider carefully, you will find in that colored air a likeness to man. For there is a body, a soul, and a spirit: a body insofar as there is air; a soul insofar as there is a form of color that penetrates, forms, and colors the air throughout; a spirit insofar as there is a ray of light that illumines the color. Unless our rational soul had within itself the discriminating spirit that shines within it, we would not be men, nor would we perceive more clearly than do other animals. Now, the light that shines within us is given from on high and is not commingled with the body. But we experience the fact
- 43** that the light is discriminating. And so, we know most assuredly that we have all our discriminating power and all our illumination, as well as the entire perfection of our animal nature, from that imperceptible light. We would altogether lack these things if that light did not shine within us. By comparison, when the sun's ray ceases to penetrate the colored glass, nothing of the colored air remains visible. Now, the heavens are as the glass, and they contain within themselves the zodiac, or circle of life; but the power of the Creator of all things is as

the [sun's] ray. From these few remarks, draw material for speculating—material which you may enlarge upon according as you wish to.

There remains the consideration of our most delectable faith, which excels all things because of its certitude and which alone brings happiness. Reflect on it carefully and frequently.

44

CONCLUSION

You now know the thoughts that I have elsewhere more extensively expressed about these topics, in many and various works, which you can read subsequently to this *Compendium*. And you will find that the First Beginning, who is everywhere the same, has appeared to us in various ways and that I have portrayed in various ways His various manifestations.

45

EPILOGUE

[This] entire guidebook is directed toward a unique Object, with respect to which the Apostle Phillip—being led by Christ, who is the Word of God—intoned: “O Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”⁷⁵ Previously⁷⁶ we spoke of the Father of the Word—that is, the Father of Equality—as *Capability*, because He is omnipotent. The object of our mind's sight⁷⁷ and of our perceptual sight is a single object.⁷⁸ [It is the object] of our mind's sight according as it exists in itself; [it is the object] of our perceptual sight according as it is present in signs. [That object] is Capability itself, than which nothing else is more powerful. Since Capability is all that which *can* be, it is also all the things that can be—[is them] without any variation, increase, or decrease in itself. Therefore, since all things are only what they can be, and since Capability, than which nothing is more powerful, is all Capability-to-be, there is no other Cause of all existing things than the Capability-to-be. For a thing exists because the Capability-to-be exists; and a thing is *this*, and not something else, because Supreme Equality exists; and a thing is one because Supreme Union exists. Hence, to the mind's sight only That than which nothing is more powerful offers itself in and through all things. For the mind's sight is not [ultimately] directed toward many and various things; for it is not inclined toward many and various things but by its nature is directed toward That than which nothing is more powerful, in the seeing of which it finds life and rest.

46 And since the Power than which nothing is more powerful is maximally unified Power, [the mind] calls it Oneness, than which nothing is more powerful. But the-things-which-can-be, [the mind] calls numbers. Now, the object of our mind's sight is "omnipotent," unvarying, and unreplicable oneness. The object is not number, since in number there is nothing that the mind desires to see except oneness, which is everything that any number is and can be or can unfold.⁷⁹ (For the mind looks not at numbers but at what is numbered in any number. But in any number, no matter how large or small, whether even or odd, there can be nothing other than that power than which nothing is more powerful, which is called oneness.) Therefore, the object of the mind's sight is nothing other than Capability, than which nothing is more powerful, since Capability alone—without any change with respect to itself—can be all things and is, as well, that in whose absence nothing else can exist. For how would there be anything at all in the absence of Capability, if that thing were not capable of being? And if in the absence of Capability something *were* capable of existing, then assuredly it would be capable in the absence of Capability—[a contradiction].

47 By contrast, the object of the sense of sight is a perceptible thing which, since it is only that-which-is-capable-of-being, is nothing but the same object as [the object] of the mind's sight. [It is] not [that object] as [that object] exists in itself and as it is encountered by the mind but is it, rather, as it is present in a perceptible sign and as it is encountered by perceptual sight. Therefore, because Capability itself, than which nothing is more powerful, wills to be able to be seen, all things exist. And it is the Cause-of-causes and the Final Cause of all things. All the causes of things are ordained—in their being and their being known—unto this Cause.

And thus I conclude [this] very brief and very compact guidebook, which those who are quite pure and who are of quite keen sight and who reflect quite carefully will expand upon more clearly—[doing so] unto the praise of the ever-blessed Omnipotent One.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* [Vol. II (edited by Raymond Klibansky) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Leipzig/ Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1932)].
- CA* *Cribratio Alkorani* [Vol. VIII (edited by Ludwig Hagemann) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1986)].
- DI* *De Docta Ignorantia* [Latin-German edition: *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung*, published by F. Meiner Verlag. **Book I** (Vol. 264a), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 3rd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1979. **Book II** (Vol. 264b), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 2nd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1977. **Book III** (Vol. 264c); Latin text edited by Raymond Klibansky; introduction and translation by Hans G. Senger, 1977].
- DM* *Idiota de Mente* [Contained in Vol. V (edited by Renate Steiger and Ludwig Baur) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1983). Replaces Baur's edition of 1937.]
- DP* *De Possess* [Latin text as contained in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning, 3rd ed. 1986)].
- DVD* *De Visione Dei* [Latin text as contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis: Banning, 2nd ed. 1988)].
- MFCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, edited by Klaus Kremer and Klaus Reinhardt. A continuing series. Volumes I-XVII published in Mainz, Germany by Matthias-Grünwald Verlag. Volumes XVIII and higher published in Trier by Paulinus-Verlag.
- NA* *De Li Non Aliud* [Latin text as contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and a Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning, 3rd ed. 1987)].
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. Series published in Paris.
- SCG* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [in Vol. II (1980) of *Index Thomisticus. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*. Stuttgart-Bad-Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag].
- ST* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [in Vol. II (1980) of *Index Thomisticus, ibid.*].
- VS* *De Venatione Sapientiae* [Vol. XII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hans G. Senger) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1982)].

PRAENOTANDA

1. (a) In the English translations brackets are used to indicate words supplied by the translator to complete the meaning of a Latin phrase, clause, or sentence. (b) When a clarifying Latin word is inserted into the translation, brackets (rather than parentheses) are used if the case ending or the verb-form has been modified. (c) In the Latin text brackets indicate that a word or phrase found in the mss. should be deleted.
2. All references to Nicholas of Cusa's works are to the Latin texts in the following editions (unless explicitly indicated otherwise):
 - A. Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Felix Meiner Verlag: Hamburg): *De Concordantia Catholica*; *Sermones*; *De Coniecturis*; *De Deo Abscondito*; *De Quaerendo Deum*; *De Filiatione Dei*; *De Dato Patris Luminum*; *Coniectura de Ultimis Diebus*; *De Genesi*; *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*; *De Pace Fidei*; *De Beryllo* (1988 edition); *Cribratio Alkorani*; *De Principio*; *De Deo Unitrino Principio*; *De Theologicis Complementis*; *De Venatione Sapientiae*; *De Apice Theoriae*.
 - B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Meiner Verlag's series *Philosophische Bibliothek*: *De Docta Ignorantia*.
 - C. Editions by J. Hopkins: *Idiotae de Sapientia, de Mente, de Staticis Experimentis* (1996); *De Visione Dei* (1988); *De Possess* (1986); *De Li Non Aliud* (1987); *Compendium* (1996). Margin numbers correspond to the margin numbers in the Heidelberg Academy editions; line numbers and some paragraph-breaks differ.
 - D. Codex Cusanus Latinus 219: *De Ludo Globi*.
 - E. Paris edition of the *Opera Omnia Cusani* (1514): *De Aequalitate*.

The references given for some of these treatises indicate book and chapter, for others margin number and line, and for still others page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. E.g., 'DI II, 6 (125:19-20)' indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chapter 6, margin number 125, lines 19-20 of the edition in the series *Philosophische Bibliothek* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag).
3. The folio numbers in the inside margins of the present edition of the Latin text of the *Idiotae* and the *Compendium* correspond to the folios in Codex Cusanus Latinus 218 (*Idiotae*) or 219 (*Compendium*).
4. References to the Bible are given in terms of the Douay version. References to chapters and verses of the Psalms include, in parentheses, the King James' locations.
5. Italics are used sparingly, so that, as a rule, foreign expressions are italicized only when they are short. All translations are mine unless otherwise specifically indicated.

6. The Appendix serves as a supplement to the respective bibliographies found in the present book and in four other books: (J. Hopkins) *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (1986³); *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance* (1985²); *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism* (1988²); *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alkorani* (1994²).

7. Citations of Nicholas's sermons are given in terms of the sermon numbers assigned by Rudolf Haubst in fascicle 0 [=zero], Vol. XVI of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1991). Not all of the sermons cited have as yet been published in the *Opera Omnia* series.

8. In the notes to the Latin texts no mention is made of trivial marginalia by later hands (such as 'nota quod' on folio 113^r, Codex Cusanus 218).

9. The present edition of the Latin texts follows, principally but not uncritically, Codices Cusani 218 and 219. At places, it differs significantly from the Heidelberg Academy editions. Several examples from *De Mente* will illustrate this fact:

<u>Heidelberg Acad. Text (1983)</u>	<u>Present text</u>
<i>DM</i> 7 (100:13): spiritui	(100:16-17): spiritus
<i>DM</i> 12 (144:15): inhabitante	(144:19): inhabitantem
<i>DM</i> 13 (148:6): habens	(148:7): habentem
<i>DM</i> 13 (149:5): imaginis	(149:6): imago

The punctuation of the present edition will also, at times, reflect an understanding that differs from the understanding implicit in the punctuation found in the Heidelberg Academy texts.

10. Codex Monacensis Latinus 14213 (Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Germany) and Codex Magdeburgensis Latinus 166 (presently in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin) are described in *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. IV (Hamburg: Meiner, 1959).

NOTES TO THE COMPENDIUM

1. This work was written in 1464. The addressee is unknown but has been surmised to be Peter von Erkelenz, Nicholas's secretary.

2. *De Sapientia* I (25).

3. That is, mode-of-being ontologically precedes the differentiation into sense, imagination, intellect.

4. "... are not this reality itself": i.e., are not the antecedent mode-of-being.

5. Cf. Nicholas's claim that the human mind does not know the essences of the objects that it perceives [*DI* I, 3 (10:18-19). *Ap.* 28:8-17], although these objects do have essences. In suggesting that *what things are* is not altogether accessible to the human mind—even as, likewise, their very *mode of being* remains inaccessible—Nicholas introduces a theme that later philosophers capitalized upon.

Nicholas himself appears to be left with the following problem: If the mode of being of all things is unknown, then how can he say in *DM* 12 (141:9-11) that "there is a very express likeness between the mode-of-being of all things insofar as they exist actually and insofar as they are present in the mind"? The correct answer seems to

be that in *Compendium 1*, Nicholas means that there is no *exact* knowledge of mode-of-being, no cognitive *copying* of it, so to speak. Accordingly, in *Compendium 2* he concedes that we do have nonexact knowledge of mode-of-being: “For since no sign designates the mode-of-being as fully as it can be designated: if we are to arrive at knowledge in the best way in which this can be done, then we must do so by means of a variety of signs, in order that from them knowledge can better be had ...” (3:4-8). Epistemologically speaking, Nicholas is not a direct realist but is a critical representative realist. He affirms (1) that the human mind knows of the *existence* of material objects, (2) that it knows many things about these objects, while knowing nothing *precisely* about them, and (3) that although the mind does not know the objects as they are *in themselves*, it does know the *objects themselves* through their mental representations.

See n. 8 below.

6. *De Quaerendo Deum 2* (35).

7. *De Dato Patris Luminum 2* (100).

8. See n. 5 above. Nicholas does not deny that we have knowledge of objects in the so-called external world. He denies only that we have perfect knowledge of them—such knowledge being possible for God alone. Similarly, he does not deny that signs designate a thing’s mode of being; rather, he denies that signs designate it fully, i.e., precisely. Note my critique of Pauline Watts’s interpretation of Cusa—on pp. 211-215 of my *Philosophical Criticism: Essays and Reviews* (1994).

9. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, opening sentence.

10. Nowhere in the *Compendium*—not even in Chap. 8 with its illustration of the mapmaker—does Nicholas even tacitly endorse a nominalistic theory of signs. See pp. 73-78 (including the notes) of my *Nicholas of Cusa’s Dialectical Mysticism* (2nd ed., 1988). Cf., above, n. 177 of Notes to the Introduction.

11. All signs are *primarily* signs at the perceptual level. In Chap. 4 Nicholas speaks of signs in the imagination; these he calls “signs of the signs that are in the senses” (9:5-6). In Chap. 8 (at 23:18-19) he mentions intellectual signs.

12. Nicholas uses the appellative “natural signs” when speaking of perceptual forms—i.e., of perceptual images—inasmuch as these images, or forms, point to the objects of which they are images. (See Chap. 4, end of section 8.) But he also uses the same appellative when speaking of physical features whose presence is an indicator of physical or emotional states. (For example, in some contexts a red face is a sign of embarrassment, just as in other contexts it is a sign of anger.)

13. *De Genesi 2* (159: last lines) and 4 (172:6-7). Augustine, *Opus Imperfectum contra Julianum* 6.31 (PL 45:1585).

14. Genesis 2:19-20.

15. “... these two arts”: viz., the art of using oral speech and the art of writing.

16. See Chap. 2 (section 5).

17. See n. 12 above.

18. See n. 11 above.

19. Nicholas everywhere emphasizes the reproductive character of imagination. Even in *DM 2*, where he points out that our notion of spoon is not the notion of anything that is found in nature, he also states that this notion is made from reason’s “harmonizing and differentiating of perceptible objects” (65:2-3). In the case of an arti-

san's envisioning a spoon, the mind does not "imitate the visible form of any natural object" (62:11-12); indeed, rather than imitating created visible forms the mind perfects them (62:14-15).

Nicholas does not distinguish—as Kant was later to do—between the reproductive and the productive imagination, though he does allow for creativity. Interpreters are wrong to expand upon Nicholas's views by both couching them in Kantian terminology and making specific references to Kant. See, for example, Louis Dupré's "Nature and Grace in Nicholas of Cusa's Mystical Philosophy," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 64 (Winter 1990), p. 166.

20. The single English word "imagination" adequately translates Nicholas's "*imaginatio seu phantastica*," since Nicholas is here making no distinction between the use of these two words. Note Albertus Magnus: "Et accipiemus modo generaliter phantasiam pro imaginatione et phantasia, vocantes totam illam animae potentiam phantasiam, secundum quam nobis fit phantasma vel idolum re non praesente. Sic enim accipitur phantasia proprie, quando non dicitur secundum metaphoram ..." (italics changed to roman type by me). *Alberti Magni De Anima*, edited by Clemens Stroick *et al.* (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1968), III.1.7.

21. A perceptible sign is here being contrasted with a formal sign, discussed at the end of Chap. 4.

22. A similar example is also used in *De Genesi* 4 (165) and *Compendium* 9 (25).

23. That is, what is singular is not knowable essentially but only incidentally, through its accidents. Cf. n. 5 above.

24. These visible signs are accidents. Here, again, Nicholas speaks of *characteristics* as being significative. See also *Compendium* 8 (23): an individual human being is himself a sign of the Creator.

25. *Compendium* 10 (33). Hegel later reverses the description of the relationship between quantity and quality. He does so when he teaches that reflection upon the concept of quality passes over into reflection upon the concept of quantity. Thus, in some sense, quality is the more basic concept.

26. *DM* 10 (128).

27. The one English word "replicable" adequately translates the Latin phrase "*plurificabile aut multiplicabile*."

28. Cf. the related notion of natural name as it occurs in *DM* 2.

29. Nicholas uses the Latin word "*species*" in many different senses. Here the meaning has to do with representation. At other times and in other places "*species*" is used to signify a perceptual form (or a perceptual image), an intellectual form (or a concept), a species (as opposed to a genus or to a particular), a specific form, a comely appearance. [See, respectively, *Compendium* 6 (17:11-12); 5 (15:1); 2 (4:1). *DI* II, 6 (126:6-8). *Sermo* 8 (30:31).] To translate the Latin word "*species*" always by the English word "species" would not be illuminating. Regarding the equivocal use of "*species*," see Boethius, *In Porphyrium Commentaria*, Book III, section on *species* (*PL* 64:99BC).

30. *DI* II, 6 (125-126). With regard to the issue of universals Nicholas is a moderate realist.

31. This informing accommodates itself to the nature of the perceiver. *Compendium* 6 (16).

32. Conceptual representations (*species notionales*) are distinct from perceptual forms (*species sensibiles*), which are mentioned in Chap. 6.

33. *DI* II, 1.

34. “...does not need a knowledge of visible signs”: i.e., does not need visual images or the knowledge of visible objects—a knowledge that come by means of images. See n. 12 and n. 24 above.

35. Aristotle, *De Categoriis*.

36. See the outset of Aristotle’s *Topics*. As the predicables were understood in the Middle Ages, they are genus, species, differentia, property (*proprium*), and accident. Note Boethius’s *In Porphyrium Commentaria*, Book I (*PL* 64:75CD) and *In Porphyrium Dialogus Primus*, introductory section (*PL* 64:15B). See, above, n. 117 of Notes to *Idiota de Mente*.

37. The traditional cardinal virtues are found in Plato’s *Republic*: wisdom, justice, courage, temperance.

38. “... the nine other aforementioned [perceptual] forms”: viz., magnitude, length, width, shape, movement, rest, number, time, and place.

39. The communal sense coordinates and synthesizes the data from the five senses.

Cf. Aristotle’s cognate discussion of *sensibilia communia* (viz., movement, rest, number, shape, and magnitude) in *De Anima* II.6 (418^a).

40. Cf. *DM* 4, where only the power of judgment (*vis iudiciaria*) is said to be innate. There are no innate concepts (*notiones concreatae*). Here in the *Compendium* Nicholas’s use of the phrase “*connatae species*” seems, *prima facie*, to indicate a modification of his earlier view. However, Nicholas here means what Augustine meant in *De Trinitate* 8.3, where he spoke of the good as a *notio impressa*. This “impressed concept”—for Augustine and also for Nicholas—is understood to be *an innate capability-of-judgment*, whereby that which is good is recognizable as such. A similar point holds for what is just, beautiful, equal, and right. None of these are explicit concepts that can be articulated and defined by every human agent early in life.

Cf. *Compendium* 10 (34: beginning lines).

41. The illustration of the beryl stone provides the focal motif of Nicholas’s *De Berylo*.

42. Nicholas’s allusion to movement, as well as his subsequent reference to the nine common perceptual forms, suggests that he is here referring to the representations arrived at by the communal sense, operating in conjunction with the intellect. See n. 38 and n. 39 above.

43. *Compendium* 6 (17). See also n. 38 above.

44. The single phrase “has learned about” adequately translates the *two* Latin verbs “*intellexit et notavit*.”

45. Nicholas’s illustration of the cartographer should not be misinterpreted to indicate that man is “imprisoned” within the confines of his cognitive apparatus, so that he knows only his own percepts and never the objects themselves. (See n. 5 above.) Indeed, Nicholas clearly teaches that the senses are gateways through which reliable messengers enter with their reports. From these reports the mapmaker forms a reliable description of the world, seeking all the while to make his descriptions ever more accurate by keeping the gateways open and by continually receiving new messengers. Once his description is “complete” at a practical level, he closes the gateways

momentarily—doing so not in order to fabricate a revised picture of the world but only in order to be able, without distraction, to contemplate God qua Maker-of-the-world. See my further discussion in *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa*, pp. 290-293.

46. John 1:5.

47. The single English passive verb “is ... incorporated” adequately translates the several Latin verbs “*inspeculatur, incorporatur, seu immateriatur*.”

48. Nicholas is alluding to the four phases of formation: letters, syllables, words, sentences. Cf. *De Genesi* 4 (165). See also *Compendium* 5 (11).

49. “... in the opposite way”: i.e., disharmoniously.

50. This is not one of the many examples, regarding weight-scales, that Nicholas gives in *De Staticis Experimentis*.

51. *DI* II, 1 (94:11-12).

52. That is, the definition is the word’s meaning.

53. That is, an interpreter errs less when he strives for a consistent interpretation that takes account of the author’s various writings. Cf. *Ap.* 17 (beginning part).

54. The Latin word “*posse*” has many meanings. It conveys, in various contexts, the ideas of power, of possibility, of ability, of capability, of potentiality, and of capacity. In *De Apice Theoriae* Nicholas uses it as a name for God. In *De Posse* he combines the two Latin words “*posse*” and “*est*” and uses the latter as another of the divine names.

In the passages that follow, Nicholas uses “*posse*” with a double meaning: on the one hand, he is talking chiefly about abstract capability (as in section 32); on the other hand, he is alluding chiefly to God (as in sections 29-30). At times, he is doing both in equal measure (as in the last sentence of section 31).

A similar twofoldness of meaning occurs with regard to “*aequalitas*”.

55. *Posse* is “beyond being” in that it ontologically precedes all *finite* being. Nicholas’s view parallels that of Plotinus, who, when he declares that the One is beyond being, also means “beyond finite being.”

56. Anselm of Canterbury, *De Casu Diaboli* 12.

57. Just as *aequalitas* is here said to exist, so too does *posse* exist—of which *aequalitas* is the equal. Likewise, in *De Apice Theoriae*, *posse ipsum* is said to exist but is denied to be among the things that exist finitely. An interpretive claim has sometimes (mistakenly) been made that, according to Nicholas, *posse ipsum* does not at all exist. See p. 219 of my *Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa* for a further specification and critique of this incorrect claim. Cf. n. 55 above.

Of course, we must remember that *posse seu deus* exists in a way that can be conceived by us only symbolically. See *DP* 26 and *DI* I, 6 (17).

58. The single word “power” adequately translates the Latin “*potentia seu virtus*.”

59. Here Nicholas presents us with another symbolism for the Divine Trinity.

60. According to Nicholas the perceptual image is an equality with the object-of-perception in that it is truly representative of the object. However, it is never a representation that does not admit of greater and greater precision and that has not been modified, by the perceiver, in the very act of perceiving.

61. Nicholas’s theory of perception might justifiably be termed “critical realism.”

62. *Compendium* 5 (12).

63. *Compendium* 6 (17: last lines).

64. “Adequation” (“*adaequatio*”) is a Scholastic term used by Aquinas and others. See the discussion in section 5 of the present Introduction.

65. This passage—*Compendium* 11 (35) poses a difficult problem for a translator and an interpreter. For what Nicholas is here referring to by “*natura*” and by “*intelligentia*” (or “*intellectus*”) is not immediately clear. My translation proceeds on the understanding that the word “intellect” is, within the long parenthetical passage, used *generally* (so as to include the intelligible working of nature) and, outside the parentheses, is used *specifically* (i.e., so as to indicate the human intellect alone). According to this interpretation Nicholas is drawing upon his view that nature is teleological. Indeed, this is also the interpretation given by Bruno Decker and Karl Bormann in their German translation of the *Compendium* [*Nicolai de Cusa Compendium* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1970)].

A further plausible way of understanding the passage—a way that I have not chosen—would be to translate it as follows: “(Forming and informing are a kind of doing. But since nothing is done without a reason, the intellect is the initiator of acts which are directed toward an end. Now, the intellect accomplishes all things either through itself [directly] or through [the intermediacy of] the nature; and so, the work of the nature is the work of the intellect. Hence, when an object informs by means of its likeness, this informing is accomplished by the nature—i.e., through the intellect by the intermediacy of the nature. But when the intellect forms, it does this forming through its own likeness.) In the one who sees, then, there are two likenesses—the one being of the object and the other being of the intellect.” This interpretive translation regards Nicholas as drawing upon, and extending, a view that he earlier articulated in *De Beryllo* 18 (24-26), where he differentiated (in the human being) intellect, reason, soul, nature, and body, and where he indicated both that the intellect imparts itself to the nature (and through the nature, to the body) and that the sensitive soul works in the body by the intermediacy of the nature. [In *Compendium* 9 (27:10) Nicholas uses “*natura*” to refer to human nature, though not in a technical sense.] Accordingly, the translation reflects the understanding that in *Compendium* 11 (35) “intellect” is being used uniformly to refer to the human intellect and that “nature” is being used to refer only to the nature within man. Therefore, the crucial sentence at 35:10-12—“*Hinc quando obiectum per suam similitudinem informat, hoc naturaliter fit, scilicet per intelligentiam medio naturae*”—is construed as indicating, within man, the work of the nature (as an intermediate between body and soul) in receiving the likeness of the object’s natural form—a likeness that is made cognitive by the sensitive soul in cooperation with the intellect.

However, I have rejected the immediately foregoing understanding for two reasons: (1) In *Compendium* 11 Nicholas maintains that the *object* informs, not that the soul’s nature informs; (2) the understanding is not fully compatible with what Nicholas says in *De Ludo Globi* I (Codex Cusanus 219, f. 143^v = , with variations, Paris edition, Vol. I, f. 156^r): “*Cardinalis*: ... [Bestiae] impelluntur ad ea quae agunt per naturam, et eiusdem speciei similes faciunt venationes et nidos. *Iohannes*: Non sine ratione haec fiunt. *Cardinalis*: Natura movetur intelligentia. Sed sicut conditor legis motus ratione legem sic ordinavit quae movet subditos non ratio legis, quae est eis incognita, sed imperium superioris, quod necessitat: ita brutum movetur imperio naturae necessitante ipsum, non inductione rationis quam ignorat.” That is: “*Cardinalis*: ... [Brute animals] are impelled toward the things-they- do-by-nature; and animals

of [one and] the same species hunt in similar ways and build similar nests. *John*: They do these things not without reason. *Cardinal*: Nature is moved by intelligence. Now, just as the Creator of the law of movement rationally ordained the law in such a way that what moves those subjected to it is not the law's rationale (which is unknown to them) but rather the ordinance-of-the-higher-law (which constrains them), so a brute animal is moved by the ordinance-of-nature (which constrains it), not by a rational inducement (of which it knows nothing)." Although "*natura*" here refers to the animals' respective nature, "*intelligentia*" is used to refer to the Creator's design for the animal nature. It is God's intelligence by which the animal nature and every other nature are moved.

Accordingly, in *De Sapientia* I (25) all things are said to partake of Wisdom (i.e., God) as best they can: "Thus, some things partake of Wisdom by means of a certain spirit that is exceedingly far removed from the First Form—a spirit that scarcely imparts elemental being. Other things partake [of Wisdom] by means of a more formed [spirit], which imparts mineral being. Still other things [partake] by means of a more noble grade-[of-spirit], which furnishes vegetable life. Still other things [partake] by means of respectively higher [grades], which [impart, respectively,] sensible life, then imaginative life, then rational life, and then intellectual life" (25:16-23). [In other treatises Nicholas indicates that things partake not of God's being but of a (symbolic) likeness of His being.] Note also *De Sapientia* II (35: 6-7): "Now, all the things that we see to exist have a reason for their existing, so that they exist in the way they do and not otherwise." See *DM* 4 (76:7-10): "Hence, creatures that lack mind are unfoldings of the Divine Simplicity rather than images thereof—although in being unfolded in accordance with the shining forth of the image of mind, they partake variously of that image."

Finally, we must remember *Compendium* 9 (25:8-9): "... those things that come from nature proceed from the elements toward nature's intended goal."

66. That is, when the intellect *forms*, it does so by means of the sensitive soul, which is a likeness of the intellect. Forming involves discriminating, comparing, abstracting, synthesizing.

67. *DI* II, 11 (157:17-21).

68. *De Ludo Globi* I.

69. "... without equality": i.e., without some degree of congruence.

70. See, above, n. 207 of Notes to the Introduction. See also *Compendium*, Epilogue (46:3-8).

71. *Compendium* 7 (19:34-44).

72. This theme places Nicholas within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition as regards a theory of perception.

73. "... the living and pure [instrumental] body": i.e., the human body.

74. Regarding the mechanism of perception, see *De Quaerendo Deum* 2 and *DM* 7 and 8.

75. John 14:8.

76. *Compendium* 10 (30-31).

77. By "the mind's sight" Nicholas means *the intellect's sight*.

78. Here, again, Nicholas's thought moves on two levels: the ultimate and the non-ultimate. Ultimately, God is the goal of all knowledge. Non-ultimately, objects are experienced by us as unified; and perceptual objects are the basis for the intellect's

formation of empirical concepts. See Chap. 10 above—including n. 54. See also the Epilogue (47:5-9): “Therefore, because Capability itself, than which nothing is more powerful, wills to be able to be seen, all things exist. And it is the Cause-of-causes and the ultimate reason why all things exist. All the causes of things are ordained—in their being and their being known—unto this Cause.”

79. *Compendium* 12 (38: 1-3).