

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA ON LEARNED IGNORANCE**  
*A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*

by

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## PREFACE

Like any important philosophical work, *De Docta Ignorantia* cannot be understood by merely being read: it must be studied. For its main themes are so profoundly innovative that their author's exposition of them could not have anticipated, and therefore taken measures to prevent, all the serious misunderstandings which were likely to arise. Moreover, the themes are so extensively interlinked that a misunderstanding of any one of them will serve to obscure all the others as well. In such case, the mental effort required of the reader-who-interprets must approximate the effort expended by the author-who-instructs. No words are more self-condemning than are those of John Wenck, at the conclusion of whose critique of *De Docta Ignorantia* we read: "*Et sic est finis scriptis cursorie Heydelberg*": "And this is the end to what was written cursorily at Heidelberg."<sup>1</sup>

Nicholas has not made his reader's task easy. For in spite of his claim to have explained matters "as clearly as I could" and to have avoided "all roughness of style," many of his points escape even the diligent reader, since the explanation for them is either too condensed, or else too barbarously expressed, to be assuredly followed. And yet, from out of the vagueness, the ambiguity, the amphiboly, the enthymematic movement of thought, there emerges—for a reader patient enough to *solliciter doucement les textes*—an internally coherent pattern of reasoning. The present translation of this reasoning aims above all at accuracy.<sup>2</sup> To this end the rendering is literal, though with no deliberate sacrifice of literate English expression. Only a literal translation (but not word for word) permits the subtle twists and turns of Nicholas's arguments to shine forth.<sup>3</sup> The earlier, radically inaccurate rendering by Germain Heron (1954) distorts Nicholas's arguments—and thus belies history by making the author of *De Docta Ignorantia* appear as someone mindlessly unable to develop even the semblance of a systematic line of thought. For even when Nicholas's arguments are specious, as they often are, they are specious in an ingenious and programmatically coherent way.

My introduction to *De Docta Ignorantia* aims at being a critical interpretation rather than at being an appreciation or an *abrégé*. On behalf of those students who are unfamiliar with Nicholas's thought, I append the following extended footnote.<sup>4</sup> Such students may also want to consult *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of*

*Translator's Preface*

*Cusa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2nd edition 1980) before undertaking their study of *De Docta Ignorantia*. The bibliography published in the *Concise Introduction* is supplemented by the selection at the end of the present volume. A penetrating understanding of *De Docta Ignorantia* can only be acquired by reading it in conjunction with John Wenck's attack and Nicholas's clarifying response. These latter treatises have been translated and appraised by me in a companion volume entitled *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenck* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981). This volume also contains my newly edited Latin text of Wenck's *De Ignota Literatura*. And the introduction includes an important critique of Vincent Martin's "standard" interpretation of Nicholas's metaphysics.

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## Preface to the Second Edition

This edition differs appreciably from the previous one. The fact that neither edition contains the Latin text is due to Raymond Klibansky's refusal to grant permission for it to be reprinted. Supplementary bibliography can be found in my *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei*. A second edition of *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenck* appeared in 1984.

## INTRODUCTION

A mélange of intellectual tension and excitement pervaded the Universities of Heidelberg, Padua, and Cologne, where Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64) studied in the early fifteenth century. The ecclesiastical clash between the competitive claimants to the papacy—a rivalry adjudicated by the powerful Council of Constance (1414-18)—had badly divided the faculties of law by engendering the dispute over the Conciliar Movement. Moreover, the theological faculties had scarcely adjusted to the prolonged debate between Ockhamism and Thomism, nominalism and realism, when the very underpinnings of Scholasticism were weakened by the rise of Jean Gerson's version of the *devotio moderna* and by the renewed spirit of Eckhart's speculative mysticism. At Padua advances in the study of mathematics and of natural philosophy fostered the promulgation of new hypotheses about the scope of the universe and the movements of the heavens. And the influence of humanism opened new ways of looking at the past and, at the same time, expanded the horizon of literary learning. On every front, it seemed, the theoretical foundations had begun to shift, thus encouraging—indeed, demanding—the appearance of new conceptual syntheses.

Nicholas of Cusa's *DI* was one such synthesis.<sup>1</sup> In it can be found the influence of Eckhart, of the Hermetic tradition, of Pseudo-Dionysius,<sup>2</sup> and of Boethian mathematics, together with a newly devised cosmological framework and a newly conceived theology of redemption. In spite of much speciousness, this treatise of three books is a monumental achievement. Rich with suggestiveness, it prefigured, in its bold tendencies, certain dialectical features of later German philosophy. We cannot be sure about the length of time required to produce this magnum opus. We know from the dedicatory letter to Cardinal Julian Cesarini that the central notion of learned ignorance—i.e., of embracing the Incomprehensible incomprehensibly—came to Nicholas while he was at sea, en route from Constantinople to Venice (i.e., sometime between November 27, 1437 and February 8, 1438). And we know from the explicit of Book Three that the work was completed at Kues on February 12, 1440. Between these two temporal boundaries Nicholas organized, refined, and put into writing his fundamental conceptual scheme—which he confessed to have cost him great effort (*labor ingens*) and from whose main outlines

he later never fully veered. Given the political activities in which he was enmeshed—activities associated with the Council of Basel and the Council of Ferrara—it is likely that he wrote the treatise during intermittent Intervals, not all of which found him in Kues. Yet, we must guard against supposing that the entire system was developed, even intermittently, within the timespan marked by the foregoing dates; for the letter to Cesarini implies that its author had long been brooding over how best to achieve such a synthesis—one which hitherto could not be formulated, given the absence of its organizing principle.

To be sure, *DI* is a highly organized work, whose third book, as Cassirer rightly points out,<sup>3</sup> is no mere incidental theological appendage but, instead, the essential culmination of the unified system. Book One deals with the *maximum absolutum* (God), Book Two with the *maximum contractum* (the universe), Book Three with the *maximum simul contractum et absolutum* (Christ). As God is a trinity of Oneness, Equality-of-Oneness, and the Union thereof, so the universe (and each thing in it) is a trinity of possibility, actuality, and the union thereof (which is motion), and so Christ, the hypostatic Union, is the medium between the Absolute Union and the maximum ecclesiastical union (viz., the church of the triumphant). God is in all things through the mediation of the universe, just as He is in all believers through the mediation of Christ. In all things God is, absolutely, that which they are, just as in all things the universe is, contractedly, that which each is, and just as Christ is the universal contracted being of each creature. Just as God ontologically precedes and unites contradictories, so the universe ontologically precedes and unites contraries, and the humanity of Christ ontologically precedes and enfolds all creatable things. In God center is circumference, just as God is the center and the circumference of the universe and just as Christ is the center and the circumference of the intellectual natures.

The fulcrum of Nicholas's system is the doctrine of *docta ignorantia*—the very doctrine reflected in the title of the work. But what exactly is this doctrine? And how is the title to be best construed? Paul Wilpert, in the opening note to his German translation of Book One, maintains that the title is more correctly translated as “*Die belehrte Unwissenheit*” than as “*Die gelehrte Unwissenheit*.” By contrast, Erich Meuthen opts for the word “*gelehrt*” and for the title “*Das gelehrte Nicht-Wissen*.”<sup>4</sup> Wilpert feels that the unknowing which Nicholas discusses is not so much an erudite or a wise unknowing (i.e., an unknowing which confers a kind of erudition or wisdom on the



one who does not know) as it is simply a recognition-of-limitedness that has been achieved (i.e., an unknowing which has been learned, so that the one who has learned of his unknowing is now among the instructed, rather than remaining one of the unlearned). Wilpert is certainly right that in *DI* the emphasis is upon instruction in the way-of-ignorance and that the man of learned ignorance is not thought by Nicholas to be a man of erudition. As is clear from the use of the verb “*doceo*” at I, 19 (55:5: “let us now become instructed in ignorance”) and the verb “*instruo*” at III, 5 (210:1: “to instruct our ignorance by an example”) Nicholas does mainly understand “*docta ignorantia*” as an ignorance which has been acquired and which distinguishes its possessor from those who are thus uninstructed.<sup>5</sup> Yet, it is equally clear from I, 1 (4:16-17: “the more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be”)<sup>6</sup> that Nicholas also sometimes understands “*docta ignorantia*” as an ignorance which renders its possessor wise.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in *Apologia* 2:9-10 Socrates is said to be wise precisely because he knows that he does not know. This kind of wisdom Nicholas would not call erudition (and in this respect Wilpert is also right); for it is available to the common man as well as to the highly schooled. Thus, Nicholas will later write his *Idiotae*,<sup>8</sup> in which he exalts the Wisdom of the layman. But such a layman, with such a wisdom as Socrates's, might appropriately be called *gelehrt* (and in this respect Wilpert's statements are misleading). The best English translation will therefore be the traditional one: viz., “On Learned Ignorance,” where “learned” is understood in the double sense distinguished orally by the different pronunciations *lürnd* and *lurnid*—i.e., understood as both *belehrt* and *gelehrt*. For it is an ignorance which both distinguishes its possessor from the unlearned, or uninstructed, and elevates him to the place of the learn-ed, or wise.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Apologia* (21:13-14) Nicholas calls the recognition that God cannot be known as He is “the root of learned ignorance.”<sup>10</sup> At 24:20-22 he reiterates this point in referring to learned ignorance as “a knowledge of the fact that [the symbolic likenesses to God] are altogether disproportional.” But at 27:22-23 he speaks in a more general way; for now learned ignorance is said to be “the seeing that precision cannot be seen.” In fact, *DI*, in its very first chapter, also contains this twofold exposition. Herein we are told that “the precise combinations in corporeal things and the congruent relating of known to unknown surpass human reason—to such an extent that Socrates seemed to himself to know nothing except that he did not know.”<sup>11</sup>

But we are also informed that “the infinite, *qua* infinite, is unknown; for it escapes all comparative relation.” So the foundation and governing principle of Nicholas's system is this twofold recognition. In saying that nothing can be known by us precisely (and adding in *DP* 42:21-22 that only God's knowledge is perfect and precise), Nicholas does not mean that we therefore do not know anything. That is, he does not equate knowledge with precise knowledge and conclude that because we cannot have the latter we do not have the former. He does not voice unqualifiedly skeptical doubts about whether we know the objects in the world. We do know them, he believes, even though we do not know them in their quiddity or as they are in themselves. Just as we do not attain the precise truth about finite things, which are further specifiable *ad infinitum*, so we do not cognitively attain unto the Infinite God, who may be regarded as Truth itself.<sup>12</sup> Learned ignorance begins with this twofold awareness.

Nicholas must here be viewed as reacting against the theological doctrine of *analogia entis*—against all attempts to conceive of Divine Being other than symbolically, against all claims to have a positive-knowledge-of-God, whether derived from nature or from the “revelation” of Christ. What we know about God is that He is unknowable by us, both in this world and in the world to come.<sup>13</sup> Of course, on the basis of Christ's teachings and works, we ought, affirms Nicholas, to believe by faith that God is loving, merciful, just, powerful, etc. But if we are to conceive of this mercy, justice, etc., we will have to conceive of it analogously to our experiences in the human dimension. We will therefore infinitely misconceive it and, accordingly, not really be conceiving it but only something infinitely short of it. Our conception of God will therefore be, positively, only a shadowy befiguring of some possible—but, alas, all too finite—supra-human being. Yet, at the beginning of *DI* I, 26, Nicholas acknowledges that such befigurings and imagings are indispensable aids to a believer's worshipping of God. Moreover, some of these imagings and symbolisms are more befitting than others,<sup>14</sup> when measured by the teachings of Christ, whose own life and works, faith and love, we are to emulate insofar as possible.<sup>15</sup>

And yet, learned ignorance is not altogether ignorance. For it instructs us that God must be Oneness, though a oneness which exceeds our conceptual capacity. And it teaches, likewise, that He must be trine, though this trinity too exceeds our comprehension. It teaches, furthermore, that in God oneness and trinity—indeed, all opposites—

coincide, that God is Being itself, that the Word of God is “World-soul,” as it were, that God is the center and the circumference of the universe, that He is present in each thing, that each thing is present in each other thing— and a host of other points, all presented in *DI* and all attesting that Nicholas, in descrying the limits of knowledge, is far from any thoroughgoing agnosticism.

In Nicholas's system there is an interconnection between our inability to comprehend God and our inability to know mundane things precisely. He expresses this interconnection most pithily in *De Poss-est* 38: “what is caused cannot know itself if its Cause remains unknown.” In *DI* II, 2 the same point is stated in a slightly different fashion: “derived being is not understandable, because the Being from which [it derives] is not understandable—just as the adventitious being of an accident is not understandable if the substance to which it is adventitious is not understood.”<sup>16</sup> If derived being -is not understandable, still it is not hereby unqualifiedly unknowable. Rather, Nicholas means that we cannot understand how from all-enfolding Absolute Oneness there arose the contracted plurality that constitutes the universe—how if Absolute Oneness is eternal, indivisible, most perfect, and indistinct, then derivative being can in any respect be corruptible, divisible, imperfect, and distinct. In short, he is affirming that we cannot comprehend the creation qua creation and that a knowledge of God would have to precede a precise knowledge of any given thing.

### I. *Maximum Absolutum*

Nicholas speaks of God as, indifferently, Absolute Maximality, the Absolute Maximum, the absolutely Maximum, the unqualifiedly Maximum.<sup>17</sup> By “the Maximum” he means “that than which there cannot be anything greater.” It follows that the Maximum is also “all that which can be”; for if it were not, it could be something more than what it is. For the same reason, it is *actually* all that which can be. Moreover, it is greater than can be humanly conceived, since the human mind cannot conceive the totality of possibilities. Because the Maximum is absolutely and actually whatever can be, it is beyond all attribution of differentiated characteristics. Indeed, it is the *absolutely* Maximum in the sense that it is ultimately and undifferentiatedly everything which is. Hence, everything which it Is, it is without opposition and is in such way that, in it, these things coincide and are indistinct and unitary. For this reason too the Maximum cannot be

comprehended or conceived by us; for we cannot comprehend or conceive that whose conception would require us to combine contradictory predicates. Moreover, the absolutely Maximum is so undifferentiated that even the absolutely Minimum coincides with it. (This point, says Nicholas, is clear from the following consideration: There cannot be anything lesser than the absolutely Maximum; for a lesser would have to be something which the Maximum would not be; but the Maximum is all that which can be. Now, the absolutely Minimum is also that than which there cannot be a lesser. Hence, the absolutely Minimum coincides with the absolutely Maximum.) Hence, the absolutely Maximum is infinite—given that not anything, not even the Minimum, is opposed to it or other than it, thus delimiting it.

There is no need to explain why the foregoing reasoning is specious. Of interest are several items other than the argument itself. First of all, we see that in commencing with his doctrine of God, Nicholas makes no attempt to prove God's existence. Rather, he here *premises* the existence of the Maximum and describes the Maximum as “what *is* (is actually) all that which can be.” He will go on in I, 6 to advance some considerations in support of the proposition that the Maximum cannot fail to exist and that nothing at all would exist if the Maximum did not exist. But these considerations are not argued for in such way that they can seriously be regarded as attempts to undertake a proof.

Secondly, because of Nicholas's insubstantial reasoning on behalf of the doctrine that the absolutely Maximum and the absolutely Minimum coincide, this doctrine here appears to spring forth in too unmotivated a way. The underlying motivation may be better sensed from the intriguing and vivid illustration in *De Possess*, where the picture of a top spinning at infinite speed provides an elucidation for the claim that maximal motion and minimal motion are indistinguishable at infinity.<sup>18</sup> Of course, Nicholas denies that in the created world there actually is any infinite motion.<sup>19</sup> And, of course, it follows herefrom, as he also explicitly asserts, that in the created world there is not actually any absolute rest: everything in the universe is in motion, whether or not it appears to us to be.

Thirdly, Nicholas explicitly maintains in I, 4 not only that the Maximum is, coincidentally, all that which is conceived to be: he maintains as well that it is whatever is conceived not to be. If we set aside the philosophical problem about what it would mean to conceive something *to be* or to conceive it *not to be*—a difficulty familiar to

students of St. Anselm's ontological argument—we will see that Nicholas is propounding the doctrine that in God even being and not-being coincide.<sup>20</sup> Since not-being (which is minimally being) is identical with maximally being, how can we—it is asked rhetorically in I, 6—rightly think that the Maximum is able not to exist?

Finally, in *DI* Nicholas nowhere says, in so many words, “*Deus est coincidentia oppositorum.*” In I, 4 he indicates that the absolutely Maximum is beyond all opposition, the word “opposites” being subsequently replaced by the word “contradictories”; and at the beginning of I, 22 God is said to be the Enfolding of all things, including contradictories. But only in the dedicatory letter does he first use the phrase “*ubi contradictoria coincidunt,*” when he speaks of the intellect's raising itself to “that Simplicity where contradictories coincide.” It seems that God's being *beyond* contradictories is the same, for Nicholas, as His being the Simplicity where they *coincide*. For when in the *Apologia* he reiterates the phrase from the dedicatory letter (a phrase which John Wenck regarded as espousing a stratagem),<sup>21</sup> he likewise affirms that God is beyond the coincidence of contradictories (e.g., is beyond the coincidence of oneness and plurality).<sup>22</sup> Although it sounds different to say that *in Deo contradictoria coincidunt* and to say that *Deus super coincidentiam contradictoriorum est*, Nicholas does not draw any distinction by means of these expressions but simply uses them interchangeably.

In I, 5 Nicholas introduces numerical considerations to establish that the Maximum is one; he will introduce different considerations in I, 7 to establish that the Maximum is three. No number can be an infinite number, we are told.<sup>23</sup> For if it were, it would be a maximum, and thus would be beyond all differentiation and thus would not even be number. And if number ceased, so too would all plurality, distinctness, and comparative relation, since these presuppose it. Although a number series may progress upwards without limit, it is only potentially unlimited, not “actually” so. That is, at whatever point we stop counting, we still will have counted only a finite set of integers, and that number at which we have stopped will itself be a finite number. But in descending the number scale, observes Nicholas, we must come to a source, or beginning, of number. For if there were no source of number, there could not be any number. For number is something generated. Moreover, that from which it is generated can only be oneness, which is a minimum because it is something than which there cannot be a lesser; hence, it must also be a maximum, because max-

imum and minimum coincide. But oneness cannot itself be a number, because number, which admits of comparative greatness, cannot be either a minimum or a maximum, which is beyond all comparative relation. (In the attempt to follow Nicholas's reasoning, we must bear in mind that he does not regard fractions as numbers but as relations between two numbers. Similarly, he has no notion of negative numbers. Nor does he consider either zero or unity to be a number.) If we read between the lines, it becomes tempting to detect in I, 5 a further reason for concluding that number has a beginning: viz., that if it did not, then there could not be numbering, since there would be no starting point in numbering. Hence, we could not know how many items were contained in a group of things. But surely if there are a number of, say, men (i.e., a plurality of men), then it must be *possible* to determine how many men there are—or so, at least, Nicholas would presumably contend.

All of the immediately foregoing serves to illustrate how the absolutely Maximum, because it coincides with the absolutely Minimum, is Absolute Oneness. God, who is the Absolute Maximum, is one both in the sense that there exists only one God and in the sense that there is no plurality in this one God's nature. In accordance with the illustration, we are now allowed to make the following inferences: (1) Anyone who would deny the existence of the one God must also deny the existence of the world, because in the absence of Oneness there can be no plurality. And (2) whoever would deny the oneness of the one God's nature must likewise deny His eternity; for only what precedes composition and otherness is eternal.

*DI* I, 6 is a curious chapter—one which gives rise to the controversy over whether or not Nicholas is intent upon proving the existence of an absolutely Maximum. I have already stated that he is not, and I, 6 is seen not to conflict with this statement. The title of the chapter, “The Maximum is Absolute Necessity,” does not indicate that any proof of existence is being undertaken. Moreover, we must read this chapter in the light of the aim expressed at the end of chapter 5: “whoever would say that there are many gods would deny, most falsely, the existence not only of God but also of all the things of the universe—as will be shown in what follows.” Even the opening section of I, 6 moves in the direction of showing that the Maximum so bounds all finite things that they cannot exist apart from it.

But in accordance with its heading, I, 6 also argues that the ab-

solutely Maximum, already premised as existing, is such that it exists necessarily. The reasoning here is thoroughly implausible and unrigorous. We are told that the Maximum is not able not to exist because not-being is not opposed to that which transcends all opposition. Similarly, we are presented with an exhaustive list of alternative possibilities, each of which is alleged to attest to the existence of the absolutely Maximum. Hence—we are supposed to conclude—it is not possible that the Maximum not exist; hence, the Maximum exists necessarily, as Absolute Necessity.

This chapter constitutes, perhaps, the nadir of the entire treatise of three books. For against the backdrop of the detailed debates conducted between Thomists, Scotists, and Ockhamists—debates packed with important logical, metaphysical, and terminological distinctions—Nicholas surely owed his own era a more elaborate and philosophically sophisticated presentation. His failure in this regard may say something about his philosophical intelligence. But, more likely, it reflects his penchant for another way of doing another kind of philosophy. Usually, his way of doing this other kind of philosophy—which we may call Neoplatonic, if we like—is not unintelligent. In the present case, however, his instincts and preferences have let him down. For he is all too content merely to sketch and to hint. Yet, we his contemporary readers are left with no idea of what he might have been hinting at when at the end of I, 6 he alludes., with no small measure of hyperbole, to “an infinity of similar considerations” which show clearly that the unqualifiedly Maximum is Absolute Necessity.

In line with the Christian tradition, Nicholas endeavors to work out a rationale for his belief that God is both one and trine—i.e., is triune. His strategy in I, 7 is to argue as follows: oneness is eternal., equality eternal, and union eternal; but since there can be only one eternal thing, it follows that oneness, equality, and union are a oneness which is trine or a trinity which is one. To this trine eternity Nicholas then likens the members of the Divine Trinity. He prefers this likeness to the traditional likeness—viz., of father, son, and spirit—which perhaps seems to him too creaturely a likeness to be befitting. Yet, he is willing to call Oneness *Father*, Equality of Oneness *Son*, and Union of both Oneness and Equality of Oneness *Holy Spirit*. He does not expect anyone to become a trinitarian on the basis of finding his arguments persuasive—any more than he expects anyone to become a monotheist on the basis of his previous points about the absolutely Maximum. He is not writing a *polemical* work., not confronting his

readers with an *apologia* on behalf of Christianity. At this juncture he is simply trying to articulate philosophically the theological doctrines he holds by faith. If he can detect any rationale at all in these doctrines, if he can find some intellectual “picturing” of them, as it were, then his ignorance will, he believes, be to that extent more learned. For the intellect, now having become more apprised of its limitations and incapacities, will be less likely to mistake its symbolisms and images for anything other than a disproportional *similitude* of the underlying *reality*.

In assessing the nuances of Nicholas's philosophical approach, we really ought to do so—at least initially—from within the philosophical tradition in which he is writing. In I, 7 his method is akin to, say, Plato's in the second half of the *Parmenides* or to Proclus's in *The Theology of Plato*—except that whereas Plato is laughing up his sleeve at the monists by deliberately making use of fallacy, Nicholas has no comparable ulterior motives and no intentional use of sophistry. His conceptualizing is born from that Platonic and Neoplatonic matrix in which it is assumed to be perfectly intelligible to regard otherness and mutability and equality as *realia* and to draw conclusions such as “equality naturally precedes inequality” or “oneness is by nature prior to otherness.” At the agora of Neoplatonic speculation, Nicholas's arguments in I, 7 would have gained some currency.

But not every chapter of *DI* proceeds in the Q.E.D. fashion of I, 7. Sometimes the language of *showing* has more to do with illustrating than with proving. [And sometimes even the very language of *proving* has more to do with affirming than with demonstrating (e.g., I, 17 (49:2))]. In I, 8 Nicholas claims to *show* that, apart from any occurrence of multiplicity, Oneness generates Equality of Oneness (i.e., that the Father begets the Son). He shows this, though, only in the reduced sense of illustrating it by the arithmetical proposition “ $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ .” In weighing his statements, we must be careful that we not automatically construe the verbs “*ostendere*” and “*probare*” as heralding a deductive proof, when all that Nicholas is promising us may perhaps be only such an illustration.

Not surprisingly, then, the most ingenious part of Book One—viz., chapters 12 through 21—utilizes both deductive and non-deductive inference. This fact can be clearly seen from the statement of method at the beginning of chapter 12: “We must first consider finite mathematical figures together with their characteristics and relations. Next, I we must I apply these relations, in a transformed way, to cor-



responding infinite mathematical figures. Thirdly, [we must] thereafter, in a still more highly transformed way, apply the relations of these infinite figures to the simple Infinite, which is altogether independent even of all figure." With regard to finite and infinite mathematical figures Nicholas advances deductive proofs. From the conclusions of the latter he infers, non-deductively, certain symbolic parallels in the case of Divine Infinity. For example, his method permits him to claim, in the title of I, 16, that "in a symbolic way the Maximum is to all things as a maximum line is to [all] lines." Pursuing his parallelism, he infers that the Maximum is the Essence of all essences and the Measure of all things.

In particular, he has contended that an infinite line is a straight line, a maximum triangle, a maximum circle, and a maximum sphere—in short, "is, actually, whatever is present in the potency of a finite line" (I, 13). The word "actually" is here misleading; and, indeed, it misled John Wenck, who pounced upon Nicholas as falsely teaching that there actually exists an infinite line.<sup>24</sup> In *Apologia* 32:9-11 Nicholas claims to have indicated sufficiently in *DI* that the actual existence of an infinite line is impossible. But he is not aware of how much trouble he causes for his readers when in I, 13 he begins by using the subjunctive ("if there were an infinite line") but soon switches to the indicative, thus obscuring the contrary-to-fact conditional nature of his claim: if there *were* an infinite line, it *would be*, actually, whatever is present in the potency of a finite line.

One infinite line cannot be longer or shorter than another; indeed, says Nicholas, these would be the same infinite line, since there could not be more than one infinite line. Now, since each "part" of the infinite line is likewise infinite, "one foot of an infinite line," so to speak, is convertible with the whole infinite line; and therefore in an infinite line one foot is not shorter than are two feet, which also are convertible with the whole (I, 16). In the infinite line, the part is the whole. Accordingly, an infinite line is indivisible; and in this regard it is unlike a finite line. But although a finite line is infinitely divisible, it is not divisible to the point that it is no longer a line. Hence, it is indivisible in its essence: "a line of one foot is not less a line than is a line of one cubit" (I, 17). It follows, we are told, that the infinite line is the essence of a finite line. But the essence is the measure of all the lines which participate in it, since not all of them participate equally in it. Hence, finite lines are measurable in relation to their degree of participation.

Nicholas transfers his considerations about the infinite line to apply in the case of God (I, 16): Just as the maximum line is the essence of all lines, so the Absolute Maximum is the Essence of all essences. Just as in the maximum line every line is the maximum line, so in the Absolute Maximum everything is the Absolute Maximum. Just as the maximum line is the measure of all lines, so the Absolute Maximum is the Measure of all things. Let us examine these three points, thus illustrated, one by one.

1. Nicholas calls God not only “the Essence of all essences,”<sup>25</sup> “the Form of [all] forms,” “the Form of being,” and “the Being of beings,” but also, more simply, “the Essence of all things” (*essentia omnium*) and “the Being of things” (*rerum entitas*)<sup>26</sup>—the last two expressions coming from Thierry of Chartres. Perhaps all of these expressions seemed objectionable to Wenck, who, in effect, singles out the last two, seeing in them only signs of heresy.<sup>27</sup> In general, Wenck feels that Nicholas is in danger of losing the metaphysical distinction between Creator and creature—by teaching that God is all things<sup>28</sup> and that all things coincide with God.<sup>29</sup> And he sees both Nicholas and Eckhart as committed, by their respective metaphysics, to a denial of the individual existence of things within their own genus.<sup>30</sup> Yet, none of Nicholas's statements either convey such meanings or entail propositions expressing them. When he says that God is the Being of [all] things and the Essence of all things, he is neither denying the respective finite essences of finite things nor confounding these essences with the Divine Essence. In *DI* he attributes to things their own essences. In II, 9 (146:2), for example, he uses the clause “since the essence of stone is distinct from the essence of man” in such way as, apparently, to be endorsing it. And in III, 12 (260:12-13) he speaks of each of the blessed—“having the truth-of-his-own-being preserved (*servata veritate sui proprii esse*)”—as existing in Christ Jesus as Christ. In the *Apologia* he explicitly repudiates Wenck's charge, insisting that things have their own respective form and being.<sup>31</sup>

“God is the Essence of all things” and “God is the Being of all things” are simply Nicholas's shorthand for “God is the Essence of all essences” and “God is the Being of all beings.” And these latter expressions are intended to teach, not to exclude, the doctrine that finite things have their own being and their own essences. What they do not teach, but rather exclude, is the doctrine that finite things have un-derived and, absolutely independent being—something reserved for God alone. But a thing's being can be totally derivative, in an ulti-

mate sense, without thereby failing to be that thing's being. That is, its being can be totally dependent, in an ultimate sense, without its thereby failing to be its own, in some more immediate sense. So just as for God to be the Cause of all things does not ipso facto exclude the existence of secondary causes, so for Him to be the Essence of all things does not thereby exclude the existence of secondary essences. Indeed, God, is the Essence of all essences in the sense that if God were not what He is, these other things would not be what they are.<sup>32</sup> And He is the Being of all beings in the sense that if He did not exist, then nothing at all would exist.<sup>33</sup>

Though Nicholas's point is clear, it has sometimes been obscured by a failure of interpreters to grasp the meaning of two or three passages which, for one reason or another, they take to be key texts. For example, at the end of I, 17 there is the following passage: "We have now seen clearly how we can arrive at God through removing the participation of beings. For all beings participate in Being. Therefore, if from all beings participation is removed, there remains most simple Being itself, which is the Essence (*essentia*) of all things. And we see such Being only in most learned ignorance; for when I remove from my mind all the things which participate in Being, it seems that nothing remains. Hence, the great Dionysius says that our understanding of God draws near to nothing rather than to something." This passage does *not* teach that each thing in its being is God, that if we imaginatively strip away the attributes of some given finite being, we will arrive at simple Being itself, which is the proper "core," as it were, of this thing.<sup>34</sup> Rather, Nicholas's point may be rephrased as follows:

All beings participate in Being. To remove any being's participation in Being is to remove *that* being (i.e., to remove its existence). If participation is removed from all beings, then there remains only *Being*, i.e., Being itself, which was participated in. But Being itself is not a being, for it is not differentiated. Hence, it is not positively conceivable. But not-being is also not positively conceivable. Accordingly, in this respect, the case is similar with Being itself and with not-being. Since God is Being itself, Dionysius rightly says that our understanding of God is more like an understanding of nothing than of something.

Another example of a passage frequently misunderstood is II, 2 (101:1-3): "But since the creation was created through the being of the Maximum and since—in the Maximum—being, making, and creating are the same thing: creating seems to be not other than God's being all things." Some interpreters have supposed that Nicholas is here in some way identifying God and His creation. Nicholas is presented as

teaching that “in creating, God somehow takes on privation—that He somehow becomes the creatures.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, Nicholas's point is much too dialectical to be accommodated by such an insensitive interpretation. Nicholas is perplexed about whether or not God's act of creating is comprehensible. For he cannot understand how from the eternal, the temporal could arise, how from the indistinct, there could come forth a plurality and a succession. He proceeds to make a distinction: insofar as the creation is God's being, it is eternity, insofar as it is subject to time, it is not from God, who is eternal. “Who, then, understands the creation's existing both eternally and temporally?” In the course of his dialectical reasoning Nicholas makes it clear that the creation is God's being—and therefore eternal—only insofar as it exists in God. But as it exists in God, it is God and not something finite and differentiated. In Nicholas's mind, this point is associated with his second comparison with the infinite line—a comparison to which we may now turn.

2. In the infinite line all lines are the infinite line; similarly, in the Absolute Maximum all things are the Absolute Maximum. The word “in” is all-important. For Nicholas nowhere states that all things are the Absolute Maximum, or God, but maintains only that *in* God all things are God:<sup>36</sup> ontologically prior to their creation they are “enfolded” in God as God; and the act of creation is God's act of “unfolding” them from Himself. Since it seems strange to speak, plurally, of *things* existing in God prior to their creation, Nicholas's expression might give rise to confusion. For instead of regarding this as simply another *modus loquendi*, someone might take him to be affirming that things exist in God as the *forms* of their finite selves. Yet, Nicholas takes pains to prevent such a misunderstanding. In I, 24 (77:1-7) he asks rhetorically: “Who could understand the infinite Oneness which infinitely precedes all opposition?—where all things are incompositely enfolded in simplicity of Oneness, where there is neither anything which is other nor anything which is different, where a man does not differ from a lion, and the sky does not differ from the earth. Nevertheless, in the Maximum they are most truly the Maximum, [though] not in accordance with their finitude; rather, [they are] Maximum Oneness in an enfolded way.”<sup>37</sup> The very same point is repeated in *Apologia* 27:2-5; and the rationale for the point is generalized in *DI* II, 5 (119:12-20).

This doctrine of enfolding overlaps with the doctrine that in God opposites coincide, though it is primarily correlated with the theo-

gy of creation, whereas the doctrine of *coincidentia* is primarily correlated with the *via negativa* and with God's inconceivability and simplicity. Of course, Nicholas does not hesitate to state that "God is the enfolding of all things, even of contradictories" (I,22), and here the topic is not creation. But it is a topic directly associated with creation; and what is said to be enfolded is *all things*, not simply *contradictories*. These linguistic patterns are matters of idiom, not matters of substance. Since all things are in God as what is caused is in the cause, it is more felicitous to say "the effect is enfolded in its cause" than to say "in the cause the effect coincides with the cause." Moreover, "enfolding" and "unfolding" serve as a balanced couple for portraying the relation between Creator and creation. But what could balance as fittingly with "coinciding"?

It is the height of irony that Nicholas, who thus restricts the use of "*coincidere*" by avoiding it when discussing the Creator-creature relationship should have been accused by Wenck of having taught, *tout simplement*, that all things coincide with God. Wenck's mistake befigured the central mistake that would come to be made by Nicholas's subsequent *frondeurs*: viz., to excerpt from *DI* some key word or key sentence, while ignoring the restrictions and qualifications that had been placed upon its use.

3. As an infinite line is the measure of all lines, so the Absolute Maximum is the Measure of all things. This point about the Absolute Maximum Nicholas illustrates not only by the hypothesized infinite line but also by the relationship between substance and accident: "accidents are more excellent in proportion to their participation in substance; and, further, the more they participate in a more excellent substance, the still more excellent they are" (I, 18). By comparison, God—who orders all things in measure and number and weight, according to Wisdom 11:21, a verse Nicholas is fond of quoting—is variously participated in by various things. A thing's entire perfection derives from God, who created it to exist in the best manner possible for it.<sup>38</sup> But one thing is more perfect than another in accordance with its degree of participation in Divine Perfection.

To say that finite things participate in the Absolute Maximum is tantamount to saying that they owe their existence to the Maximum, which created them and which sustains them for as long as they exist. Their being is therefore dependent being, illustrated by an accident's dependency upon the substance in which it participates—with the proviso that whereas an accident modifies the substance, the universe

does not modify God.<sup>39</sup> God is the Measure of all these things in that He alone has bestowed upon each thing its degree of perfection, which He alone knows precisely, though He knows this immediately and apart from any comparative relation to Himself.

Though the Maximum is not of the nature of the things it measures, it nonetheless receives the name of the things it measures—i.e., of the things that participate in it (I, 18). But these transferred names and significations befit God only infinitesimally. Even “Oneness,” though it seems to be a quite close name for the Maximum, is still infinitely distant from the true and ineffable name of the Maximum—a name which *is* the Maximum.<sup>40</sup> The same point holds true, *a fortiori*, for “Substance,” “Justice,” “Truth,” and all the other names traditionally applied to God. In last analysis, Nicholas regards these names as religiously useful metaphors. They are not proper names but are simply words whose significations have been transferred so as to apply figuratively to God. Or better, what is customarily signified by these words can, by a kind of extension, as it were, be considered as “likenesses” of God. And yet, they are not likenesses that correspond to what God is but are only quasi-likenesses that direct the mind in its worship of the Deity. Accordingly, *Apologia* 24:19-22 declares: “to all who do not have learned ignorance (i.e., a knowledge of the fact that [the likenesses to God] are altogether disproportional), [the likenesses] are useless rather than useful.”

The foregoing names belong to affirmative theology. According to negative theology, however, “there is not found in God anything other than infinity” (I, 26). Thus, according to negative theology God is known only to Himself; the human mind, even in the life to come, will be unable to know Him other than as He shows forth in Christ.

We have now reached the fundamental tension within the entire system of learned ignorance. For if affirmative theology terminates in likenesses that are infinitely remote from Divine Being and if negative theology conceives of God only as Inconceivable Infinity, what entitles Nicholas to refer to creatures as a reflection or an image of God, as he does in II, 2 (103:3-9)?<sup>41</sup> And how, on the basis of the creation, can he see clearly God's eternal power and divinity, as Paul teaches in Romans 1:20?

The foregoing problem is so philosophically grave that unless it can be dealt with successfully, it threatens to undermine the very basis of learned ignorance. Let us be content to examine here only one small

aspect of the network of interlacing difficulties. Wenck reproached Nicholas for tacitly repudiating Wisdom 13:5: "By the greatness of the beauty of creation the Creator can be knowably seen."<sup>42</sup> To this reproach Nicholas responded: "Since there is no comparative relation of the creature to the Creator, no created thing possesses a beauty through which the Creator can be attained. But from the greatness of the beauty and adornment of created things we are elevated unto what is infinitely and incomprehensibly beautiful—just as from a work of craft [we are referred] to the craftsman, although the work of craft bears no comparative relation to the craftsman."<sup>43</sup>

The first thing for us to notice is Nicholas's reaffirmation of the principle "*non est proportio creaturae ad creatorem*." But a second feature also strikes our attention: viz., that the illustration of the craftsman does not serve Nicholas's purpose. True, a craftsman's work furnishes us with some basis for making inferences about the craftsman himself, even though the work does not *resemble* the craftsman. For example, from a Greek vase we can justifiably make inferences about the Greek potter, even though the vase does not resemble the potter. Similarly, Nicholas wants to say, from the works of God we can justifiably make inferences about God, even though the works of God do not resemble God. Yet, the comparison does not hold: it is defeated by Nicholas's unremitting claim—at the beginning, the middle, and the end of Book One—that God, unlike a craftsman, is inconceivable.<sup>44</sup> We therefore cannot justifiably draw any inferences about what He is like. We remain stranded in the realm of the *as if*.

Had Nicholas throughout his works not emphasized and re-emphasized the inconceivability of God (except to Himself), we might have had grounds for construing the principle of *nulla proportio* in a different way. For we might understand it merely to mean that there is no *fully adequate* likeness between God and creation. But in order for this interpretation of his words to be plausible, there would have to be found in his works the parallel thesis that we have no *fully adequate* concept of God but only a partially adequate one. But for better or for worse, this latter thesis does not square with the texts.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his works Nicholas shies away from using the word "*analogia*." This aversion goes so far that it leads him to substitute the word "*proportio*" for the word "*analogia*" in the passage he cites, in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 30, from Ambrose Traversari's translation of Pseudo-Dionysius's *The Divine Names*; and on folio 65<sup>r</sup> of Codex Cusanus 106 (works of Heimeric de Campo) he strikes out the word

“*analogae*” and writes instead “*proportionalis*.”<sup>46</sup> Many explanations for his having done so would be viable. But it is tempting to view him as simply going further in the direction of disassociating himself from the doctrine of *analogia entis*. For in place of Thomisticlike distinctions between *analogia proportionis* and *analogia proportionalitatis*, we find, in *DI*, the use of infinite geometrical figures to illustrate Divine Infinity and, in later works, “object lessons,” such as the lessons learned from the eyeglass in *De Beryllo*, the spinning top in *De Possess*, and the glowing ruby in *De Li Non Aliud*. It would be wrong to suppose that these object lessons and illustrations are variants of the Thomistic doctrine of *analogia*. True, Nicholas does draw various kinds of analogy—e.g., that an infinite line is to finite lines as God is to the world. But he never believes, as does Thomas, that on the basis of analogies something that is really the case can be signified about God's relation to the world—or even about God's nature. Because analogies do not correspond to any reality to be found in Infinite Being or its relations, they are better called illustrations. Nicholas himself calls them *aenigmata*, i.e., symbolisms; and he uses them to direct the mind's reflection so that the mind's ignorance may be learned. For the human intellect is supposed to recognize that though these symbolisms help it to form a lofty conception of God, this conception is nonetheless only an *as if*—infinitely distant from and infinitely other than the Reality itself.<sup>47</sup> Now, since there are alternative—indeed, conflicting—sets of symbolisms, Nicholas needs criteria for deciding which sets are fitting and which unfitting. But if all of these symbolisms and illustrations are infinitely distant from Infinite Reality, then in accordance with Nicholas's own example of an infinite line, a “fitting” symbolism will be no closer to the Reality than an “unfitting” one. For “it is not the case that an infinite line exceeds the length of one foot more than it exceeds the length of two feet”;<sup>48</sup> for it exceeds both lengths infinitely.

## II. *Maximum Contractum*

As the Maximum Absolutum is infinite, so the maximum contractum is finite. Book One has already taught us the former point. Book Two now develops the latter point. Wherever there can be comparisons of greater and lesser we do not attain to the unqualifiedly Maximum, which escapes all such comparisons. Moreover, wherever there can be such comparisons we cannot by any addition thereto or division



thereof reach the infinite. (This is clear, declares Nicholas, from the example of the ascending number series and from the example of the divisibility of a finite line. In neither case do we arrive at the infinitely great or the infinitely small, for we can always keep adding or keep dividing.) Hence, since one quantitative part of the universe (e.g., the moon) can be greater or lesser than another part (e.g., the earth), we do not by adding all the quantitative parts arrive at something infinite (i.e., maximum), than which there could not be a still greater quantity. Similarly, with regard to virtue, perfection, etc.: since one order of perfection (e.g., human beings) can be greater or lesser than another order of perfection (e.g., angels), we do not by increasing the degree or order of perfection arrive at an infinite (i.e., maximum) perfection, than which there could not be a still greater degree. Accordingly, since the quantitative and non-quantitative parts of the universe are finite and comparative, they cannot by being extended become maximum and non-comparative. Hence, the whole of the universe is also finite.

Yet, Nicholas calls the finite universe privatively infinite, distinguishing it from God, who is negatively infinite. And this terminology causes some, confusion. To say that God, or Maximum Absolutum, is negatively infinite is to say that nothing at all can limit Him, for He is everything which can be. To say that the universe is privatively infinite is to say that it lacks limits—that it is not, and cannot be, actually limited by any greater thing external to it; for it is by definition, all things other than God. (And God does not delimit it in such way as to be its bound—i.e., a bound which would mark the end of the universe and the beginning of what is not the universe. For such a bound would have to be finite, since it would stand in comparative relation to what it bounded and would be defined partly in contrast to what it bounded). Accordingly, to call the universe privatively infinite amounts to calling it finite but physically unbounded. In order not to be misled by this expression, we must be reminded of two tenets of Nicholas's program: (1) the universe, of itself, does not have the power to expand; (2) to say that God is greater than the universe is not to place God in a comparative relation with the universe, for it is tantamount to saying only that the Infinite is greater than the finite—that whatever is, actually, all that can possibly be surpasses infinitely and disproportionally whatever is not the actuality of all possibility.

Nicholas thinks that, given our understanding of the notion *universe*, we cannot conceive of the universe as finite.<sup>49</sup> For to conceive

of something as finite is to conceive of it as demarcated by what it is not. But since we understand the universe to be everything there is (other than God), we cannot conceive of there being anything beyond it which delimits it. Any such thing of which we did conceive would itself be a part of the universe. And so, we could conceive of it as delimiting the universe only if we radically misunderstood the notion *universe*. This move allows Nicholas to draw a parallelism between the world and God: just as we judge that God is infinite, so we judge that the world is finite; yet, just as we cannot conceive of God's infinitude, so we cannot conceive of the world's finitude.<sup>50</sup> However, with regard to both aspects of this parallelism, Nicholas needs to provide a penetrating analysis of conceivability.

The universe is not only *infinitum*, or *maximum*: it is also *contractum*. Nowhere in Nicholas's works do we find a definition of "*contractio*." The closest thereto is the statement at the end of II, 4: "Contraction means contraction to [i.e., restriction by] something, so as to be this or that." Yet, from this statement, together with various other statements which use the word "*contractio*" or the word "*contractum*," we obtain an idea of what Nicholas understood by these terms. For he contrasts what is contracted with what is Absolute; and just as he regards the Absolute as in every respect undifferentiated, so he considers the contracted as in some respect differentiated. Thus God is *Absolute Maximum*<sup>51</sup> in that He is that Maximum in which contradictories coincide (as well as in the sense that there *cannot possibly* be anything greater than God); and the universe is a *contracted* maximum in that it is that maximum which is ever a oneness-in-plurality because it is a differentiated oneness, in which contradictories cannot coincide. But when we read that "the universe is contracted in each actually existing thing" or that a universal is contracted in a particular, the sense is rather the following: the universe (or some given universal) exists in a restricted way—which Nicholas will have to explain—in each actually existing thing (or in the designated particular).

Over and over again Nicholas states that only God is absolute, that all else is contracted.<sup>52</sup> These clear statements serve to exclude all interpretation of his philosophy as pantheistic. And yet, tragically, John Wenck and a host of others have stigmatized his thinking as pantheistic or as leaning towards pantheism. This misrepresentation occurs both from a neglecting of the emphasis upon the infinite gulf between the contracted and the Absolute<sup>53</sup> and from a confusion about certain other statements which become strange-sounding once their connec-

tion with the foregoing distinction is obscured. Sometimes Nicholas's very words are changed, his concepts shifted, so that he is presented as teaching that "everything is, in fact, God Himself,"<sup>54</sup> that "the being of a creature is intrinsically constituted by the divine being,"<sup>55</sup> that the world is a contraction of the divine being,<sup>56</sup> that God is the maximum and minimum of creatures,<sup>57</sup> that the universe is *Geist*.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps too the very description of the Maximum as "all that which can be" has confused some readers. For if the Maximum is, actually, all that which can be, then it might seem that the reality of God must in some respect be mingled with the reality of the universe, which is among the things which can be.<sup>59</sup> Let us, then, take a closer look at Nicholas's teachings regarding the distinction between Creator and creature.

Above all, we need to notice that in *DI* Nicholas clearly affirms that the creation is not God.<sup>60</sup> And he reaffirms it in *Apologia* 23:8-9. Indeed, the creation is a *reflection* of God, is the *image* of that Infinite Form.<sup>61</sup> But the reflection of God is not God—any more than an image is the reality of which it is the image. Moreover, the terms "reflection" and "image" will mislead us if we forget that, for Nicholas, the so-called reflection, or image, is not the resemblance of God but is only the work of God—a work from which we can form a useful conception of God, though it be a conception falling infinitely and incommensurably short of the Reality itself. The words "*resplendentia*" and "*imago*" are used chiefly to insist that the creation owes to God all that it positively is, for it was created *ex nihilo*—rather than fashioned from some independently pre-existing material principle.<sup>62</sup> When Nicholas says that the creature is "something very much like God,"<sup>63</sup> he means to indicate that each creature was created in as perfect a state as it could be and that every created thing *qua* created thing is perfect (even if it seems less perfect in comparison with some other created thing). Thus, there is a parallelism between the fact that the creation *qua* creation is perfect and the fact that God is absolutely perfect. And yet, created perfection does not resemble Divine Perfection; nor does the creation's originally being as perfect as it could be preclude its having become imperfect as a result of the Fall. So when Nicholas terms each creature a created god or a god manqué, he does so in order to emphasize that God was not niggardly or envious in creating: He imparted as much being and perfection as could be received. But now the question arises: received by what?, since God created *ex nihilo*. Here Nicholas's response is altogether unsatisfactory: a thing's degree of perfection comes from God; its imperfection and limitation

come neither from God nor from any positive cause but only from contingency.<sup>64</sup> And the introducing of the word “contingency”—like Augustine's having introduced the phrase “deficient cause” vis-à-vis Satan's fall—signals that Nicholas has no intelligible explanation to offer. He is thus reduced further and further to unintelligibility: “There remains only to say that the plurality of things arises from the fact that God is present in nothing.”<sup>65</sup>

We may now turn to the central metaphysical theme vis-à-vis God's relation to the world—a theme we have already briefly touched upon: “God is the enfolding of all things in that all things are in Him; and He is the unfolding of all things in that He is in all things.”<sup>66</sup> In what sense, according to Nicholas, is it true that all things are in God and that God is in all things? Probably no question has generated more conflicting responses among Cusa scholars. For precisely this configuration of themes has led many to see in *DI* a tendency toward pantheism.

We previously observed that, for Nicholas, all things are enfolded in God ontologically prior to their creation and that as thus enfolded in God they are God.<sup>67</sup> And we saw that they are in God as what is caused is in the power of its cause. The universe is not in God *temporally* prior to its creation because “before” creation there was no time. Like Augustine, Nicholas believes that time was created together with the world.<sup>68</sup> Hence, there is a sense in which the world always existed—viz., that it existed from the beginning of time. But there is also a sense in which it did not always exist—viz., that time itself has a beginning. Thus, God is prior to the world in the order of dependency: without God the world would be nothing (i.e., there would be no world); but without the world God would remain the eternal and immutable God.

Accordingly, we may view created things in two different ways: (1) as totally deriving, in an ultimate sense, from God's power (i.e. as enfolded in God); (2) as being parts of an on-going world process in which one thing is interrelated to other things and in which there are secondary causes of existence and change (i.e., as unfolded from God).<sup>69</sup> From the first point of view, all things may be said to be in God's power and to be—in God's power—*God* without differentiation: “in the Maximum they are most truly the Maximum, [though] not in accordance with their finitude; rather, [they are] Maximum Oneness in an enfolded way.”<sup>70</sup> From the second point of view, they may be said to exist according to their finitude and as distinct from God and from

one another. Yet, even as distinct from God and unfolded from God they still exist, in some sense, in God. But the sense is now different. For whereas in the first sense they exist in God as God, in the second sense they exist as themselves in God: "Everything which exists actually, exists in God, since He is the actuality of all things. Now, actuality is the perfection and the end of possibility. Hence, since the universe is contracted in each actually existing thing: it is evident that God, who is in the universe, is in each thing and that each actually existing thing is immediately in God, as is also the universe."<sup>71</sup> The first sense accords with the way things exist in God as enfolded-in-God; the second sense accords with the way they continue to exist in God while existing as unfolded-from-God. The first sense can be illustrated by the way a craftsman's idea of what he will produce exists in his mind *as* his mind (and thus as himself). The second sense can be illustrated by an *as if*: the world is, *as it were*, "an artifact"—but one which depends entirely upon the Divine Craftsman's Idea and which, ultimately speaking, has no other being than dependent being.<sup>72</sup> Of course, the relation between a craftsman's idea and his product is temporal: the idea temporally precedes the production. But the relation between God and His creation is non-temporal: God ontologically precedes the created world. Still, we can envision a state of affairs in which only God exists; and we can also envision a state of affairs in which both God and the creation exist. And this envisioning enables Nicholas to use the language of enfolding and unfolding, even though the enfolded state does not temporally precede the unfolded state. Viewed, then, as enfolded absolutely in God, each thing *is* God; for *there* it is not its finite self. Viewed as unfolded from God, no thing is God; for *here* it *is* its finite, contracted self and is said to participate in (the likeness of) God rather than to be God.

Whatever problems Nicholas has with his language of creation, they are problems shared by Augustine and by all who profess the doctrine that time does not precede the beginning of the world. Nonetheless, let it be clear that Nicholas is not subscribing to a double aspect theory, in terms of which the world and God, though identical, may be viewed according to one aspect as world, according to another as God. This doctrine was reserved for Spinoza to set forth at a later period in the history of philosophy. Nicholas himself teaches something more traditional: the world is not identical with God but is only an image of God. The language of enfolding and unfolding is meant to mark this fundamental ontological distinction.

So then, as unfolded from God, things remain in some sense in God. But it is also true that God is in some sense present in each *unfolded* thing;<sup>73</sup> and thus He may be said to be the *unfolding* of all things. To say this, however, is not to say that the world is God unfolded, for the world is not at all God. The world is unfolded *from* God without being God in His unfolded state, so to speak.

Nicholas attempts to clarify the doctrine of divine presence by means of a comparison: “in all things God is that which they are, just as in an image the reality itself (*veritas*) is present.”<sup>74</sup> Of course, the reality (i.e., the original) is not physically present in the image—any more than God is physically present in His creation. The reality is present in the sense that the image is truly an image of the original. In the case of God and the world, Nicholas regards the world as truly an image of God, even though it is not a true image of God. That is, it befigures God<sup>75</sup> but is not an analogue of God. This befiguring is really a kind of parallelism: as God is Absolute Maximum, so the universe is a contracted maximum; as God is Absolute Oneness, so the universe is a oneness-in-plurality; as God is Trinity, so the universe is also a trinity; and so on. Likewise, with regard to the language of image and original, we also have a parallelism: the original gives to the image its identity, insofar as the image is identified in terms of what it is an image of; indeed, the image would not be what it is if the original were not what *it* is. Similarly, no thing in the world would be what it is if God were not what He is. Elsewhere Nicholas reverts to the illustration of the craftsman: God is in the universe as a craftsman's design, which is something abstract, is present in the artifact, which is something concrete.<sup>76</sup> Because Nicholas believes that everything sprang into existence from God's design, he views the world's perfection as an indicator of that design and, consequently, of the presence of Omnipresence.

In stating that in a thing God is, absolutely, what that thing is, Nicholas uses the language of quiddity and of essence: God is the Absolute Quiddity, or Absolute Essence, of that thing.<sup>77</sup>

Just as God, since He is immense, is neither in the sun nor in the moon, although in them He is, absolutely, that which they are: so the universe is neither in the sun nor in the moon; but in them it is, contractedly, that which they are. Now, the Absolute Quiddity of the sun is not other than the Absolute Quiddity of the moon (since [this] is God Himself, who is the Absolute Being and Absolute Quiddity of all things);<sup>78</sup> but the contracted quiddity of the sun is other than the contracted quiddity of the moon (for as the Absolute Quiddity of a thing is not the thing, so the contracted [quiddity of a thing] is none other

than the thing)... Although the universe is neither the sun nor the moon, nevertheless in the sun it is the sun and in the moon it is the moon. However, it is not the case that God is in the sun sun and in the moon moon; rather, [in them] He is that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference.<sup>79</sup>

Hereby Nicholas reaffirms that God is not, in any ordinary sense, present in all things. But in the moon, say, He is, absolutely, that which is moon. To say “absolutely” is to say that in the moon God is the ultimate ground of the moon's being what it is. That is, God is not this finite thing; nor in this finite thing is He this finite thing; rather, in this finite thing He is the ultimate sustaining Power of its contracted being and essence—in which Power its contracted being and essence “participate.”

Is Nicholas teaching that each thing, in its being, is God? In order to answer this question satisfactorily we must keep in mind that his thought moves back and forth between two distinct ontological levels: the level of the ultimate and the level of the non-ultimate. Thus, when speaking non-ultimately, he deals with the contracted quiddity, or contracted essence, of things;<sup>80</sup> he declares that “Aristotle was right in dividing all the things in the world into substance and accident”;<sup>81</sup> he proclaims that each thing exists in the best way it can, that it is a union of potentiality and of actuality—and so on. When speaking on the ultimate level, he talks of the Absolute Quiddity of all things, the Essence of all essences, the enfoldedness of all things in God; and he makes statements such as the following: the creation *qua* creation “does not have even as much being as an accident but is altogether nothing. . . .”<sup>82</sup> This last citation illustrates how radically incoherent—even nonsensical—his entire system would be if we did not distinguish, with him, these two different levels; for otherwise, it would be absurd to affirm that the creation *qua* creation does not have as much being as an accident, since an accident is itself a part of the creation. Similarly, when he teaches that the universe is only a reflection or that God is the Essence of all things, he is speaking from the point of view of the ultimate.

We are now in a position to understand the following statement from the end of I, 17: “No thing exists in itself except the Maximum; and every thing exists in itself insofar as it exists in its Essence [*ratio*], because its Essence is the Maximum.” God is the ultimate Essence in which all things are enfolded; these things *qua* enfolded in God *are* God and hence exist *per se* and *in se*. Nicholas is not claiming that a thing has no being or essence except God; nor is he claiming that is

has no positive being or essence except God. Rather, he is maintaining that, ultimately speaking, the creation—both as a whole and with respect to any of its parts—would be nothing without God, since it has no independent ontological status other than the relatively independent status given to it by God (e.g., there are secondary causes; and human beings have free wills). But in granting this status, God has granted to each created substance its own positive, contracted essence, so that those substances which are material objects are other than the contracted mirror images of themselves. At this level it would be just as wrong to call a material object a mere reflection as it would be on the ultimate level not to call the entire universe a mere reflection. Indeed, because there are two different levels Nicholas can meaningfully advance the following proportionality: a face is to its mirror image as God is to the world.<sup>83</sup>

Accordingly, Nicholas does not teach either that the universe is God in a state of contraction<sup>84</sup> or that each thing's being is Divine Being. For, on the one hand, Divine Being cannot at all be contracted; and, on the other, Divine Being is never a created thing's being but is the ultimate Cause and Sustainer of each finite thing's being. In the moon God is not the moon's being, for the moon's being is contracted being and hence different from the sun's being. God's being is never *this* being or *that* being but is undifferentiated Being itself; He is Being only in a sense which is inconceivable to us, for He is Being in such way that Being is not opposed to not-being.

Thus, interpreters such as Vincent Martin<sup>85</sup> have been misled by the illustration of the infinite line in I, 17: "An infinite line is the essence of a finite line. Hence, there is one essence of both lines [i.e., a line of two feet and a line of three feet]; and the difference between the things, or the lines, does not result from a difference of the essence, which is one, but from an accident, because the lines do not participate equally in the essence." From such passages Martin infers that, for Nicholas, "God and the creature have the same proper nature," that a creature's "positive content, i.e., that by which . . . it is constituted, is the divine being."<sup>86</sup> And Martin thinks that Nicholas conceives of creatures as differing from one another only accidentally, because they differ by their degree of participation in their Essence, which is God.<sup>87</sup> Yet, Martin's inferences are too sweeping. For such Cusan passages as the foregoing teach only the following: that just as the infinite line is the essence of all finite lines, which differ from one another in accordance with their respective degree of participation in it, so the Max-



imum Essence is the Essence of all finite essences, each of which differs from the others in accordance with its respective degree of participation in the Maximum Essence. From Nicholas's comparison with the infinite line we are not supposed to infer that as all finite lines differ only accidentally, so all finite things differ only accidentally. Had Nicholas meant for us to make this inference, he would not have gone on in I, 18 to classify finite things as substances and accidents. For a substance differs from a finite line by virtue of having an essence of its own. Throughout I, 16-18 Nicholas speaks of essences and substances in the plural. Moreover, throughout *DI* he uses the language of genus, species, common nature. In II, 6 we read that "dogs and other animals of the same species are united by virtue of the common specific nature which is in them" (126:6-8). And in III, 7 we read, apropos of Christ's example of the grain of wheat: "In this example the numerical distinctness of the grain is destroyed, while the specific essence remains intact; by this means nature raises up many grains" (225:2-4). Similarly, III, 8 states: "There is only one indivisible humanity and specific essence of all human beings. Through *it* all individual human beings are numerically distinct human beings, so that Christ and all human beings have the same humanity, though the numerical distinctness of the individuals remains unconfused" (227:12-16). And III, 1 tells us that a particular "contracts, in its own degree, the one nature of its own species" (186:7), that "all things differ from one another—either (1) in genus, species, and number or (2) in species and number or (3) in number—so that each thing exists with its own number, weight, and measure" (182:14-16). Accordingly, Nicholas teaches that a dog and a human being differ essentially.<sup>88</sup> In differing essentially, they also differ in their degree of participation in Divine Being, or Divine Essence.<sup>89</sup>

The illustration of the infinite line also teaches that substance does not admit of more or less—"even as a finite straight line, insofar as it is straight, does not admit of more and less. But because [it is] finite, one [straight] line is—through a difference of participation in the infinite line—longer or shorter in relation to another; no two [finite lines] are ever found to be equal."<sup>90</sup> By comparison, one dog is not more a dog than is another. And yet, each dog contracts the canine nature in its own degree, for no two dogs are perfect dogs. That is, the different degrees of contraction do not correspond to different degrees of being canine but to different degrees of being more perfectly or less perfectly canine.<sup>91</sup> Thus, it is true both that each individual

thing of a given species or genus has its own unique degree of contraction and, at the same time, that it has an essence, or nature, which is its positive principle of determinateness.<sup>92</sup>

We may now return to the question of whether or not the very description of the Maximum entails that the world's being is also God's being. The answer is plainly No. For although the Maximum is, actually, all that which can be, it is it coincidingly—i.e., absolutely and indistinctly. Therefore, the Maximum cannot be the universe, since it cannot be any finite or composite thing. Likewise, the only way that Maximum Being constitutively includes the universe's being is by way of enfolding. But, of course, insofar as the universe is enfolded in God, it is not the universe but is God Himself. The universe *qua* universe exists only as unfolded from God; and as unfolded from God, it is not at all God, though Nicholas calls every creature a “created god” and a “god manqué” in order to make a special point about created perfection.

A final passage which has been thought to exhibit pantheistic tendencies is the whole of II, 5. where the doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet* is found. As philosophically bizarre as this doctrine is, Nicholas regards it as implied by what he has already taught. For if (1) all things are in God and (2) God is in all things. then (3) everything is in everything else—i. e. , each thing is in each other thing. Nicholas expands these statements by reasoning that God is present in all things by means of the universe, which precedes its own parts, “just as in a craftsman's design the whole (e.g., a house) is prior to a part (e.g., a wall)”; similarly, all things, by means of the universe, are present in God (II, 4). This expansion then allows him to make the following restatement: “to say that each thing is in each thing is not other than [to say] that through all things God is in all things and that through all things all things are in God” (II, 5).

Nicholas illustrates his doctrine in two ways: by the example of the infinite line and by the example of the several members of one body. Since neither one of these illustrations is philosophically intelligible, neither one need here be rehearsed. Suffice it to say that both are based upon an altogether dubious notion of the relation between part and whole.

With the foregoing bizarre doctrine Nicholas was seeking to portray another parallelism between God and the world: as (in one way) God is in all things, and all things in God, so (in another way) the universe is in all things, and all things in the universe; indeed, as God

is in all things through the mediation of the universe, so through the mediation of the universe all things are in God. But this time the parallelism was of no help to him. For the crux of his doctrine exceeds the parallelism and relies upon a different comparison: just as the hand, the foot, etc., are, in the eye, the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man, so the sun, the moon, etc., are, in any given thing, that given thing insofar as that thing is immediately in God. Nicholas thinks that from the proposition "each actually existing thing is immediately in God, as is also the universe" and the proposition "God is in all things" it follows that in each thing each other thing exists as contractedly *that* thing. But since no such conclusion is entailed by these premises, additional premises will be needed. Nicholas's several illustrations become substitutes for the required additional premises. In the end, this elaborate edifice of thought collapses, raising a beclouding dust, so that many readers of *DI* come becloudedly to believe that the expression 'the universe is immediately in God' displays pantheistic leanings.

We have already seen that in I, 18 Nicholas agrees that "Aristotle was right in dividing all the things in the world into substance and accident." Similarly, in II, 6 he commends the Aristotelians when he writes: "In this way the Peripatetics speak the truth [when they say that] universals do not actually exist independently of things. For only what is particular exists actually." Nicholas's theory of universals blends Aristotelianism with his own metaphysics of contraction. Here again we find a parallelism: as God is the enfolding and unfolding of all things,<sup>93</sup> so the universe enfolds and unfolds all universals. For the universe is the contracted enfolding of three types of universal (each possessing its own respective degree of universality): viz., the ten categories, genera, and species. The categories are unfolded in and exist in the genera; the genera are unfolded in and exist in the species; the species exist only in individual things, i.e., in particulars. In Nicholas's language of oneness: God is the first and absolute Oneness; the universe is a second, but contracted, universal oneness-of-ten-categories; genera are a third universal oneness; species, a fourth. Species have a greater degree of contraction than do genera; and genera have a greater degree of contraction than do the categories. God, of course, is uncontracted; and Nicholas does not hesitate to refer to Him as *Absolute Universal*.

Though universals exist in particulars, which are still more contracted than is any universal, they exist in each particular as that par-

ticular. For example, though humanity is neither Socrates nor Plato: in Socrates it is Socrates, and in Plato it is Plato.<sup>94</sup> This statement about universals corresponds to the statement about the universe, which in a given thing is that thing.<sup>95</sup>

Humanity, according to Nicholas, exists in Socrates and in Plato in the following sense: Socrates is a man, and Plato is a man. Similarly, to say that in Socrates humanity is Socrates is tantamount to saying that Socrates's humanity differs numerically from Plato's. It is not tantamount to denying the reality of humanity *qua* universal. Nicholas is not a nominalist (or a conceptualist) but an Aristotelian-Thomistic realist; for he teaches that universals—i.e., species, or natures—exist in the particulars to which they belong; they are not mere rational entities. Though they do not exist apart from particulars, they are nonetheless ontologically prior (in Nicholas's words “prior in the order of nature”) to those particulars in which they are present. Human beings (or dogs or cats, etc.) share a specific nature which is individuated in each human being (in each dog or cat, etc.).<sup>96</sup> These natures are therefore numerically distinct, as Aristotle and Thomas had taught. Nicholas also borrows the Aristotelian-Thomistic view that the intellect, by the process of comparing and abstracting, makes universal concepts which correspond to the specific natures that exist in the various kinds of particulars.

The theory of universals sketched in *DI* cannot without distortion be severed from the doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet*; in this respect it shares some of the failings of the company it keeps. And yet, no part of *DI* is more basic than is this theory; for the exposition in II, 6 is fundamental to the developments in Book Three, where the role of genus and species looms large vis-A-vis the topic of Christ's humanity.

Having made his peace with the Aristotelians, Nicholas must still contend with those Platonists and Neoplatonists whose metaphysics interposed between God and the cosmos a world-soul in which are found the exemplars of all created things. Allegedly, the world-soul unfolds from God: that which in God is one uncreated Exemplar is in the world-soul an uncreated plurality. The corresponding likenesses of these exemplars, or intelligible forms, are said by these Platonists to exist in matter—though they exist there ontologically (not temporally) subsequent to the existence of the corresponding exemplar in the world-soul. Supposedly, this world-mind, as it is also called, is the cause of motion, to which it is also prior only ontologically.

While never making explicit just who these Platonists might be, Nicholas opposes their configuration of views primarily because it is inconsistent with the metaphysics he has been devising: whatever is is either God or not-God, either Absolute or contracted. If there were a Platonistic -type world-soul, containing a plurality of exemplars, then it would exist contractedly (for wherever there is a plurality, there is contraction). However, “there cannot be many distinct exemplars, for each exemplar would be maximum and most true with respect to the things which are its exemplifications. But it is not possible that there be many maximal and most true things.”<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, there is only one Exemplar, teaches Nicholas: viz., the Word of God, who is God.<sup>98</sup> As the Form of all forms and the Essence of all essences<sup>99</sup> God may not unfittingly be called World-soul, thinks Nicholas. But he would not want our use of this appellative to obscure the fact that the Word of God—“the World-soul”—is neither a contracted nor an uncontracted *unfolding* of God and that the “exemplars” which exist in Him are one indistinct “Exemplar,” which He Himself is *qua* God the Son.

The topic of the world-soul naturally gives rise to the topic of motion, since the Platonists of II, 9 regarded the world-soul as the source of mundane motion. Within the Cusan metaphysics God Himself, who replaces the world-soul, is the ultimate source of the world's motion. But “it is not the case that any [mundane] motion is unqualifiedly maximum motion, for this latter coincides with rest. Therefore, no motion is absolute, since absolute motion is rest and is God. And absolute motion enfolds all motions.”<sup>100</sup> Book One has already made clear that God is really beyond the distinction between motion and rest, so that to call Him Absolute Motion is tantamount to denying that He is motion in any sense comparable to what we ordinarily understand by the term. Yet, He is the cause of the movements of the spheres. The Ptolemaic ordering had depicted the earth as the fixed center of ten concentric spheres, beginning with the moon and proceeding outwards with Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the sphere of “fixed” stars (i.e., the firmament), the crystallinum, and the *primum mobile*—the last three spheres being the three heavens. We may surmise from II, 11 (159:10-13) that Nicholas accepted this ordering. But he did not accept the tenet that the earth or any other body is the fixed center. His reasons for not doing so are mainly metaphysical. A fixed and immovable physical center would be minimum motion (i.e., rest), than which there could not be a lesser motion.

“However, it is not the case that in any genus—even [the genus] of motion—we come to an unqualifiedly maximum and minimum” (156:11-12). Given any motion, he thinks, there can always in principle be a greater and a lesser motion. Moreover, if the earth (or some other body) were the fixed, *immovable* physical center of the world, then (because the unqualifiedly minimum coincides with the unqualifiedly maximum) it would also be the circumference—something which it obviously is not. (Indeed, no physical object can be both the smallest thing and the largest thing.) Therefore, the world has neither a fixed physical center nor a fixed physical circumference. Not even the center of the earth can be the center of the world. For the earth, being an imperfect sphere, cannot have an exact center—i.e., a point equidistant from every point on its circumference. According to Nicholas's metaphysics a perfect sphere or a perfect circle does not actually exist, because for any positable sphere or circle a still truer one could be posited. Hence, with respect to any correspondingly posited center a still truer center could be posited.

Since the earth is not the fixed center of the universe, it is not unmoved. Nicholas regards the earth as an approximate sphere that moves with an approximately circular motion around a pole which “we conjecture to be where the center is believed to be.” For, by parity of reasoning, there are no fixed and immovable physical poles in the sky. Though the world, the heavens, the earth, and any body whatsoever have no *fixed physical* center or circumference, they do have a center and a circumference. For since such a center would be an unqualifiedly minimum, it can only be God, who was shown in Book One to be the unique Absolute Minimum. And since God is also the Absolute Maximum, with which the Minimum coincides, He is also the circumference of the world, of the earth, and of all things in the world. Thus, the world's center and circumference coincide, for they are not a physical center and circumference but are God Himself.

Having reached this conclusion on the basis of purely metaphysical considerations, Nicholas attempts to render it plausible by other than purely metaphysical considerations. He does so by introducing the notion of perspective, which he develops in accordance with a *Gedankenexperiment*. Suppose person A were on the earth somewhere below the north pole of the heavens and person B were at the north pole of the heavens. In that case, to A the pole would appear to be at the zenith, and A would believe himself to be at the center; to B the earth would appear to be at the zenith, and B would be-

lieve himself to be at the center. Thus, A's zenith would be B's center, and B's zenith would be A's center.

And wherever anyone would be, he would believe himself to be at the center. Therefore, merge these different imaginative pictures so that the center is the zenith and vice versa. Thereupon you will see—through the intellect, to which only learned ignorance is of help—that the world and its motion and shape cannot be apprehended. For [the world] will appear as a wheel in a wheel and a sphere in a sphere—having its center and circumference nowhere. . . .<sup>101</sup>

In Nicholas's paradoxical language: the world's center and circumference are nowhere because they are everywhere,<sup>102</sup> depending upon the perspective. The center and the circumference coincide for God, because God is equally near to, and equally far from all things<sup>103</sup>—presumably in the sense that the Divine Mind encompasses infinite perspectives.

So in *DI* II, 11 Nicholas first of all derives—from metaphysical principles already accredited in Book One—the conclusion that the world has no center and circumference but God; only thereafter does he provide the *Gedankenexperiment* to help us envision the corollary that this center and this circumference are everywhere and nowhere.<sup>104</sup> The thought experiment is never intended to establish the conclusion.<sup>105</sup> Nor is it indispensable for supporting the corollary; for once we grant that God is the center and the circumference, then it follows from the theological doctrine of divine omnipresence that the center and the circumference are everywhere and nowhere. And indeed this theological route is explicitly taken by Nicholas in II, 12: “The world-machine will have its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere, so to speak; for God, who is everywhere and nowhere, is its circumference and center” (162:15-17). Like the recurring illustration of the infinite line, so the presence of the quasi-empirical thought experiment gives witness to the era in which Nicholas lived—an era which still wanted to safeguard many of the received theological traditions but which felt the need to re-expound them and reexplain them in more up-to-date terms.

The updating is often more suggestive than detailed. For example, in *DI* Nicholas actually says very little about perspectivism; but the little he says is rich with implication. “It would always seem to each person,” he says, “(whether he were on the earth, the sun, or another star)<sup>106</sup> that he was at the 'immovable' center, so to speak, and that all other things were moved . . . .”<sup>107</sup> This statement implies that if someone were on the sun, he would regard the earth as revolving

around the sun just as from his present vantage point on earth he regards the sun as revolving around the earth. Nowhere however, does Nicholas develop this implication. Yet, his relativizing of motion and the measure of motion, together with his repudiation of the view that the earth is immobile and is the lowliest of all the “stars,” dimly foreshadowed—but did not anticipate—the future Copernican Revolution.

Nicholas's relativization is not thoroughgoing, for he is still willing to believe, through learned ignorance, that the world has a motion and a shape.<sup>108</sup> Later in the history of philosophy Leibniz, in his correspondence with Clarke, exposed the strangeness of the affirmation that the world as a whole is moved; and he went on thoroughly to relativize the notions of space and time by defining them as relations. Nicholas's speculation falls far short of such tenets, not being as revolutionary. Yet, for its own day it was bold and innovative—for example, in its surmise that the earth and the moon have a light, a heat, and an influence of their own.

In judging that the earth is larger than the moon—a judgment which startled Wenck—Nicholas appealed, for confirmation, to evidence from our experience of eclipses. But such a direct empirical appeal is rare in his works—the notable exception being *De Staticis Experimentis*. When he asserts that the earth and the moon have a heat of their own or that there is life on every other “star,” he does not point to any direct or indirect empirical confirmation thereof. What can be discerned most of all in his speculative cosmology is what can also be discerned principally in his metaphysics: viz., a burning desire for *nouveautés*. This is the desire that drives him to view every created thing as a finite infinity<sup>109</sup> and to view the universe as “neither finite nor infinite.”<sup>110</sup> He lived in an age in which the old ways of looking at things were beginning to be experienced as confining. A world whose celestial motions were supposed to be precisely measurable and whose sole living inhabitants were to be found exclusively at its center no longer seemed sufficiently adventurous. *DI*'s own venturesome picture of the world testifies to the fact that as early as 1440 the dawn of the Renaissance had commenced for German intellectuality.

### III. *Maximum simul Contractum et Absolutum*

The innovativeness of Nicholas's theory of redemption strikingly surpasses, in significance, the novelty of his cosmological speculation. For this theory is more centrally linked to the originality and distinc-



tiveness of his entire program of learned ignorance than are the “corollaries of motion” and the “conditions of the earth” found in Book Two, chapters eleven and twelve. Indeed, without some such theory, the labors of Books One and Two could not have come to fruition. And the unity-of-thought which was being sought would have remained hauntingly unattained. Still, for all its uniqueness, the theory of redemption does not veer from orthodoxy, as certain isolated expressions might induce us to believe. Instead, in its broad sweep, it retains the dogmas of Christ's virginal and sinless birth, the hypostatic union of His two natures, the dispensing of His merit to all believers, the final resurrection of the dead through His power, and the last judgment, before His throne, of all human and angelic beings. Thus, what is innovative is not the dogmas themselves but the understanding of them in terms of the metaphysics of contraction.

According to this metaphysics no contracted thing or series of contracted things can become infinite, or unqualifiedly maximum. Thus, no individual thing attains unto the maximum of its species, since for any given species God can always create a more perfect individual within that species. Similarly, for any given species within a genus, or any given genus within the universe, God can create a more perfect species within that genus, or a more perfect genus within the universe. And the universe itself does not exhaust the power of God; for God could have created a more perfect universe, even though He could not have created *this* universe with *these* creatures more perfect than it existed in its state before the Fall. “Therefore, all contracted things exist between a maximum and a minimum, so that there can be posited a greater and a lesser degree of contraction than [that of] any given thing. Yet, this process does not continue actually unto infinity, because an infinity of degrees is impossible, since to say that infinite degrees actually exist is nothing other than to say that no degree exists. . . .”<sup>111</sup>

Having thus reaffirmed that in general there is no actually maximum individual of any species, no actually maximum species of any genus, no actually maximum genus within the universe, and that the universe itself is not a maximum in the unqualified sense of being all that which can be, Nicholas now begins to reason hypothetically: what if there were an actually existing contracted maximum individual of some species? In that case, it would be actually everything that is in the possibility of that species, just as a maximum line is “actually” whatever is in the possibility of any finite line. Thus, it would enfold

in itself the entire perfection of that species. And in being both the maximum and the minimum of the species, it would be beyond all comparative relation and would be the measure of everything within the species, as the maximum line is the measure of all finite lines.

But since no merely contracted individual thing can attain unto the limit of its species: this maximum individual thing, if it exists, will not be a purely contracted thing existing in itself; rather, since it will be maximum because it exists in Absolute Maximality, it will exist in union with what is Absolute. The divine and uncontracted maximum nature will be united to the creaturely and contracted maximum nature in such way that the being who is both Absolute and contracted will not be (1) only God or (2) only a creature or (3) a composite of the divine and the creaturely. Rather, the created nature will be subsumed in the divine person—as, in our own cognitive being, what is perceptual is subsumed in what is intellectual—so that the one being will be both a creature and the Creator. Neither nature will pass over into the other; for the uncontracted nature cannot become contracted, nor can the contracted nature lose its contractedness. Instead, the two natures will be united to such an extent that if they were more united, there would not remain two distinct natures. Who, then, asks Nicholas rhetorically, can conceive of such a union?

But within which species would the Absolute Maximum unite itself to a contracted maximum? In answering this question Nicholas adopts the following guideline: “If Absolute Maximality is in the most universal way the Being of all things, so that it is not more of one thing than of another: clearly, that being which is more common to the totality of beings is more uniteable with the [Absolute] Maximum.”<sup>112</sup> Now, in the order of contracted natures some natures are higher or lower than others. For example, living beings are higher than non-living beings; intelligent beings are higher than non-intelligent beings; living and intelligent beings are higher than living but non-intelligent beings. If there is a middle nature—one which is the highest of the lower natures and the lowest of the higher natures—then this would be the nature with which God would unite. For such a nature would enfold within itself all natures, so that if it were to ascend wholly to a union of itself with God, then in and through it “all natures and the entire universe” would reach the supreme gradation.<sup>113</sup> Now, human nature, thinks Nicholas, is just such an intermediate nature; created a little lower than the angels, it enfolds both the sensible and the intellectual and is a microcosm enclosing all things.

But since humanity exists only contractedly as this or that human nature, only this or that human nature—and not humanity as such—is elevated to the point that it is the maximum human nature existing in maximum union with the Absolute Maximum.

And, assuredly, this being would be a man in such way that He was also God and would be God in such way that He was also a man. [He would be] the perfection of the universe and would hold pre-eminence in all respects. In Him the least, the greatest, and the in-between things of the nature that is united to Absolute Maximality would so coincide that He would be the perfection of all things; and all things, *qua* contracted, would find rest in Him as in their own perfection. The measure of this man would also be the measure of an angel (as John says in the Book of Revelation) and of each thing; for through union with Absolute [Maximality], which is the Absolute Being of all things, He would be the universal contracted being of each creature. Through Him all things would receive the beginning and the end of their contraction, so that through Him who is the contracted maximum [individual] all things would go forth from the Absolute Maximum into contracted being and would return unto the Absolute [Maximum] through this same Medium. . . .<sup>114</sup>

Nicholas identifies the contracted maximum individual within the species of humanity as the human nature of Jesus. This human nature, he believes, is elevated into a hypostatic union with the divine nature, so that through this maximal union Jesus is both human and divine. Nicholas bases his identification upon the authority of Scripture and the witness of the Church. A number of observations are now called for.

1. Earlier in the history of theology Anselm of Canterbury had attempted to establish that God's justice, mercy, and honor, together with the fact of the Fall and its consequences, theologically necessitated the advent of a God-man; through this God-man there would be made a satisfaction sufficient to pay the debt of all men's sins. The main lines of Anselm's magnificent theory are well known and need not here be rehearsed.<sup>115</sup> Let us simply be reminded that Anselm begins, in the *Cur Deus Homo*, by reasoning *Christo remoto*; and then, having exhibited by "rational necessity" (*rationibus necessariis*) that a God-man is required, he turns to identify the required individual with Jesus and to assert that what has been established rationally proves the truth of the Old and the New Testaments. Since Nicholas, in his sermons,<sup>116</sup> appropriates portions of the Anselmian theory, it is tempting to view his procedure in III, 1-3 as analogous to Anselm's *Christo remoto* methodology. But, in fact, any such comparison with Anselm would be misleading. For Nicholas does not aim to show *ra-*

*tionibus necessariis* that the advent of a contracted maximum individual who is also God is theologically required—i.e., is implied by the theological principles and premises that he presupposes as true. Instead, his reasoning moves with a reverse emphasis. For the *Christo remoto* portion of it is presented without any appeal to the theological need for the existence of such an individual, whereas the identification portion of it emphatically appeals to the *evidential* witness of the Evangelists and the Apostles “regarding the fact that Jesus is God and man.”<sup>117</sup>

2. Indeed, the very sentence “Jesus is God and man” is striking. For throughout the discussion Nicholas prefers the expression “God and man” to the expression “the God-man.” This way of speaking, together with certain other sentences containing the word “*homo*,” fosters the impression that Nicholas adheres to a Nestorian Christology, which affirms a merely moral unity of two persons. For example, in III, 12 he speaks of “the true man Christ Jesus” as “united, in supreme union, with the Son of God” (260:2-3). And in III, 3 he states: “It would not be possible that more than one true human being [*homo*] could ascend to union with Maximality. And, assuredly, this being would be a man in such way that He was also God and would be God in such way that He was also a man” (199:2-4). But these passages must be interpreted in the light of Nicholas's clear exclusion of Nestorianism: “The maximum man, Jesus, was not able to have in Himself a person that existed separately from the divinity. For He is the maximum [human being]. And, accordingly, there is a sharing of the respective modes of speaking [about the human nature and the divine nature], so that the human things coincide with the divine things;<sup>118</sup> for His humanity—which on account of the supreme union is inseparable from His divinity (as if it were put on and assumed by the divinity) cannot exist as separate in person.”<sup>119</sup> This passage, together with the consideration that *DI* nowhere speaks of a human person in Christ, means that we are obligated to view his Nestorian-sounding statements as primarily the result of imprecise uses of the notoriously ambiguous word “*homo*.” For example, at 198:5-6 he speaks of *ipsa* (= *humana natura*) as elevated unto a union with Maximality.<sup>120</sup> A few lines later (199:2-3) he talks about the impossibility of more than *unus verus homo* ascending to union with Maximality. But for him to say that only one true *homo* ascends to union with Maximality sounds as if he meant that a human being—consisting of both a nature and a person—was united with the divine person, i.e., with the Word of God.

But though *homo qua* united with God is a man, it is not the case that the *homo* which ascends to this union is a man. Rather, it is a human nature which Nicholas already thinks of as a man because he believes that the human nature and the Word of God were united beyond all time.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, he employs the verb “ascends” to indicate an ontological rather than a temporal difference.<sup>122</sup> The true man Christ Jesus is “ever” one with the Son of God, for the Son of God was non-temporally united with the human nature He assumed. Nicholas would agree with Augustine's statement in *Enchiridion* 35.10 to the effect that Jesus is God without beginning, man with a beginning. But he would insist that the beginning of Jesus as a man is not a temporal beginning, even though His historical birth was subject to time.

So we see that although in many respects Nicholas's Christology is quite different from Anselm's, it resembles Anselm's in at least the following way: both Christologies teach that in the incarnation God the Son assumed a human nature into a unity of person with the divine nature. That is, they do not teach that He assumed a man (i.e., an individual human being consisting of a nature and a person) or that He became Man (by assuming unindividuated human nature, human nature as such); instead, they maintain that He became *a man* by assuming *a human nature*. Of course, Nicholas goes on to develop the idea that the humanity of Jesus is the contracted maximum individual (indeed, is the maximum creature) and that therefore Jesus is the fullness of perfection of the human species (indeed, is—*qua* maximum humanity, which is an intermediate nature—the enfolding of all creatable things). But this further development takes nothing away from his view that humanity exists contractedly and in individual men<sup>123</sup> and that in these different men it is differently individuated.<sup>124</sup> Even the *maximum* human nature is individuated—so that Jesus was a man distinct from every other man, for other men do not have a maximum nature. Because Jesus's human nature was maximal, its perfection transcends all comparative relation with the degrees of perfection of other human natures.<sup>125</sup>

So when Nicholas says that Jesus is God and man or that He is God and creature, he means that He is a man, or a creature, who is also God.

3. Jesus is said to be the perfection of all things<sup>126</sup> and the universal contracted being of each creature,<sup>127</sup> as well as “the means, form, essence, and truth of all the things which are possible in the species.”<sup>128</sup> These and other such statements led Wenck to denounce

*DI* as heretical—as negating the doctrine of the individuality of Christ's humanity and as teaching that “Christ was not an individual man but was universal man,” “that the being of Christ is the being of each man.”<sup>129</sup> In the *Apologia* Nicholas does not deign to respond to these particular charges, regarding them as too obviously distorted. Thereby he signals to us that however the foregoing statements from *DI* are to be interpreted, they are not to be construed radically and heretically, à la Wenck. Indeed, Nicholas specified in what sense Jesus is the universal contracted being of each creature: viz., in the double sense that (1) His humanity, which is both a *natura maxima* and a *natura media*, “enfolds within itself all natures”<sup>130</sup> and that (2) through His humanity, as united to His deity, all things receive “the beginning and the end of their contraction.”<sup>131</sup>

Although, for Nicholas, then, Jesus is the maximum human being, He is nonetheless the maximum *individual*, with an *individuated* maximum human nature. He is the *universal* contraction of all things not because His humanity is unindividuated but because it enfolds all things. And His humanity is the *essence* of all the things which are possible in the species not because it is numerically identical with the respective human nature of other men (for, as was said, they do not have a maximum nature) but because it is, actually, whatever can exist within the species, just as the Absolute Maximum, which is the Essence of all things, is, actually, whatever can at all exist.

4. Someone might now ask: 'If, as is taught in Book Two, everything is present in everything else (*quodlibet in quolibet*), then why could God not have united Himself to anything whatsoever, e.g., to a non-rational animal or to an angel? For in so doing He also would have united all things to Himself.' Anselm of Canterbury, in his *Cur Deus Homo*, had reasoned that the divine program of human redemption required that someone of the same race (viz., the human race) make satisfaction for the sin and debt of Adam: “For just as it is right that human nature make satisfaction for human nature's guilt, so it is necessary that the one who makes satisfaction be either the sinner himself or someone of his race. Otherwise, neither Adam nor his race would make satisfaction for themselves.”<sup>132</sup> Judging from the sermon “*Hoc Facite*,”<sup>133</sup> we may infer that Nicholas would have accepted Anselm's line of argument. Nonetheless, in *DI* he reasons differently, not appealing to the doctrine of atonement in order to fix his doctrine of incarnation. Instead, he bases his argument on the metaphysics of

contraction, and he appeals to the illustration of the maximum line to help render plausible his position:

If the nature of lower things is considered and if one of these lower beings were elevated unto [Absolute] Maximality, such a being would be both God and itself. An example is furnished with regard to a maximum line. Since the maximum line would be infinite through Absolute Infinity and maximal through [Absolute] Maximality (to which, necessarily, it is united if it is maximal): through [Absolute] Maximality it would be God; and through contraction it would remain a line. And so, it would be actually everything which a line can become. But a line does not include [the possibility of] life or intellect. Therefore, if the line would not attain to the fullness of [all] natures, how could it be elevated to the maximum gradation? For it would be a maximum which could be greater and which would lack [some] perfections (III, 3).

Just as lower natures lack some of the perfections of higher natures, so higher intellectual natures neither need nor have some of the perfections of lower natures. To elevate all natures through a single nature, God willed to elevate a *natura media* into a maximum union with the Absolute Maximum.

We may put the foregoing point in a slightly different form: Although everything is present in everything else, not everything is *enfolded* in everything else, according to Nicholas's account; in this respect the doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet* is different from the doctrine of enfolding. For if all perfections are enfolded in human nature, it makes sense to think of them as also unfolded from human nature. But from the supposed fact that each thing is in each other thing, it does not follow that from a given thing all things can emanate. Now, on Nicholas's Christology, Jesus—the maximum human nature, united with the Absolute Maximum—is the one from whom the whole of creation emanates. All things *qua* existing are from Him *qua* Word of God; and all things *qua* contracted are from Him *qua* universal contraction.<sup>134</sup>

So because God the Son unites a human nature to His own divine person,<sup>135</sup> He may be said to be—through and in the humanity—all things contractedly.<sup>136</sup> Yet, this statement must not obscure the fact that not the divine nature or the divine person, but only the human nature, is contracted.

5. A final network of problems surfaces regarding Nicholas's Christology: (a) a pedagogical problem, (b) a semantical problem, and (c) a theological problem.

a. In order better to explain how it is that Jesus's maximal human intellect exists in the divine intellect in such way that it is God,

Nicholas offers a further illustration:

Assume that a polygon inscribed in a circle were the human nature and the circle were the divine nature. Then if the polygon were to be a maximum polygon, than which there cannot be a greater polygon, it would exist not through itself with finite angles but in the circular shape. Thus, it would not have its own shape for existing—[i.e., it would not have a shape which was] even conceivably separable from the circular and eternal shape.<sup>137</sup>

Yet, far from proving clarificatory, this illustration engenders bafflement. According to I, 20 the only polygonal figure which can be infinite is the triangle. In an ingenious argument Nicholas there “proves” that whenever “x” stands for any polygonal shape other than triangular (e.g., when it stands for *quadrangular shaped*) the expression “to be maximum and to be x” implies a contradiction. So in the foregoing quotation from III, 4, the inscribed polygon is not understood to be maximal in the same sense of “maximum” as in I, 20; for if it were, the expression “maximum polygon” would either refer to a maximum triangle or else would imply a contradiction (or else Nicholas's point in I, 20 would not be consistent with his point above). But as used above, this expression neither indicates such a triangle nor implies anything contradictory. Instead, it indicates a finite polygon having infinitely many angles. And this is where the perplexity begins. For according to I, 3 an inscribed polygon of infinite angles would not be equal to the inscribing circle unless it were identical with the circle. (And, of course, in the case of an identity the polygon would no longer rightly be said to be *inscribed*.) Now, in the above quotation from III, 4 we are told that the inscribed maximum polygon would not retain its own shape but would have a shape inseparable from the circular shape—inseparable even for the intellect. This claim, together with the passage in I, 3, implies that the polygon of infinite angles would *be* the circle rather than merely being in the circle. For if it were merely in the circle its shape would, according to I, 3, only very closely approximate the circle's shape and some infinitesimal difference would always remain, and thus the two shapes would be both distinguishable and separable. So either Nicholas's point in the illustration is that the polygon would be the circle or else the illustration is inconsistent with I, 3. Assume the former alternative. Then, drawing the comparison with the two natures of Christ, we would have to say that Christ's maximum human nature is not merely in the divine nature but *is* the divine nature and is not even conceivably separable from it, i.e., is not distinct from it. But this consequence is inconsistent with his ear-



lier point that though the human nature is subsumed in the divine nature, the two remain distinct because what is contracted does not become uncontracted and vice versa.<sup>138</sup> The upshot is, then, that though Nicholas wants to safeguard the distinction between the human and the divine natures in Christ, he can do so consistently only if he either abandons the foregoing illustration or else changes his mind about his position in I, 3. But the point made in the passage cited from I, 3 is so central to his program that he cannot afford to reverse it. He must therefore abandon the foregoing illustration.

b. If the illustration in II, 4 is misleading, then so also at times is Nicholas's very choice of words. For example, difficulties are created by the use of the word "coincide" in the following sentence from III, 7: "There is [with regard to Jesus] a sharing of the respective modes of speaking [about the human nature and the divine nature], so that the human things coincide with the divine things. . . ." <sup>139</sup> But "coincide" suggests, by its very nuances, that the human properties and the divine properties are indistinct and indistinguishable in Christ—just as when opposites coincide in God, rest is no longer distinct from motion, and so on. Yet, what Nicholas means by his doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* is that the human nature and the divine nature are inseparably and hypostatically united and that the properties of the one nature may sometimes be spoken of as if they were also properties of the other nature. To express this idea clearly, he needs to choose a word other than the verb "coincide."

c. These first two difficulties—the pedagogical and the semantical ones—appear to be easily surmountable. And so, we are tempted to imagine that both of them could have, and would have, been dealt with satisfactorily had they been brought to Nicholas's attention. Yet, when they are recognized to be linked to the third difficulty—the theological one—they will not seem so readily surmountable, for this latter difficulty will appear to be much more devastating to the central enterprise of Book Three. Let us consider the following passage:

With respect to the fact that the humanity of Jesus is considered as contracted to the man Christ, it is likewise understood to be united also with His divinity. As united with the divinity, [the humanity] is fully absolute; [but] as it is considered to be that true man Christ, [the humanity] is contracted, so that Christ is a man through the humanity. And so, Jesus's humanity is a medium between what is purely absolute and what is purely contracted.<sup>140</sup>

Preliminarily, we may note that here and elsewhere the name "Jesus"

is used interchangeably with the name “Christ” and that “humanity” is simply an alternative name for human nature. Another example of a simple interchange of expressions is the switch between saying, as above, that the humanity is united to the divinity and saying, as elsewhere,<sup>141</sup> that it is united to the divine person. (Since the divine nature is in the divine person, the humanity could not be united to the latter without also being united to the former.)<sup>142</sup> These interchanges are not objectionable as long as we recognize them as simply that. Indeed, the use of “divinity” instead of “divine person” is not the source of trouble in the troublesome sentence “As united with the divinity, [the humanity] is fully absolute. . . .” Only if the humanity were united to the divinity in such way as to be in some respect identical with it could it be in any respect fully absolute (*humanitas plurimum absoluta*). But what sense would it make to assert that the humanity is in one respect identical to the divinity and in another respect not identical to it? By comparison, how could the human properties rightly be affirmed both to coincide and not to coincide with the divine properties? Or how could a polygon with infinite angles be consistently alleged both to be and not to be the inscribing circle? The theological, the semantical, and the pedagogical assertions are inextricably interlinked, so that either some sense must be found in each of them or else all three must be rejected. Yet, it is not clear what this sense could be. We might suppose Nicholas to mean that because in God everything is God (a principle advanced in Book Two),<sup>143</sup> the human nature is, *in the divine nature*, the divine nature—though the human nature *qua* not in the divine nature is not the divine nature. But if this is what he means, then his argument will be the following:

(1) Jesus's humanity *qua* in the divinity is the uncontracted God.

(2) Jesus's humanity *qua* not in the divinity is a contracted creature.

So (3) Jesus's humanity is a medium between the uncontracted and the contracted.

And such an argument is strange by virtue of its first premise. For humanity *qua* in the divinity would no longer be humanity; and therefore the premise would not conduce to entailing the conclusion.

Let us recast the objection. A more traditional-sounding way for Nicholas to have put his point would have been for him to assert that Jesus is both absolute and contracted: with respect to His divine nature He is absolute; with respect to His human nature He is contracted. Nicholas agrees to this more traditional-sounding statement. For

at the end of III, 2 he states that in the hypostatic union there is no confusion of the natures and that what is contracted does not pass over into what is absolute.<sup>144</sup> In III, 7 the word “unconfusedly” (“*absque confusione*”) is again used to describe how the two natures are united.<sup>145</sup> But in further theologizing, Nicholas goes beyond the theological conservatism of this point and asserts that Jesus's *humanity* is both contracted and uncontracted. If we ask how what is asserted would be possible, he answers that the humanity *qua* the human Jesus is contracted but that the humanity as united to the divinity is uncontracted. If we ask why humanity as united to the divinity is not still contracted humanity, he introduces in reply an example from our cognitive being: “Perceptual knowledge is a certain contracted knowledge because the senses attain only to particulars; intellectual knowledge is universal knowledge because in comparison with the perceptual it is free from contraction to the particular. . . . In the intellect the perceptual contractedness is somehow subsumed in the intellectual nature, which exists as a certain divine, separate, abstract being, while the perceptual remains temporal and corruptible in accordance with its own nature.”<sup>146</sup> That is, as the perceptual is subsumed in the intellectual, so Jesus's humanity is subsumed in His divinity. Moreover, the essence of the humanity is the intellect,<sup>147</sup> and since Jesus's intellect is a maximum intellect, it “cannot at all exist without being intellect in such way that it is also God. . . .”<sup>148</sup> as is illustrated by the example of a maximum polygon inscribed in a circle. But at this point Nicholas has gone too far; and it now becomes obvious how *ad hoc* his examples are. To exemplify the relationship between the human nature and the divine nature he introduces the example of the relationship between the perceptual and the intellectual. But when the example will not support his further point, about the intellect's being God, he simply supplements it by a further illustration. But the trouble with the further point is that both it and the accompanying illustration produce an incoherence. Although Nicholas sees that humanity *qua* the human Jesus cannot be uncontracted, he does not see that so-called humanity *qua* uncontracted (*humanitas plurimum absoluta*) could not in any respect be humanity. And hence his reasoning will not have shown that the humanity of Jesus is in different respects both contracted and uncontracted.

Nicholas's Christology depends in an essential way upon his taking the foregoing further step beyond theological conservatism. For, on his view, the humanity of Jesus can be maximum only if it exists

in Absolute Maximality, i.e., in the divine nature. And, according to his metaphysics, whatever exists in the divine nature is the divine nature. Thus, Nicholas must conclude that Jesus's humanity is in some respect divinity. But, at the same time, his orthodoxy requires him to maintain that Jesus is fully human by virtue of His humanity. So he infers, though invalidly, that Jesus's humanity is a medium between what is purely absolute and what is purely contracted (in addition to being a medium between the higher and the lower orders of contracted natures). This doctrine allows him to preserve his orthodoxy by affirming that in Jesus the contracted nature does not pass over into identity with the uncontracted nature. But he preserves the orthodoxy at the expense of introducing an incoherence into his Christology. Moreover, he veers from the more traditional forms of orthodoxy in teaching that God the Son *assumed* a human nature by *subsuming* the human nature in the divine nature, thereby "maximizing" it.

Nicholas proceeds to explain that the birth of the maximum human being could not have been by natural means and that it was most appropriate that such a maximum individual be born of a virgin. He deems that Mary "ought rightfully to have been free of whatever could have hindered the purity or the vigor, and likewise the uniqueness, of such a most excellent birth."<sup>149</sup> But he does not develop any of these points. Similarly, in preference to elaborating a theory of atonement, he merely indicates the direction that such a theory might take:

The maximality of human nature brings it about that in the case of each man who cleaves to Christ through formed faith Christ is this very man by means of a most perfect union—each's numerical distinctness being preserved. Because of this union the following statement of Christ's is true: "Whatever you have done to one of the least of my [brethren], you have done to me." And, conversely, whatever Christ Jesus merited by His suffering, those who are one with Him also merited—different degrees of merit being preserved in accordance with the different degree of each [man's] union with Christ through faith formed by love.<sup>150</sup>

Scandalized by the statement that "Christ is this very man by means of a most perfect union," Wenck referred to Nicholas as a pseudo-apostle and a universalizer. To be sure, Nicholas's theological expressions do have an initially startling quality; and yet, a reflective reading discloses nothing intrinsically shocking about the foregoing statement. The believer is united to Christ by faith rather than by his membership in the human race. That he is "of the same humanity with

Christ"<sup>151</sup> means that his humanity and Christ's are one in species, not that they are one in number. Accordingly, what Christ has merited He has merited not for each individual of the species but only for the faithful. And the sense in which Christ *is* each of the faithful is the very sense in which each of the faithful is united to Christ—as the branches are in the vine, as the members of the body are in the body.<sup>152</sup> Of course, Nicholas is here adopting the language of Scripture.<sup>153</sup> But in some contexts he metaphysicizes this language, construing it as more than metaphorical: each member of the body is, through the mediation of the body, in each other member. Yet, in other contexts he spiritualizes: in this life believers are united to Christ spiritually through faith and love; in the next life they shall be thus united through attainment and enjoyment.<sup>154</sup> Though all human beings shall arise through Christ, only believers shall arise “as Christ and in Christ through union.”<sup>155</sup> Moreover, Nicholas unabashedly speaks of *absorption*: “As someone's flesh is progressively and gradually mortified by faith, he progressively ascends to oneness with Christ, so that he is absorbed into Christ by a deep union—to the extent that this is possible on [this pilgrim's] pathway.”<sup>156</sup> Of course, the clause “he is absorbed into Christ” is theologically explosive. And on the basis of such statements Wenck hastens to associate Nicholas with the much-maligned Meister Eckhart.

Sometimes, at first glance, Nicholas seems to be deliberately provocative; for the inflaming word “absorbed” need not have been used. In last analysis, however, Wenck's judgment of condemnation reflects more adversely upon himself than upon Nicholas. For Wenck mistook the language of mysticism for the language of metaphysics. Such statements as “We shall arise as Christ,” “We are absorbed into Christ,” “We exist in the flesh as a spirit for whom this world is death,” “We see in each believer Jesus,” and “The truth of our body exists in the truth of Christ's body” are redolent with the spirit of mysticism. They pervade Book Three and set it in contrast to the pervasive use of mathematical language in Book One and to the pronouncedly metaphysical disquisitions of Book Two. In the program of learned ignorance the mathematical and the metaphysical are impulses motivating the mind in its ascent toward the mystical. On this pilgrim's pathway Nicholas desires to be engulfed by Christ—engulfed spiritually, not ontologically. If he wants to lose himself in Christ in this lifetime, it is not in order to lose his individual identity but in order to transcend the intellectual, moral, and emotional constrictions

which are the consequences of sin.

In accordance with the mystical themes of Book Three Nicholas emphasizes the need for faith:

Since God is not knowable in this world (where by reason and by opinion or by doctrine we are led, with symbols, through the more known to the unknown), He is apprehended only where persuasive considerations cease and faith appears. Through faith we are caught up, in simplicity, so that being in a body incorporeally (because in spirit) and in the world not mundanely but celestially we may incomprehensibly contemplate Christ above all reason and intelligence, in the third heaven of most simple intellectuality. Thus, we see even the following: viz., that because of the immensity of His excellence God cannot be comprehended. And this is that learned ignorance through which most blessed Paul, in ascending, saw that when he was being elevated more highly to Christ, he did not know Christ, though at one time he had known only Christ.<sup>157</sup>

Nicholas believes that the *visio dei* is given by grace to some believers even during their earthly lifetime; but it is a vision of God as He is manifested in the glorified Christ. As Moses of old was unable to gaze upon the resplendent countenance of God and live,<sup>158</sup> so in the mystical ascent the believer will behold the divine glory only through the shielding cloud that renders forever inaccessible God's inmost abode. This beholding may well be fuller, more joyous, and more ecstatic than was Moses's; but it will nonetheless remain a veiled viewing of God by means of the glorified Christ and through a more rarefied veiling cloud.<sup>159</sup> It will not be a knowing; for what is beheld with "the intellectual eye"<sup>160</sup> will be too boundlessly immense to become an object of knowledge.

The *intellectual eye*, to be sure, is the eye of the *intellect*. In Book Three Nicholas distinguishes the intellect (*intellectus*) from reason (*ratio*), as he had not explicitly done in Books One and Two. The intellect is higher than reason and "is not temporal and mundane but is free of time and of the world."<sup>161</sup> In the *Apologia*, *ratio* is said to be the domain of discursive reasoning, *intellectus* the domain of mental seeing.<sup>162</sup> Only the intellect attains unto the coincidence of opposites—a coincidence which, because it cannot be conceived, is not within the reach of reason. Though in the *Apologia* Nicholas speaks of the *evidence* that comes from seeing, he does not mean evidence in any sense that requires (1) a weighing of data in support of premises or (2) an inference from premises to a conclusion. The eye of the intellect is that power by which the mind intuitively apprehends that which it is unable to conceptualize and is therefore unable to know. And thus

even in the future *visio dei*, on the part of all resurrected believers, God will be seen only insofar as He is present in the glorified Christ, who is God and man; the God of gods in Zion, who dwelleth in light inaccessible, will remain eternally unintuited. Therefore, learned ignorance is as much an abiding condition as a speculative method. As a method it is associated with the *via negativa* and involves the recognition that God cannot be known as He is, that our symbolic representations of His nature must fall infinitely short of the reality itself. As an abiding condition it is associated with the believer's perpetual hungering after God, so that Nicholas can boldly proclaim the blessedness of God, "who has given us an intellect which cannot be filled in the course of time."<sup>163</sup> In the resurrected state the believer's intellect will be, paradoxically, both filled with truth and desirous of more truth; for each truth learned will, while it satisfies, whet the intellectual desire. Though never apprehending all truths, the believer will apprehend Him who is all truth. Until the coming of this resurrection day the believer's understanding is to be guided by faith; for "where there is no sound faith, there is no true understanding."<sup>164</sup>

*DI* began with a discussion of the Absolute Maximum, which was shown to be Absolute Oneness. From out of Oneness there arose a oneness in plurality, viz., the created universe, which was discussed in Book Two. Book Three then took as its theme the return of the creation to God through Christ. But in its return the creation is not *re-folded* in God, is not merged with Absolute Oneness, for each finite thing retains its individuality; rather, the creation is *reunited* to God. The closing chapter of this last book distinguishes between three unions: the Absolute Union, the hypostatic union, and the ecclesiastical union. The first of these is Absolute Oneness; the second is the union, in Jesus, of the two natures in one person; the third is the union of the blessed with the deity of Christ. Since each of the three unions is a maximum union, than which there can be no greater union, they all coincide and are one Maximum Union—one Union of all unions. (As used here the word "coincide" does not preclude the distinctness either of the unions or of the things united.) Moreover, the ecclesiastical union includes both redeemed human beings and unfallen angels—all of whom, having their own identities preserved, exist "in Christ Jesus as Christ and—through Christ—in God as God."<sup>165</sup> Since unfallen angels have never turned from God, they cannot, strictly speaking, return to God. Nicholas views them as united—not re-unit-

ed—to God through Christ, whose humanity is a union of the higher and the lower orders of created being. The human beings who do not belong to the ecclesiastical union, i.e., to the church of the triumphant, are returned to God through sharing in Christ's resurrection and immortality. But though they shall arise through the power of Christ, they shall not arise “as Christ and in Christ through union.”<sup>166</sup> And though they are returned to God, they are returned for the judgment of condemnation and for banishment from the presence of Him whose love they have freely spurned.

A balanced interpretation of the thought of the man from Cusa must take account of both its original and its traditional aspects. The Aristotelian-Thomistic terminology is not mere window dressing, any more than is the language of Absolute Maximality, Absolute Quiddity, Absolute Possibility. Even the various *modi loquendi* are not mere matters of adornment but are integral parts of the profound program of learned ignorance. This program does *not* teach that we know *only* that we do not know; indeed, we have just finished considering many of the truths that *DI* purports to disclose. Rather, the program of learned ignorance attempts to show the limitations of human knowledge by exhibiting the cognitive limits for various domains. In attempting to demarcate the bounds of knowledge—to draw the line between what can and what cannot be humanly known—Nicholas is not thoroughgoing enough to be called a precursor of Kant.<sup>167</sup> But by generalizing the notion of learned ignorance into the formula “the seeing that precision cannot be seen,” he leans in the direction of modernity.

In the Prologue to Book One Nicholas ritualistically displays humility by referring to his work—being presented to the Italian Cardinal Cesarini—as his “foreigner's foolishness.” Wenck was quick to stigmatize it as ignorance. Yet, whatever may be its shortcomings, it is not *foolish* ignorance but *learn-ed* ignorance. And whoever scrutinizes it more carefully than did Wenck will feel obliged to pay tribute to it as a landmark in fifteenth-century theorizing.



**CORRIGENDA  
ABBREVIATIONS  
PRAENOTANDA  
NOTES**

**CORRIGENDA FOR THE LATIN TEXT OF  
*DE DOCTA IGNORANTIA***

In the Latin-German series published by F. Meiner Verlag the following revisions have been taken account of in the English translation. (These Latin texts are cited in the *Praenotanda*. below.)

- 4:15: Change 'doctissimus' to 'doctissimum'.
- 24:13 Change 'unitas' to 'unitatis' *coni*.
- 29:6 Put colon after 'esse maximum'.
- 29:8 Change punctuation to: 'unio, hinc'.
- 29:16 Change 'acuetur' to 'acuatur'.
- 37:10 Move '10' down one line.
- 41:10 Add '10'.
- 61:1 Correct '1' to '61'.
- 68:15 Change 'si' to 'etsi' *coni*.
- 71:6 Change to read: 'et in ea curvitas' *p*.
- 91:2 Change 'corrolaria' to 'correlaria'.
- 99:13 Change 'contingenti' to 'contingenter'.
- 107:4 Change 'explicata' to 'complicata'.
- 108:14 Change to read: 'explicare omnia, scilicet' *p*.
- 111:17-19 Change punctuation to: 'multiplicationem (non dico...non possit): in ipsis'.
- 112:13 Change 'absoluta absoluto' to 'absoluto absolute'.
- 113:6 Change 'quo' to 'qua' *p*.
- 114:8 Change punctuation to: 'maximum:'.
- 122:3 Change 'a quo' to 'a qua' *p*.
- 128:18-19 Delete 'nihil prius sit unitate. Sed tamen nihil in esse producitur, quod prius non possit'.
- 147:6 Change 'notio talis' to 'motus, talis' *p*.
- 152:5 Delete 'et subsistere'.
- 156:2 Change 'Corrolaria' to 'Correlaria'.
- 156:27 Delete 'licet'.
- 171:6 Delete 'non'.
- 173:9 Change punctuation to: 'redeat?'.
- 173:16 Change 'rediet' to 'rediens'.

- 179:14 Change 'qui vult' to 'quem vult' *coni*.
- 201:6 Change to read: 'non possent' *coni*.
- 202:9 Add comma after first 'sunt'.
- 206: Move note for line 15 to preceding Latin page.
- 230:12 Change note to read: 'Cusanus, subsequentis
- 243:10 Change note to read: 'illos),'
- 162:8 Change punctuation to: 'illa. Quae'.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*  
*DI* *De Docta Ignorantia*  
*DP* *De Possess* (reprinted in *PNC*)  
*IL* *De Ignota Litteratura*  
*MFCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* (ed. Rudolf Haubst)  
*NA* *De Li Non Aliud* (reprinted in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud*. Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1983 (2nd ed.))  
*NC* *Nicolò da Cusa*. Florence: Sansoni, 1962. (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Magisterio dell'Università di Padova)  
*NK* *Nikolaus von Kues. Einführung in sein philosophisches Denken*. Ed. Klaus Jacobi. Munich: K. Alber, 1979  
*PL* *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne  
*PNC* J. Hopkins. *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980 (2nd ed.)  
*SHAW* *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse*. Heidelberg: C. Winter

## PRAENOTANDA

1. All references to Nicholas of Cusa's works are to the Latin texts—specifically to the following texts in the following editions (unless explicitly indicated otherwise):

- A. Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia: 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; Idiota* (1983 edition) *de Sapientia, de Mente, de Staticis Experimentis; De Pace Fidei; De Li Non Aliud* (Banning reprint); *De Venatione Sapientiae; Compendium; De Apice Theoriae*.
- B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Melner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia, De Beryllo, De Possess* (Minnesota reprint).
- C. Paris edition (1514) of the *Opera Cusana: Complementum Theologicum, De Aequalitate, De Principio* (=Paris edition, Vol. II, Part 1, fol. 7<sup>r</sup> - 11<sup>v</sup>).
- D. Strasburg edition (1488) of the *Opera Cusana* as edited by Paul Wilpert and republished by W. de Gruyter (Berlin, 1967, 2 vols.): *Cribratio Alkoran, De Ludo Globi*.
- E. Banning Press edition (1985) of *De Visione Dei*.

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, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19-20. And "Ap. 8:14-16" indicates *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, p. 8, lines 14-16.

- 2. A number of references in the Notes have been adapted from Vol. I of the Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*.
- 3. To reduce publication costs, extensive references to the writings of Anicius Boethius, Meister Eckhart, and Thierry of Chartres have not been incorporated into the Notes. Readers are advised to consult the works of Joseph E. Hofmann, Hans G. Senger, Herbert Wackerzapp, and Pierre Duhern as listed in *PNC*.
- 4. The margin numbers in the English translation of *DI* correspond to those found in the Latin-German editions, cited in n. 1 above.
- 5. Any Latin words inserted into the English translation for purposes of clarification are placed in parentheses—except that nouns whose respective cases have been changed to the nominative are bracketed. All expansions of the translations are bracketed.
- 6. References to the Psalms are to the Douay version (and, in parentheses, to the King James's version).
- 7. References to *IL* are given in terms of the new critical edition published in *Nicholas*

of Cusa's *Debate with John Wenck: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Ignota Litteratura and Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981; 2nd edition, 1984).

## NOTES

### NOTES TO THE PREFACE

1. I opt for the transcription “*cursorie*” (rather than “*cursoriae*”); and I take it to mean “cursorily,” rather than to be an allusion to the cursory lessons at the University of Heidelberg. Cf. Nicholas of Cusa *Idiota de Mente* 7 (106:15-16): “*Haec autem nunc sic dixerim cursorie et rustice.*” Cf. *ibid.*, 15 (160: 1): “*Haec sic cursim dicta ab idiota grate recipito!*”

2. Nicholas often uses Latin words—even the more common ones—in a special way, with a special sense. For example, in *DI* I, 7 (20:3) “*vel . . . vel*” means “both . . . and”; and in *DI* II, 1 (95:5) “*aut*” can be translated as “i.e.” A Latinist who compares my translation with Nicholas's texts should not be too quick to judge that something is amiss simply because I have not translated various words and phrases in accordance with, say, Lewis and Short's *A Latin Dictionary*.

I have regularly consulted Paul Wilpert's fine German translation of *DI* I and II and Hans G. Senger's equally fine translation of *DI* III; yet, my translation is my own, for it is a translation of Nicholas, not of Wilpert and of Senger. Where I am at variance with the latter two, as often enough occurs, I am so intentionally. Like these German translations, my own work, though painstakingly done, is nonetheless bound to fall short of perfection. Indeed, translations of lengthy and difficult philosophical works must necessarily be refined, over time, in accordance with the scrutinizing judgment of the larger community of scholars, who, after surveying the published translation, will offer their own insightful suggestions for its subsequent improvement. I ask only that the scholarly community, in the course of formulating these valuable suggestions, guard against entertaining, *a priori*, the following presumption: viz., that wherever there appears to be a discrepancy between the Latin text and the English translation, the apparent discrepancy must be a sign of the translator's deviation from the Latin, rather than being a sign that the syntax and usage of Nicholas's Latin expressions, which have been rightly translated, deviate from Cicero's. Let it also be noted that I have not always signaled, by a footnote, the various places where I regard the editors' punctuation of the Latin text as in need of revision; nonetheless, this revision has been taken account of, and it is reflected in the English sentence structure.

3. See chap. 6 (“What Is a Translation?”) of my book *Anselm of Canterbury: Vol. IV: Hermeneutical and Textual Problems in the Complete Treatises of St. Anselm* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976).

4. The following is a summary of Nicholas's views in *DI* (spoken as if by Nicholas himself):

“Learned ignorance” means, primarily, an ignorance which someone has come to learn of and, secondarily, an ignorance which renders its possessor wise. The root of such learned ignorance is the recognition that God cannot be known as He is. *DI*

does not attempt to prove the existence of God but proceeds by working out the implications of the conviction that God is the Absolute Maximum, i.e., is that than which there cannot be anything greater, is all that which can be. By a sequence of assorted considerations *DI* demonstrates both that the Absolute Maximum coincides with the Absolute Minimum and that it is Oneness which is trine, or Trinity which is one. Yet, there is no composition in God, whose trinity is not *numerical*. As undifferentiated Oneness, God is also undifferentiated Being itself, which is beyond all human conception. Therefore, we can only conceive of what He is not. Even though we affirm that God is the Absolute Maximum, we cannot conceive of what it is like to be Absolute Maximum. Moreover, though we call the Maximum *Goodness, Love, Justice, etc.*, these names—as indeed even the names “Being” and “Oneness”—cannot, insofar as we comprehend their significations, succeed in signifying God's infinite Being. Insofar as we grasp all these points about God, we will be possessors of learned ignorance.

God is the Being of things in the sense that He is the Being of all beings. And He is the latter in the sense that (1) He is the Creator of these beings, imparting to them their respective being, and that (2) they would not now exist if He did not exist (though He would exist even if they did not). Similarly, God is the Essence of things in the sense that He is the Essence of all essences. And He is the latter in the sense that (1) He is the Creator of these essences, imparting to them their respective essence, and that (2) each thing would not be what it is if God were not what He is (though His self-identity would remain unimpaired even if all else perished). We may speak of things as *enfolded* in God—i.e., as existing in God prior to their creation—as long as we realize that this priority is ontological rather than chronological and that as things exist in God they are God and not their distinct, finite selves. (By comparison: in a chronological sense we sometimes say that what is going to be caused is already enfolded in its cause.) We may even correctly say that God *is* all things—if what we mean is that He is these things insofar as they are enfolded in Him. Moreover, things are *unfolded* from Him in the sense that from Him every created thing derives, ultimately, its entire being and essence.

The world cannot be identical with God because the world is originated from God, and what is originated cannot be its own originator; otherwise it would have existed *before* it existed—an impossibility. Moreover, the world (also called the universe) and each thing in it are contracted and finite, whereas God is Absolute and Infinite. So the world falls as far short of God as the contracted falls short of the Absolute and as the finite falls short of the Infinite. The word “contracted” has a number of different meanings; but as used in *DI* “contraction” means contraction to (i.e., restriction by) something, so as to be *this* or *that*. God, who alone is uncontracted, is neither this nor that, because He is altogether undifferentiated, as was said earlier.

The universe is composed of genera, species, and individual things. Genera exist in, and are contracted by (i.e., are received in a restricted way by), species; species exist in, and are contracted by, individual things. Moreover, genera are universal, because the same genus may be contracted differently by a plurality of individuals. Species are less universal and more contracted than are genera; and individuals are not at all universal and are the most contracted things in the universe. Individuals are the only *actually* existing things in the universe, in the sense that genera and species do not actually exist apart from individual things. We may call these individual things

*substances*, as did Aristotle; and with him we may distinguish them from their accidents. Accidents too are present only in substances. Insofar as accidents are considered purely as categories, they are more universal than are even genera. Though the universe as well as each thing in it is contracted, no one thing in the universe is contracted to the same extent as another: no two substances or accidents, no two genera or species, are exactly alike in their degree of contraction. Human nature, for example, which is a species, is contracted to a different extent than is canine nature, which is also a species. And both of these differ in degree of contraction from animality, their genus. Two dogs have the same canine nature (and two human beings the same human nature); in *DI* this statement is construed to mean that two dogs have numerically distinct natures, which are, however, identical in species. The dogs differ from each other in their degree of contraction and as they more perfectly and less perfectly individuate the species. The species qua individuated is the respective dog; if the species qua species existed independently, it would be unindividuated. But the species never exists unindividuated; it exists only in the different dogs.

Though the universe is contracted, it is not God contracted, i.e., God in a state of contraction. For, as was already indicated, God is the Absolute, i.e., the Uncontracted. And what is uncontracted cannot also be contracted. Similarly, although the universe is unfolded from God, it is not God unfolded. For God unfolds and unfolds, but He Himself is neither enfolded nor unfolded—just as, likewise, He encompasses but is not encompassed. He may be said to be in all things, as the original is in the reflection of itself. Similarly, all actually existing things may be said to be immediately in God (in a sense other than their being enfolded in Him); for they exist in actuality, and God is actuality. Since all things exist in God and God exists in all things, everything exists in everything else (*quodlibet in quolibet est*).

Though the universe is a reflection of God, it bears no resemblance to God, for between the Infinite and the finite there is no comparative relation. The universe is a reflection of God in that it conforms to what God wills for it to be; but such conformity is not resemblance. Moreover, the universe reflects God insofar as it helps us to recognize that the Creator of the universe cannot be less excellent than the most excellent created things. Thus, the universe points us toward inconceivable Divine Excellence. In creating, God willed that each thing be perfect. No created thing, however, can be maximally and absolutely perfect; for if it were, it would not be a created thing but would be God. Accordingly, God created each thing to be as perfect as it could be and still be that thing. Therefore, each thing qua created exists in the best way it can. Insofar as it cannot actually be more perfect—i.e., insofar as it is as perfect as it can be—it may be called a created god or a god manqué. But a created god falls as short of being God as the contracted falls short of the uncontracted. Moreover, Adam's sinning resulted in the marring of the entire creation (and not just of human nature), so that now many things are subject to even greater defect and corruptibility. Though every thing qua created and unfallen was created to be as perfect as it could be, nonetheless with respect to any given thing, God can always create something else which is more perfect. But there cannot actually exist an infinite number of finite things; for if there could, then the Infinite would be of the nature of the finite—something impossible. Indeed, anything which admits of being comparatively greater or lesser can neither be, nor become, infinite. So the universe—whose finite parts are comparatively greater and lesser—is not infinite. Yet, it is also not finite;



for since it is everything other than God, it has no physical bounds: there is nothing outside it which physically limits it. Accordingly, the universe is neither infinite nor finite—though in different respects (i.e., the signification of “finite” is not simply the contradictory of the signification of “infinite”). We may, if we like, refer to the universe as both infinite and finite. It is privatively infinite insofar as it is “deprived” of bounds; and it is finite insofar as it has a definite measure, known only to God. God could have created a greater universe (though not an actually infinite one); but the present universe with its present matter, or contracted possibility, cannot be greater. For the matter cannot extend itself farther. Of course, if the universe's matter could keep extending itself ever farther, without limit, then the universe could become actually infinite. But the universe cannot so extend itself, because it cannot both have finite parts qua universe and not have finite parts qua actually infinite—and also because matter, which is contracted possibility, cannot through itself become infinite actuality.

There are many things about God's creating which we cannot understand; for example, we cannot understand how a contracted plurality could have arisen from Absolute Oneness. Similarly, there are many things about the universe itself which we cannot comprehend; for instance, we cannot comprehend either the shape or the motion of the universe. We do know, however, that the universe cannot have a fixed, immovable physical center, since this immovable center would be unqualifiedly minimum motion (i.e., would be rest), than which there could not be a lesser motion. But the unqualifiedly minimum coincides with the maximum. Hence, the physical center would be the physical circumference; i.e., the smallest physical point would also be the largest physical circle—an impossibility. Only God, who is equally close to all things and who is unqualifiedly Minimum and unqualifiedly Maximum, is the center and circumference of the universe, of the earth, and of all spheres. Since God is the universe's center and circumference and since God is everywhere and nowhere, we may say that the universe has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere.

If the universe has no center other than God, then the earth is not its center, though to us the earth *seems* more central than do any of the other planets or than does the sphere of fixed stars. The earth is spherical but is not an exact sphere. For, like the universe, the earth has no fixed physical center—i.e., no point equidistant from every point on its circumference. Therefore, it is only approximately spherical. It has a motion, a light, a heat, and an influence of its own. Its motion is approximately circular and is from east to west around a conjectural pole in the heavens—i.e., around a pole which we conjecture to be where we believe the center to be. From our point of view on earth the moon, in its motion from east to west, does not appear to describe as large an approximate circle as does Mercury; Mercury does not appear to describe as large an approximate circle as does Venus; and so on, progressively, with the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—the Ptolemaic ordering of the spheres. The earth is not the lowliest of all the planets; it is, for example, larger than the moon, as our experience of eclipses teaches. Finally, the movement of the spheres is detectable only in comparative terms; wherever anyone would be (whether he were on the earth or the sun or another “star”) he would perceive himself as at the “immovable” center, as it were. Thus, someone on earth regards himself as motionless and the sun as moving; similarly, if he were on the sun, he would regard the sun as motionless and the earth as moving. In fact, however, both the earth and the sun move, with an approx-

imately circular motion, from east to west, around a conjectural pole, as was said.

Between the universe and God there is no intermediate being—not even a world-soul, which various of the Platonists posited as existing ontologically posterior to God but ontologically prior to the world's contraction. The Platonists also thought that all souls are enfolded in the world-soul, as are also all motions. Indeed, they maintained that the world-soul is the source of all motion and that it is the repository of the true forms of things. In God, these forms are, they said, one uncreated Exemplar; but in the world-soul, which is the unfolding of the Divine Mind, they are an uncreated plurality. (The Exemplar in the Divine Mind exists ontologically prior to the exemplars in the world-soul, or world-mind.) The world-soul is related to the world analogously to the human soul's relation to a human body, according to the Platonists. Many Christians consented to these doctrines. But they ought not to have, for there is no such Platonistic world-soul. There is only one infinite Form of forms, viz., God. In particular, God the Son—through whom all things were created—is the Form of all creation.

In itself no created thing can be a maximum or a minimum, for maximum and minimum do not exist in the domain of the purely contracted. Than any individual created thing or any species or any genus God can always create a greater and a lesser individual or species or genus. But what if there were a maximum individual thing contracted to some species? Well, in that case it would be actually everything that is in the possibility of that species; it would be the entire perfection of the species; it would be the maximum and the minimum of the species and thus would be beyond all comparative relation. But, of course, no purely contracted thing could be this maximum individual. The contracted maximum individual thing would be maximum because it existed in Absolute Maximality. Because of this union it would be not only a contracted creature but also the uncontracted God. This union would not be a composite of the Absolute and the contracted. Rather, the created nature would be subsumed in the divine person (and, therefore, in the divine nature), as what is perceptual is subsumed in what is intellectual. Yet, the contracted nature, though maximum, would not become the divine, absolute nature; nor would the latter become the former. In the union of the two natures neither nature would be changed into the other.

But within what species would the Absolute Maximum unite itself to what is contracted? Well, since the Maximum is in a most universal way the being of all things, it would unite with that species which has more in common with the totality of contracted beings. Thus, it would unite with a human nature, because human nature is a medium nature between lower natures, which perceive, and higher natures, which understand. Human nature is the highest of the lower natures and the lowest of the higher natures. By enfolding them, human nature also enfolds all the things which they enfold. It is therefore a microcosm, as the ancients were accustomed to call it.

From Scripture and from the testimony of the church we know that the human nature of Jesus is the contracted maximum individual, which is elevated into union with the divine nature. For Jesus became incarnate as a man by assuming a human nature, being born into this world through the Virgin Mary, who was ever sinless and ever a virgin. Accordingly, Jesus, as the maximum human being, is the perfection not only of human nature but also of all creatable things, which are enfolded in His maximum humanity. Through His death and resurrection, He reunites the creation with the Creator. All human beings are resurrected through Christ; but only those who are

Christ's through faith, hope, and love shall arise as Christ and in Christ through union. In this union believers shall still retain their individuality; but they shall be so one with Christ that His merit will be theirs, in proportion to their love. They shall be filled with His goodness and joy, when His glory will appear. Until that resurrection day believers should seek, through ever increased faith, to attain unto the mystical vision of Christ—a vision which it is God's prerogative to grant or to withhold. Blessed be God. Amen.

## NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Throughout the Introduction the title “*De Docta Ignorantia*” will be abbreviated by “*DI*”.

2. In *Ap.* 12:19-22 Nicholas denies that he received the idea of learned ignorance from (Pseudo-) Dionysius or “any of the true theologians.” But he acknowledges that after his voyage to Greece he began to examine these teachers. In *DI* he several times cites the opinions of Dionysius, though the main influences came subsequently to the writing of *DI* and to his having been presented with the translations made by Ambrose Traversari. Nicholas seems to have received these translations in 1443. See p. 187 of Paul Wilpert's translation *Vom Nichtanderen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976, 2nd edition).

3. Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 38.

4. Erich Meuthen, *Nikolaus von Kues 1401-1464. Skizze einer Biographie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979, 4th edition), p. 53.

5. Also see I, 2 (5:3) and I, 3 (10:20-22). Note the use of “*ad indoctorum manus*” in *Ap.* 5:20.

6. The entire passage (4:13-17) reads: “For a man—even one very well versed in learning—will attain unto nothing more perfect than to be found to be most learned in the ignorance which is distinctively his. The more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be.” To translate this last sentence even Wilpert has recourse to the word “gelehrt”!

7. Cf. *DP* 41:15: “Therefore, the one who knows that he is unable to know is the more learned.”

8. *Idiota de Sapientia, Idiota de Mente, Idiota de Staticis Experimentis*.

9. Provided the latter point were not denied, I myself would not find anything objectionable in translating the title as “On a Knowledge of Our Ignorance” (though some purists might object). Even Wenck takes “*docta*” in the sense of “*notum*” (*IL* 23:4) and takes “*doctrina*” in the sense of “*scientia*” (*IL* 34:2).

10 Cf. *DI* III, 11 (245:20-23).

11. *DI* II, 1 elaborates and illustrates this point.

12. In *DP* 43 the Abbot (John Andrea) protests that our knowledge of mathematical truths is exact knowledge. Nicholas does not deny this but instead makes the following distinction: “Regarding mathematical [entities], which proceed from our reason and which we experience to be in us as in their source [*principium*]: they are known by us as our entities and as rational entities; [and they are known] precisely, by our reason's precision, from which they proceed. . . . Without these notional entities reason could not proceed with its work, e.g., with building, measuring, and so

on. But the divine works, which proceed from the divine intellect, remain unknown to us precisely as they are. If we know something about them, we surmise it by likening a figure to a form. Hence there is no precise knowledge of any of God's works, except on the part of God, who does all these works. If we have any knowledge of them, we derive it from the symbolism and the mirror of [our] mathematical knowledge."

13. *DI* 1, 26 (88:16-20). Cf. *De Visione Dei* 13 (52:4-8); 16 (67:7-8). *Cribratio Alkoran* II, 1 (88:6-19).

14. Note the frequent appearance of the verb "*convenire*" in *DI* I, 24.

15. Cf. *DI* III, 11 (e.g., 252). Notice that in III, 12 (257:9-10) Christ is called Faith and Love.

16. *DI* II, 2 (100:12-15). Cf. II, 13 (180: 1-11). *Idiota de Mente* 10 (127:11-14); *De Deo Abscondito* 2:9 - 4:9; *VS* 12 (31:14-16); *DP* 38:12-15.

17. In *DI* I, 4 Nicholas does not present a tightly sequential line of reasoning. In fact, the order of his steps there differs from the order in which they are sketched in I, 2, his "preliminary clarification." In discussing the intent of his thought, I do not fully adhere to the actual order of his presentation in I, 4, since there is no special need—whether philosophical or hermeneutical—for doing so. In slightly rearranging what Nicholas says, I am not thereby transforming or in any important sense *reconstructing* his argument, which is more of a conglomeration than a set of deductive steps. N.B. Nicholas also uses "unqualifiedly minimum" and "unqualifiedly maximum" in contexts in which they do not refer to God [e.g., in I, 20 (60:7-8) and II, 11 (156:12, 16)]. The role of "unqualifiedly" ("*simpliciter*") is to indicate that there are no degrees of comparatively more and less.

18. Just as the faster the top spins the more it seems to be at rest, so if it could spin with infinite speed it would *be* at rest. (See *DP* 18-20).

19. *DI* II, 10 (155:2-3); II, 11 (156:11-12). *DP* 10: 19-21.

20. *DI* I, 21 (65:7-8).

21. *IL* 21:20-25. *Ap.* 14:5-9.

22. *Ap.* 15:14-15; 9:6. See *PNC*, pp. 12 and 21.

23. In *DI* II, 1 (96:15) Nicholas alludes didactically to the infinite number, which he does not however posit. See the entire discussion in section 96 of *DI*.

24. *IL* 32:7-8.

25. *DI* I, 16 (45:4). Cf. *NA* 10 (37:13-14).

26. *DI* I, 23 (70:23-24); II, 7 (130:14-15); I, 17 (48:3 and 51:8); I, 8 (22:8).

27. *IL* 23:27 and 33:3.

28. Wenck associates Nicholas with the Beghards, whom he refers to as teaching "that God is, formally, whatever is" (*IL* 25:19-20).

29. See Wenck's first thesis.

30. *IL* 26:20-21.

31. See the entire passage at *Ap.* 26:4-25; also note 33:19-25. Cf. *NA* 10 (39). Also see Giovanni Santinello, *Il pensiero di Nicolò Cusano nella sua prospettiva estetica* (Padova: Liviana, 1958), p. 95, and Maria T. Liaci, "Accenti spinoziani nel 'De dato patris luminum' del Cusano?" *NC*, pp. 217-242.

32. This theme is a central theme of *NA*, where Nicholas teaches that God, who is Not-other, is the definition of all things. Not-other is definable solely in terms of itself ("Not-other is not other than Not-other"); and in the absence of Not-other no

thing at all is definable. The sky is the sky because it is not other than the sky. The very existence and self-identity of the sky is dependent upon the existence and self-identity of Not-other.

See also *De Visione Dei* 9 (3 6:10-12); 14 (63: 1 -10). *De Ludo Globi* 2 (91:10 - 92: 1).

33. *DI* II, 3 (110:4-5). Cf. *DP* 57:21. *NA* 7 (26:1-2); 17 (80:6).

34. Cf. *De Coniecturis* I, 8 (35:12-22), a passage likewise often misunderstood.

35. Vincent Martin, "The Dialectical Process in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 5 (1949), 257.

36. Mark Fuehrer claims, mistakenly, that for Nicholas "everything is, in fact, God himself." But Fuehrer bases this claim on his mistranslation of *DI* I, 22 (69:3-4). See "The Principle of *Contractio* in Nicholas of Cusa's Philosophical View of Man," *Downside Review*, 93 (October 1975), 290.

37. Cf. chap. 34 of St. Anselm's *Monologion*. Also see Augustine, *Confessions* 7.15.21 (*PL* 32:744).

38. *DI* II, 2 (104:5-11).

39. *DI* II, 3 (110:15-21).

40. *DI* I, 24 (77:13-15).

41. And what entitles him to assert?: "The negations which remove the more imperfect things from the most Perfect are truer than the others. For example, it is truer that God is not stone than that He is not life or intelligence..." (I, 26). See *PNC*, p. 20.

42. *IL* 24:2-3.

43. *Ap.* 18:26 - 19:4.

44. *DI* I, 4 (11:7-9); I, 12 (33:4-6); I, 26 (87:1-3). In II, 13 (177: 1) Nicholas sets forth a proportionality: "Earth is to fire as the world is to God." But he includes the word "*quasi*": "so to speak," "as it were." And this word must be understood as still applicative when he goes on to write: "Fire, in its relation to earth, has many resemblances to God."

45. See especially the dialogue *DP*.

46. The first of these observations is Werner Schulze's, the second Rudolf Haubst's. Both are cited from W. Schulze, *Zahl, Proportion, Analogie. Eine Untersuchung zur Metaphysik und Wissenschaftshaltung des Nikolaus von Kues* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 35n.

47. Cf. *DI* I, 20 (61:28-31). In discussing God's relation to the universe, Nicholas frequently uses the language of "as if"; see II, 2 (104:3 and 6); II, 3 (111:15); II, 4 (114:14-15).

48. *DI* I, 16 (46:5-6).

49. *DI* II, 11 (156:27-29).

50. Moreover, the universe's shape and motion are said to be ungraspable by us [*DI* II, 11 (161:12-13)]. Or again: "Since it is not possible for the world to be enclosed between a physical center and [a physical] circumference, the world—of which God is the center and the circumference—is not understood" [II, 11 (156:24-27)].

51. Sometimes "absolute" means, for Nicholas, "in every respect" and is contrasted with "in some respect." So God is also Absolute Maximum in the sense that He is in no relevant respect not Maximum.

52. See especially *DI* II, 8 (136:9-10); II, 9 (150:9-10); III, 1 (183:10-13). But

also note *DI* I, 2 (6:9-10); I, 6 (15:3-4); II, 8 (140:6-8); II, 9 (148:8); III, 1 (182:5-6); III, 2 (192: 4-5).

53. “. . . what is contracted [falls short] of what is absolute—the two being infinitely different.” *DI* 11, 8 (140:6-8).

54. Fuehrer, “Principle of *Contractio*,” *op. cit.*, 290.

55. Martin, 258.

56. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*. Vol. III (Westminister, Md.: Newman Press, 1953), p. 239.

57. Martin, 225, 234.

58. Kurt Goldammer, “Nicolaus von Cues und die Überwindung des geozentrischen Weltbildes,” in *Alte Probleme-Neue Ansätze. Drei Vorträge von Fritz Krafft, Kurt Goldammer, Annemarie Wettley* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), p. 37. Cf. Ernst Hoffmann, *Cusanus-Studien. I. Das Universum des Nikolaus von Cues*. SHAW, 1930, p. 11: “Der Kosmos [dem Nikolaus nach] ist Erscheinung ....”

59. But notice *DI* III, 4 (204:13-17).

60. *DI* II, 2 (100:3-4).

61. *DI* II, 2 (103:3-4; 104:2).

62. *Ap.* 28:18-19. Cf. *DI* II, 2 (103:5-9).

63. *DI* II, 2 (104:9).

64. *DI* II, 2 (99:11-13).

65. *DI* II, 3 (110:11-12).

66. *DI* II, 3 (107:11-12).

67. Cf. *Ap.* 16:21-17:2: “From the fact that all things are in God as things caused are in their cause, it does not follow that the caused is the cause—although *in the cause* they are only the cause. . . . For number is not oneness, although every number is enfolded in oneness, even as the caused [is enfolded] in the cause. But that which we understand as number is the unfolding of the power of oneness. Thus, in oneness number is only oneness.”

68. *DI* II, 2 (101:10-13). See the Sermon “*Ubi est qui natus est rex Iudaeorum?*” sections 23-25 in Josef Koch, ed. and trans., *Vier Predigten im Geiste Eckharts*. SHAW 1936-37. Also see *De Ludo Globi* 1 (17:4-7); 1 (18:10-14); 2 (87:10-14).

69. Cf. the two kinds of seeing discussed in *NA* 21 (98).

70. *DI* I, 24 (77:5-7).

71. *DI* II, 5 (118:3-8).

72. *DI* II, 2 (103:5-8).

73. Cf. *DI* II, 3 (107:11-12) and II, 3 (111:11-15). Note Anselm, *Monologion* 14.

74. *DI* II, 3 (111:14-15).

75. Note the title and the contents of *DI* II, 4.

76. *DI* II, 4 (116:9-15).

77. Cf. *DI* II, 4 (115:4-7) with I, 17 (48:3).

78. To say that God is the Absolute Quiddity of the sun (or of the moon) is not to say that the sun has an absolute quiddity; rather, it is a manner of speaking which serves to indicate that God is present in the sun absolutely—i.e., is present without any change in Himself or any restriction or contraction of His own Being or Essence. He is present as if in the way that an object is present in a mirror-image: the object, as it is in itself, is not at all affected by the restrictions that apply to the image. Accordingly, Nicholas says (paradoxically) that God is present in all things and in no

thing [*DI* I, 17 (50:11-12)]. In a secondary sense, the *modus loquendi* serves to indicate that the sun participates, through its own contracted quiddity, in the Absolute Quiddity of all things, viz., God. But it does not participate in God as He is.

79. *DI* II, 4 (115:1-9 and 13-16).

80. *DI* II, 4(115).

81. *DI* I, 18 (53:15-16).

82. *DI* II, 3 (111:3-5).

83. *DI* II, 3 (111:13-22).

84. See *PNC*, p. 37.

85. For this reference see n. 35 above.

86. Martin, 234, 258.

87. *Ibid.*, 266-67.

88. Cf. *NA* 21 (98:12-13): “The earth’s quiddity is seen by the intellect to be other than the quiddity of water or of fire.”

89. Cf. *NA* 10 (36). Cf. *DI* 11, 2 (103:1-2). *De Venatione Sapientiae* 7 (16:4-9).

90. *DI* I, 18 (53:1-6).

91. Cf. *Complementum Theologicum*, chap. 11, lines 26-29, Paris edition.

92. In “Nicholas of Cusa’s Theory of Science and Its Metaphysical Background,” *NCMM*, pp. 317-38, Thomas P. McTighe denies this point. His article-judicious and well-balanced—is probably the best article to read in support of the interpretation that, for Cusa, “because there is but one essence, that of the Absolute, there can be no plural positive essences intrinsic to things. . . . Ontologically speaking, things differ only numerically. Or to put it another way, all differentiation is accidental” (pp. 326-327).

93. *DI* II, 3 (107:11-12).

94. *DI* II, 4 (115:17-19).

95. But though all particulars exist in the universe and the universe exists in all particulars, Nicholas does not teach either that each particular qua particular exists in every other particular or that every species qua species exists in every other species. For when he says “*quodlibet in quolibet*,” he means that each actually existing thing contracts the whole of the universe in such way that in this thing the universe is this thing; yet, in this given thing the universe does not exist as a plurality—i.e., as a composite of particulars. So although humanity exists in Socrates and in Plato, it does not exist in dogs or cats because neither Socrates nor Plato qua Socrates or qua Plato exists in dogs and cats.

The most interesting attempt to make sense out of Nicholas’s doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet* is Heinrich Rombach’s, in chap. 2 of his *Substanz, System, Struktur*. Vol. 1: *Die Ontologie des Funktionalismus und der philosophische Hintergrund der modernen Wissenschaft* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1965). Unfortunately, Rombach’s discussion—be it ever so intriguing—is an essential part of a more general interpretation of Cusanus which will not hold up. See my *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, chap. 3.

96. Cf. *DI* III, 1 (189: 1), which speaks of individuating principles.

97. *DI* II, 9 (148:17-20).

98. *DI*, II, 9 (149:16-20). Cf. II, 12 (166:15-18). Also see *Idiota de Mente* 13 (145:1-2 and 7-9).

99. In *DI* II, 9 Nicholas uses the word “form” (“*forma*”) and the word “essence”

("ratio") interchangeably. Forms are said to exist both uncontractedly in the Word as Word and contractedly in contracted things. These contracted things include intellects, where forms exist more independently and abstractly than they exist in material objects.

100. *DI* II, 10 (155:1-4).

101. *DI* II, 11 (last lines).

102. *DI* II, 12 (162:15-17) refers to the world's center as everywhere, though in II, 11 (161:14-15) it was said to be nowhere.

103. *DI* II, 11 (157:17-23).

104. Karsten Harries insightfully works out the implications of Nicholas's perspectivism, even relating it in a clarifying way to some points already made by Meister Eckhart. See "The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of a Metaphor," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 13 (January 1975), 5-15.

105. It is intended to elucidate the conclusion by helping to give a sense there-to.

106. In *DI* the earth, the moon, the sun, the planets are referred to as stars, though they are distinguished from the so-called fixed stars of the eighth sphere.

107. *DI* II, 12 (162:10-12).

108. *DI* II, 11 (161:12-13).

109. *DI* II, 2 (104:6).

110. *DI* II, 1 (97:5-6).

111. *DI* III, 1 (183:3-8). The infinite exceeds all differentiation, all naming, all comparative relation, all degrees. See *DI* I, 5.

112. *DI* III, 3 (195:12-15).

113. *DI* III, 3 (197:8-12).

114. *DI* III, 3 (199:3-16).

115. See *Anselm of Canterbury: Volume III*, ed. and trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976).

116. E.g., in the sermon "*Hoc Facite*." Sermon 3, Vol. 16, fascicle I of the *Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1970).

117. *DI* III, 4 (204:1-2).

118. See the discussion under arabic numeral 5 a little later in this section of the Introduction.

119. *DI* III, 7 (223:1-7). Also note III, 4 (204:2-6).

120. Rudolf Haubst's *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956) gives numerous examples of statements, in Nicholas's sermons, that tend to mislead us regarding his Christology. (E.g., see pp. 121 and 135). Nicholas simply was incautious.

121. Note especially III, 2 (193:3-9). Cf. Sermon XVII: "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*." Also, see n. 41 of the notes to *DI*, Book Three.

122. Note the end of *DI* III, 3: "But this order should not be considered temporally—as if God temporally preceded the Firstborn of creation. And [we ought not to believe] that the Firstborn—viz., God and man—preceded the world temporally but [should believe that He preceded it] in nature and in the order of perfection and above all time." But cf. III, 5 (214:1-2).

123. *DI* III, 3 (199: 1).

124. Cf. *DI* III, 1 (189:1-3).



125. *DI* III, 2 (191:11-12).
126. *DI* III, 3 (199:7).
127. *DI* III, 3 (199: 10-11).
128. *DI* III, 2 (191:7-8).
129. *IL* 39:1-5.
130. *DI* III, 3 (197:8-9).
131. "Through union with Absolute [Maximality], which is the Absolute Being of all things, He would be the universal contracted being of each creature. Through Him all things would receive the beginning and the end of their contraction, so that through Him who is the contracted maximum [individual] all things would go forth from the Absolute Maximum into contracted being and would return unto the Absolute [Maximum] through this same Medium—[in other words,] through [Him who is] the Beginning of their emanation and the End [i.e., the Goal] of their return, as it were." *DI* III, 3 (199:11-17).
132. *Cur Deus Homo* II, 8. In II, 21 Anselm explains why the redemption of fallen angels through a God-angel is impossible. Anselm thinks that God had the power to become incarnate as an angel or an ass but that for Him to accomplish such an incarnation would not serve His purposes.
133. Sermon 3, Vol. 16, fascicle 1, pp. 44-45 of the *Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1970).
134. *DI* III, 3 (202:8-10).
135. *DI* III, 4 (204:7-9); III, 7 (223:9).
136. *DI* III, 3 (200:4-6).
137. *DI* III, 4 (206:12-18). N.B. *Complementum Theologicum*, chap. 5, lines 6-9, Paris edition.
138. *DI* III, 1 (183:10-13).
139. *DI* III, 7 (223:3-4). See H. Senger's note on pp. 125-26 of Vol. III of *De docta ignorantia. Die belehrte Unwissenheit* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1977).
140. *DI* III, 7 (225:11-17).
141. *DI* III, 4 (204:2-6). Cf. III, 7 (223:8-9).
142. *DI* III, 7 (224:21-23), where the humanity is said to be united to the nature of the divine person.
143. *DI* II, 5 (119:18-19). See also I, 22 (69:3-4).
144. *DI* III, 2 (194:4-7 and 16-17).
145. *DI* III, 7 (224:22).
146. *DI* III, 4 (205:1-5 and 13-17).
147. *DI* III, 4 (207:1-3).
148. *DI* III, 4 (206:11-12).
149. *DI* III, 5 (212:6-8). In Sermon 9, "*Completitque Deus*" [*Opera Omnia*, Vol. 16, fascicle 2 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1973)], Nicholas teaches that Mary was ever free of original sin and of all personal sin (11:24-27).
150. *DI* III, 6 (219:5-14).
151. *DI* III, 6 (218:15-16).
152. *DI* III, 12 (256:16; 256:2).
153. John 15:5. Rom. 12:4-5.
154. *DI* III, 12 (255:10-12).
155. *DI* III, 8 (228:23-25).

156. *DI* III, 11 (252:11-14).

157. *DI* III, 11 (245:10-23).

158. Ex. 33:18-23.

159. *DI* III, 11 (246:15-16).

160. *DI* III, 11 (246:3).

161. *DI* III, 6 (215:7-8).

162. *Ap.* 15:4-16.

163. *DI* III, 12 (259:1-2).

164. *DI* III, 11 (244:12-13).

165. *DI* III, 12 (260:13-14).

166. *DI* III, 8 (228:24-25).

167. In "Wisdom and Eloquence in Nicholas of Cusa's *Idiota de sapientia* and *de mente*," *Vivarium*, 16 (November 1978), 152n. Mark Fuehrer writes: "The epistemological similarities between Kant and Cusa are quite striking. Just as Kant argues that there can be no real unity in the world of appearances unless an order of reality is postulated which provides the unity in the manifold of appearances which by themselves the appearances cannot supply, Cusa argues that the realm of the 'more or the less' when judged by the mind indicates a precision which neither the 'more or the less' nor the mind could provide. Thus something which is identified with neither the world (= the realm of the more or the less) nor the finite mind must be postulated. Without this postulate the finite mind could not think the concepts of 'more' or 'less'." But this comparison misconstrues *Idiota de Sapientia* II. (Moreover, Fuehrer should make use of the critical edition of the Latin texts, published by the Heidelberg Academy, rather than, as he does here, using the Strasburg edition of 1488, reprinted by de Gruyter in 1966-1967.)