

CHAPTER THREE
NICHOLAS OF CUSA
AND FUNCTIONALIST ONTOLOGY

In Volume One of his *Substanz, System, Struktur*¹ Heinrich Rombach promotes the view that Nicholas of Cusa is “the Aristotle of modern thought.”² This epithet seems fitting, thinks Rombach, because Nicholas is the initiator of *functionalist* ontology, in the modern sense of the word. According to Rombach, Nicholas not only propounds functionalism but also recognizes that in doing so he is propounding something new; nevertheless, Nicholas is said not to formulate an explicit *concept* thereof.³ Indeed, Nicholas, we are told, adheres to *three* different ontologies, without ever fully reconciling their differences: an ontology of substances, an ontology of functions, and an ontology of identity.⁴ The first of these considers objects not only as they present themselves to us in daily life but also as they are apprehended scientifically and philosophically within, say, the Aristotelian tradition. The second considers objects to be only moments of the whole and not to have any existence of their own—i.e., not to have any substantial existence. The third looks beyond substances and beyond moments-of-the-whole and attempts to grasp Being itself, wherein there is no plurality or differentiation whatsoever. These three ontologies, continues Rombach, cannot be derived from one another and do not lead into one another. Moreover, they are not supplementary to one another; for the first has nothing of value to offer to the second, and the second does not contribute anything to the third. Yet, all

three are operative in Nicholas's philosophy. And they include propositions which, if directly compared, are contradictory. However, thinks Rombach, if the ontologies are kept apart, their respective propositions may be regarded as mutually exclusive ways of referring to the same reality. For example, Nicholas states that things are different from God; but he also states that things are not different from God. Similarly, he teaches that the world is so radically separate from God that it is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself; but he also teaches that everything which is is God, that outside of God there is nothing.⁵

Nicholas's lack of explicitness regarding these different ontologies seems to Rombach to explain why previous interpreters overlooked the functionalist dimension of Nicholas's metaphysics.⁶ This is the dimension upon which Rombach concentrates. He also discusses the dimension of identity but leaves undeveloped the dimension of substance.

Section I, below, summarizes Rombach's understanding of Nicholas's ontology—concentrating, as does he, on functionalism; Section II then challenges this understanding; and Section III proceeds to offer an interpretive restatement of *DI* II, 4 and 5.

I

1.1. *Functionalism.* Ontologically speaking, "functionalism" is a view that conveys a twofold idea: (1) negatively, that no finite thing is a substance, having some measure of relatively independent being; and (2) positively, that each finite thing is constituted only by its system of relationships to every other finite thing.⁷ In other words, each thing is only what it determines other things to be and what it is determined by them to be.⁸ Thus, each thing is identical with the whole; and no thing is itself.⁹ Moreover, no thing could exist alone; for a thing's being consists in its being

different from something else, so that its being is *only* its relationality.¹⁰ Expressed more paradoxically: each thing is the whole of what it is not—i.e., of what is other than it.¹¹ But were there not anything other than it, it too would be nothing, for it would be only possibility.¹² Since things are not substances,¹³ they do not have essences;¹⁴ or better, all essences are only the one and only essence of all things.¹⁵ Thus, whatever happens anywhere is a function of the whole,¹⁶ so that from a single fact the state of the world can in principle be read off. For example, if someone knew everything about the moon at the present moment, then he would also know everything about the state of the world at this moment. Or better, someone could not know the former *without* also knowing the latter, for everything which has hitherto occurred has contributed to the present state of the moon and expresses itself in and through the moon. Similarly, an observer with absolutely sharp discriminatory powers could infer the future state of the world from the present stage of the moon.¹⁷ In sum, not only does the state of the world *express* itself in and through the moon, but the moon *is* a state of the world as a whole. Whatever can be determined regarding the moon—its shape, its mass, its state of energy and of motion—is determined and determinable only through the whole of the system. And if the world-system is expressed in a determinate state, then only therein resides the precise definition of, say, the moon's constitution. Therefore, the world is in the moon moon and in the sun sun.¹⁸

1.2. *God and finite things in the world.* Functionalism, as exhibited above, was initiated by Nicholas of Cusa in *DI*. But we need to go beyond *DI* to glimpse clearly what Nicholas regards as the basic ontological distinction between God and finite things. For this distinction occurs most vividly in the dialogues *De Possess* and *De Li Non Aliud*. In the latter we are reminded that each finite thing in the world is *other* than all others, that each manifests what it is by contrast with the others which it is not;¹⁹ its very

being is relationality.²⁰ God, however, who is infinite, is incomparable with finite things. For example, He is not greater than they are or lesser than they are; nor is He *other* than they are. Since by virtue of transcending the entire domain of comparison with finite beings God cannot be *other*, Nicholas prefers, above all other names for God, the name "Not-other." In the former dialogue, i.e., *De Possess*, we are told that God is the actuality of all possibility, whereas in finite things actuality and possibility are always distinct. Now, precisely because God is actually all that which He *can* be, He cannot be *other* than He is, whereas a finite thing is never all that which it *can* be, and hence it can always be *other* than it actually is.²¹ This fundamental ontological distinction between God as *non-aliud* and the creation as *aliud* is already implicit in *DI*.²²

1.3. *The world and finite things in the world.* Nicholas refers to the world as a finite infinity. It is unlimited because it is without boundaries and because there is no point at which it necessarily comes to a spatial end; accordingly, it can always be thought to be greater.²³ Yet, from the viewpoint of an absolute observer, the world is limited; indeed, it cannot outdistance the measure of its possibility, or matter, which is finite.²⁴ So although with reference to God's power, which is infinite, the world can be thought to be greater than it is, nevertheless with reference to its resisting possibility, or matter, which cannot actually be stretched unto infinity, the world cannot be thought to be greater.²⁵ Moreover, the world is not like a being; nor is it the mere sum of all beings.²⁶ It has no location. It is not something that exists along side of beings or even above them; it is not anything which can enter into comparative relations with them. Instead, the world must be understood as, so to speak, "sitting" amid beings as the precise definition of their *what* and their *that*. For between the world and a being in the world there exists absolutely no difference, since a being is the contracted actualization of the world-system at a given point in this system.²⁷ The individual thing is the

whole because it brings to expression, in a determinate moment, the state of the whole world. Indeed, its *content* is the world: "In each creature the universe is that very creature . . . and each thing receives all things in such way that in that thing the universe is contractedly that thing . . ." ²⁸ Thus, the universe is contracted quiddity, which is contracted in one way in the sun and in another way in the moon. Although the universe is not the sun and not the moon, nevertheless in the sun it is the sun, and in the moon it is the moon. Or, to generalize the point: "In a stone all things are stone; in a vegetative soul, vegetative soul; in life, life; in the senses, the senses; in sight, sight; in hearing, hearing; in imagination, imagination; in reason, reason; in intellect, intellect; in God, God."²⁹ Accordingly, each thing is only the world itself—in a contracted manner.³⁰

Insofar as the world is the particular thing and the particular thing has as its essence nothing other than the world itself, everything is bound up with everything, each thing is contained in the other: *quodlibet in quolibet*.³¹ What is present in each thing is *not* the plurality of things but the *universe*, which contains everything in an *inseparable* way and which *is* each thing. The universe is prior to the plurality of things: "*omnia praecedit [sic] quodlibet, plura non praecedunt quodlibet*."³² Therefore, in a strict and basic sense all things are the same: viz., the world. There is nothing new under the sun and nothing that is different from what exists elsewhere. All essences are only the one and only essence of all things": "*omnes essentiae sunt ipsa omnium essentia*."³³ Fundamentally, then, all things contain the same thing and differ from one another only from the point of view of their relation to one another. In the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings: there is only the world as a single creature.³⁴

As a functionalist, Nicholas does not regard the universe as a *cosmos*.³⁵ For *cosmos* has to do with an ordering of things which already exist in a relatively independent manner, so that they can be brought into harmony from out

of an initial *chaos*. Thus, *cosmos* and *chaos* are antithetical notions: the less chaos, the more cosmos; the less cosmos, the more chaos. But we have already seen that Nicholas's functionalist ontology is incompatible with the conception of substances—i.e., the conception of things which exist for themselves with relatively independent being and which admit of a *subsequent* global ordering. Nicholas does not teach that creation occurred successively—one thing after another and each thing for itself; instead, he teaches that everything was created at once.³⁶ So, on Nicholas's functionalist view, the world both is and is not each individual thing. On the one hand, the world is the presupposition of individual things; and, on the other, the world is not possible without individual things and does not precede them.³⁷ The conceptual antithesis to *world* is neither *not-world* nor *chaos*; rather, on functionalist theory, there is no conceptual antithesis to *world*.³⁸

1.4. *God and the world.* Nicholas's metaphysics is not pantheistic, for it posits the most radical distinction between God and the world: viz., that God exists of Himself and for Himself, whereas the world can never exist of and for itself.³⁹ To be sure, God is everything in the world; but He is all things only through the *mediation* of the universe, says Nicholas. Only if God were said to be *immediately* identical with each respective thing would Nicholas be proposing a pantheistic doctrine.⁴⁰ Viewed relationally, each thing is that which it itself is in contradistinction to all others. But when each thing is viewed as a representation of the whole world and as an embodiment of the one Divine Essence, then the Divine and Absolute Essence shows forth, and the inmost nucleus of the thing discloses itself as God Himself.⁴¹ Now, the relational aspect of a thing cannot be eliminated, because it is posited with the world itself. The relational aspect protects the individual and preserves its reality, even though the individual thing has the Divine Essence itself as its content. Rain remains rain and is, in all its particular features, just what it is for the maintenance of

the earth and of life on the earth. It demonstrates its reality in the fruitfulness of the fields, in the thirst of creatures, in the power of rivers and streams—even though in the rain, viewed absolutely, God Himself is manifest in transcendence of the world.⁴²

Not only is God the content of the world, He is also—because of the fact that the world is the actual *what* of each thing—the inmost essence of each thing: *omnium essentialium simplicissima essentia*. If we consider a being as it differs from other beings—i.e., consider it in its contracted and separate quiddity—we attain only its contracted essence, *quiditas contracta*. However, if we consider it in its absolute aspect—i.e., with reference to the oneness of all beings and to the unchangeable Essence—there springs forth the *quiditas absoluta*, which is identical with the Essence of God Himself.⁴³ Now, the Absolute Essence is this thing much better than this thing is itself. God is this pond more than this pond is itself, as Cusa says. God is a thing “precisely,” whereas this thing is only approximately itself—a disorderly copy of itself.⁴⁴ Because God is the precise Essence of each thing, He is present in everything. He is the Heart of all things; He is the Element, and the final Oneness, of which everything consists. We must take this identity of the essences of God and creatures in a very narrow sense. It means not only that in creatures there is contained nothing other than God Himself but also that in God there is contained nothing other than what any given determinate being contains. The sun contains the *entire* essence of God. Cusa advances from the essential content of the sun to the essential content of God only because of the fact that he posits the sun's unchanged content *absolutely* instead of relatively. Since the content of the sun is everything—i.e., everything apart from any negation—we can also consider the sun in absolute isolation and, accordingly, without the viewpoint of relation; and in this way we have before us *entitas absoluta*, i.e., God.⁴⁵

So in Nicholas of Cusa we find a new—i.e., a

functionalist—envisioning of *thing*, of *world*, and of *God*. Indeed, functionalism could virtually be called Cusan ontology.⁴⁶ Though Nicholas does not self-consciously abandon the ontology of substances, his ontology of functions is at odds with it.

II

The very boldness of Rombach's portrayal captures our imagination, thereby startling us into envisioning Nicholas of Cusa as a more strikingly pivotal philosophical figure than previously we had dared fancy. But once we scrutinize more closely Rombach's text, comparing it in detail with Nicholas's, we will recognize that our timidity is more praiseworthy than is Rombach's temerity. For the portrayal of Nicholas as a functionalist proves untenable.

We may catalogue the weaknesses of Rombach's account under seven headings: (1) textual and translation errors, (2) other outright errors, (3) misapplications of Nicholas's texts, (4) incoherence or *prima facie* incoherence, (5) misapprehensions, (6) imprecisions and unclaritys, (7) lack of adequate documentation.

2.1. *Textual and translation errors.* One of the first things that strike a reader is how carelessly Rombach deals with Nicholas's text. We have already noticed his translation of "*qui ista prius inaudita legerint*" as "[*die Leser,*] *die so Unerhörtes früher nicht lasen.*"⁴⁷ Other such examples are easy to find. On p. 165 he writes: "*Alle Wesenheiten sind nur die eine und einzige Wesenheit des Alls.*"⁴⁸ "*omnes essentiae sunt ipsa omnium essentia.*" Here Rombach simply adds the German word "*nur*," for which there is no corresponding word (or idea) in the Latin text. But the small word "*nur*" (i.e., "only") makes no small difference in the sentence, for it helps foster the impression that Nicholas's texts contain the doctrine of functionalism. In this respect, then, Rombach mistranslates the sentence. But even worse, he appears

to misinterpret what he has translated; for he seems to take "*ipsa omnium essentia*" to refer to the universe, when, in fact, it refers to God.⁴⁹ But perhaps worst of all, Rombach does not even have the Latin text right, since he has "*sunt*" instead of "*sicut.*" When we look to see whether "*sunt*" is a simple misprint, we discover that it is not, that Rombach is following the reading in the Paris edition (1514) rather than the reading in the critical edition published by the Heidelberg Academy (Vol. I, 1932). Furthermore, Rombach does not even document the Latin citation; consequently, a reader must manage somehow or other to locate it for himself in Nicholas's texts. Nor does Rombach anywhere call attention to the fact that this reading differs from the reading in the critical edition. Finally, when we examine the Latin text and context, we recognize that the Paris edition's word "*sunt*" is not merely a less preferable reading but is, indeed, a mistaken one.

Let us take another example from the same page in Rombach (p. 165): "*Das All ist früher und eigentlicher und ursprünglicher als die Vielheit der Dinge: 'omnia praecedunt [sic] quodlibet, plura non praecedunt quodlibet.'*" Once again, Rombach gives no documentation. But he is referring to *DI* II,5 (117:15-17): "*Si igitur omnia sunt in omnibus, omnia videntur quodlibet praecedere. Non igitur omnia sunt plura, quoniam pluralitas non praecedunt quodlibet.*" Rombach has elided and revised Nicholas's text; yet, he does not indicate any elision or revision but prefers to convey the impression that he is quoting the Latin exactly. Moreover, his translation adds an idea not found in the Latin: viz., the idea that *das All ist eigentlicher als die Vielheit der Dinge*.

Other—less important—examples of Rombach's unreliability are his translation of "*consequenter*" and "*ex consequenti*" by "*folgerichtig*" and "*mitfolgend*," in a context where they should be translated by a *temporal* adverb.⁵⁰ Or again, the Latin text which he reproduces in footnote 21 on pp. 161-162 contains "*que*" instead of "*quae*" and is cited as *DI* I, 2 instead of as II, 1.

All in all, Rombach's handling of Nicholas's texts is exceedingly loose. And this looseness goes a long way toward explaining how he could possibly "find" functionalism therein.

2.2. *Other outright errors.* On p. 152, note 5 Rombach attempts to justify his choice of "Not-other" as that characterization of God which is the most important one for Nicholas of Cusa: "If we prefer this characterization of God above all others, even though it was found by Cusa only late (1462), the reason is that it is the one which best characterizes his thought. '*Non reperitur in alio aliquo clarius, quam in non aliud.*' De ven. sap. ch. 14." But Rombach is engaging in special pleading. For in Nicholas's very last treatise, viz., *De Apice Theoriae* (1464), we find: "*Videbis infra, posse ipsum, quo nihil potentius nec prius nec melius esse potest, longe aptius nominare illud sine quo nihil quicquam potest nec esse nec vivere nec intelligere quam possest aut aliud quodcumque vocabulum. Sive enim nominari potest, utique posse ipsum, quo nihil perfectius esse potest, melius ipsum nominabit. Nec aliud clarius, verius aut facilius nomen dabile credo.*"⁵¹ Here Nicholas makes it clear that, as a name for God, he now prefers "Possibility itself" to "Not-other."

On p. 172 Rombach maintains that, for Nicholas, all numbers are *parts* (*Teile*) of oneness. Yet, Rombach does not document this claim. Moreover, he *could not* document it even if he wanted to, for Nicholas nowhere advances it. Finally, even to suppose that Nicholas could consider numbers to be *parts* of oneness is to misconstrue completely the doctrines of enfolding and unfolding. Rombach's confusion about this topic underlies his concomitant confusion—which we shall examine later—concerning the topic of God and the world. For if God is to finite things as oneness is to numbers,⁵² and if numbers are parts of oneness, then things are parts of God.

On p. 172 Rombach also goes on to affirm, still in the name of Nicholas: "Now, insofar as everything is in God,

God is—when considered in terms of everything—the Absolute Maximum (*maximum absolutum*). And insofar as (1) He is present in everything and (2) nothing can be so small that it would not contain Him as a whole, God is likewise the Minimum (*minimum absolutum*)."⁵³ Once again, we may note that Rombach does not document this line of reasoning. And once again we may say that he *could not* document it even if he wanted to, for Nicholas nowhere reasons in this way. Except in a symbolic sense, Nicholas does not think that God can be comparatively considered in terms of anything—nor even in terms of everything. Moreover, even if God were so measurable, or comparable, His being all things would not *ipso facto* suffice either for His being—or for our inferring—that He is *Absolute Maximum* (as contrasted with *de facto* maximum). Furthermore, Nicholas does not reason that God is *Absolute Minimum* insofar as nothing can be so small that it would not contain Him. And, in any event, "contains" is the wrong word, since God is present in things in such way as not to be contained by them.⁵⁴ Finally, even to suppose that Nicholas could reason in the foregoing manner is to misapprehend completely his understanding of *Absolute Maximality* and *Absolute Minimality*.

Elsewhere Rombach observes, with reference to Nicholas's concept of *world*:

God "*harmonized* the relations of the parts *mutually and in every detail (ita proportionabiliter partium ad invicem proportionem constituens)*, [so] that everywhere the movement of the parts leads to the whole (*ut in qualibet sit motus partium ad totum*)" (*DI* II, 13).—This is perhaps the clearest definition of function in the Cusan texts.⁵⁵

But this is not a definition—and *a fortiori* not a definition of *function*.

A bit later (p. 210) Rombach interprets Nicholas's doctrine of *explicatio* (i.e., unfolding)—a doctrine which we have already seen Rombach not to comprehend—by affirming: "Through explication nothing is changed—or increased." This statement—at the very least—is mislead-

ing. For in the case of the world (though not in the case of numbers or of the infinite line) *unfolding* is the same thing as *emanation*,⁵⁶ where *emanation* signifies *creation* but does not connote temporal stages. To view things as created is to view them as no longer enfolded in God—i.e., to view their ontological status as *changed*.

On p. 225 Rombach makes the astounding assertion that “the connection between functionalism and Christian theology is so fundamental that the one necessitates the other.” But this statement is false both historically and conceptually.

2.3. *Misapplications of Nicholas's texts.* Just as Rombach is careless in his citing and translating of Nicholas's texts, so he is careless in his use of Nicholas's texts. For example, he appeals to *De Li Non Aliud* 10 to justify the following view, which he purports to find in *DI*: “Fundamentally, all things contain the same thing: only as they are considered *in relation to one another* are they different from one another. In the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings but only the world as a single creature” (p. 165). But in *DI* Nicholas nowhere teaches that in God's sight there is no plurality of creatures. Rombach seems to elicit this view *solely* from *Di Li Non Aliud* 10 (39:4-11), which is the only passage he refers to:

Therefore, when I look at things, beholding their essences: since things exist in accordance with their essences, then when I behold these essences through the understanding prior to [the things' existence], I maintain that they are different from one another. But when I view them above the understanding and prior to other, I do not see different essences but see no other than the simple Form of the essences which I am contemplating in these things. And I call this Form *Not-other* or the *Essence of essences*, since it is whatever is observed in all the essences.⁵⁷

But this passage does not make the points “elicited” by Rombach. First of all, it has nothing to do with whether or not God beholds the world as a multiplicity. Secondly, Nicholas is maintaining that as the essences exist *in God* they are God and therefore are not a plurality.⁵⁸ Since he is

talking about them insofar as they precede otherness, he is talking about them with reference to their state of enfoldedness, ontologically prior to their creation. Thirdly, the statement “Not-other is whatever is observed in all the essences” does not mean that fundamentally all things *contain* the same thing; in Nicholas's last sentence the Latin equivalent of the word “contain” does not at all appear. Rather, the statement is to be understood along the following lines: Not-other is whatever is observed in all the essences because it is the Cause of the essences' being what they are;⁵⁹ thus, too, Not-other defines all things, since each thing is not other than itself, so that Not-other is in it. Fourthly, we should notice that even in *De Li Non Aliud*, which dates more than twenty years after *DI*, Nicholas is still talking about the essences of things. Now, Rombach contends that “for functionalism ‘essence’ is no longer a meaningful word” (p. 213). But instead of drawing the conclusion that Nicholas is not a functionalist, he prefers to allege that Nicholas did not fully work out his functionalism, that he had the idea of functionalism but not the concept,⁶⁰ that he had three separate ontologies.

Similarly, Rombach's attempt to connect *DI* with *De Possest* leads him to misconstrue the latter. Let us reconsider the following statement of his:

We must take this identity of the essences of God and creatures in a very narrow sense. It means not only that in creatures there is contained nothing other than God Himself but also that in God there is contained nothing other than what any given determinate being contains. The sun contains the *entire* essence of God. Cusa advances from the essential content of the sun to the essential content of God only because of the fact that he posits the sun's unchanged content *absolutely* instead of relatively. Since the content of the sun is everything—i.e., everything apart from any negation—we can also consider the sun in absolute isolation and, accordingly, without the viewpoint of relation; and in this way we have before us *entitas absoluta*, i.e., God.⁶¹

Rombach cites *De Possest* 68:11-23 as support for this statement.⁶² But, first of all, *De Possest* 68 does *not* teach

that God and creatures have an identical essence. Secondly, it does not teach that in God there is *contained nothing other than* what any given determinate being contains. Ignoring the invidious word “contained” (“*enthalten*”), we should recall that not only are all *created* things present in God but so also are all *creatable* things.⁶³ As Nicholas tells us, “God’s creative power is not exhausted in His creation.”⁶⁴ Thirdly, Nicholas nowhere says that in creatures there is *contained nothing other than* God Himself. Indeed, Nicholas never denies, not even in *De Possest*, that creatures have their own contracted essence. This essence is not God but is that which makes the sun the sun and the moon the moon, so that “the being of the sun is not the being of the moon.”⁶⁵ When Nicholas says that God “is at once and as a whole present in all things,”⁶⁶ he is not saying anything more than Anselm had much earlier said in *Monologion* 22 and *De Veritate* 13. Moreover, *De Possest* 68 should be read in conjunction with *De Possest* 11 and 12: Nicholas is not maintaining that every finite thing contains God as its “core” of being, so to speak; he is rather providing us with a strategy for seeing how it is that “the invisible things of Him, including His eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, by means of understanding created things.”⁶⁷

Suppose we say that God is sun. If, as is correct, we construe this [statement] as [a statement] about a sun which is actually all it is able to be, then we see clearly that this sun is not at all like the sensible sun. For while the sensible sun is in the East, it is not in any other part of the sky where it is able to be. [Moreover, none of the following statements are true of the sensible sun:] “It is maximal and minimal, alike, so that it is not able to be either greater or lesser”; “It is everywhere and anywhere, so that it is not able to be elsewhere than it is”; “It is all things, so that it is not able to be anything other than it is”—and so on. With all the other created things the case is similar. Hence it does not matter what name you give to God, provided that in the foregoing manner you mentally remove the limits with respect to its possible being.⁶⁸

So God is not the sensible sun; and the sensible sun is not, in its own, contracted being, God. Nor can we strip away

the properties of the sun and find God lurking behind them, as it were—as if God were the sun’s essence and these properties were only accidents of God. We may indeed mentally strip away the sun’s determinations in order better to recognize why undifferentiated Being itself, which is God, cannot be conceived as it is. But Nicholas does not claim that God and finite beings are identical in essence, that God is “the ultimate Oneness of which everything *consists*.”⁶⁹ Rather, God is the ultimate Power which creates and sustains the finite being of each finite thing. Through His Power God is present in each finite thing, as the power of a cause is present in what it effects and sustains.

2.4. *Incoherence or prima facie incoherence.* On p. 152 Rombach states that, for Nicholas, “nothing is everything; each thing manifests what it is in that it is not something else.”⁷⁰ But on p. 214 we are told, with what presumably is supposed to have Nicholas’s endorsement, that “a thing is exactly identical with the whole. *Nothing is itself; everything is the whole.*”⁷¹ Perhaps there is some way to render these two passages compatible; but it is difficult to see how this can be done—given the occurrence, in the latter passage, of the words “exactly identical” (“*genau identisch*”). The difficulty is reinforced by a passage on p. 164 in which the word “*keinerlei*” appears: “*Es besteht keinerlei Unterschied zwischen der Welt und einem Seienden in ihr*”: “There exists *no difference at all between the world and a being in the world.*” Now, this is surely not Nicholas’s view. For Nicholas says explicitly—as Rombach himself recognizes⁷²—that the universe is neither the sun nor the moon.⁷³ Nicholas does say, however, that *in each thing* the universe is this thing. And no doubt this statement is what is confusing Rombach, who seems generally confused about the doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet*. Rombach should content himself with saying, as he does on p. 208: “. . . *und so nimmt jedes alles auf, derart, dass das All in ihm jenes selbst in zusammengezogener Weise ist . . .*” But, instead, he switches from saying that in each thing the universe is this

thing to saying that there is no difference between the universe and each thing in it. Nicholas himself, however, sees obvious differences. And hence he can write: "in each thing the universe is, contractedly, that which this thing is contractedly; and in the universe each thing is the universe; nonetheless, the universe is in each thing in one way, and each thing is in the universe in another way."⁷⁴

We have already noted the statement of Rombach's in which he attributes to Nicholas the view that "in the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings but only the world as a single creature."⁷⁵ But it is not clear how this statement, taken together with the claim that Nicholas is a functionalist, can cohere with the statement, on p. 228, which is presumably presenting an inherent feature of functionalism: "An Absolute Observer who stands outside the world and does not grasp the relations as *individual* relations but would like to look at the whole would not see anything. The world, for God, is not 'there'."⁷⁶

On p. 168 Rombach states: "To be sure, the world, with respect to its content, is God; but with respect to its form it is separated from God by an infinite gulf."⁷⁷ But on p. 224 we read that "within the world as envisioned functionalistically there is no other content than the world itself . . ."⁷⁸ These statements seem *prima facie* unreconcilable. For if (1) Nicholas's functionalism teaches that the content of the world is God and (2) functionalism in general, and therefore Nicholas's functionalism in particular, teaches that the world has *no other content than* the world itself, then either functionalism is inconsistent or it regards the world itself as God. But Nicholas does not consider the world to be God, though he does say that *in God* all things are God.⁷⁹ Moreover, Nicholas does not affirm, *tout court*, that God is the world, though he does say, in one special sense or another, that God is all things.⁸⁰ Is Rombach prepared to maintain, then, that Nicholas's functionalism is radically inconsistent? Or does he mean to be making a distinction between Nicholas's functionalism and functionalism in gen-

eral? And if the latter, then how could functionalism virtually be called Cusan ontology, as he states on p. 151?

2.5. *Misapprehensions.* Rombach's misconceptions and misstatements are legion. For example, he makes the following assertion: "Insofar as (1) the world is the individual and (2) the individual possesses, as its content, nothing other than the world itself, everything is connected with everything, i.e., each thing is contained in each. '*Quodlibet in quolibet*.'"⁸¹ However, this is not an accurate account of the doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet*; for as Nicholas states this doctrine (viz., in *DI* II, 5), it has reference, necessarily, to God: "From Book One it is evident that God is in all things in such way that all things are in Him; and it is now evident that God is in all things through the mediation of the universe, as it were. Hence, it is evident that all is in all and each in each."

Rombach thinks that, for Nicholas, "*Quiditas absoluta* is a thing much better than this thing is itself. God is this pond more than this pond is itself . . . God is a thing 'precisely,' whereas this thing is only approximately itself—a disorderly copy of itself."⁸² Once again, however, Rombach does not document this claim. And, once again, we need not be surprised at the absence of documentation, since Nicholas nowhere makes the claim. In *DI* I, 16 he does state that God, as Infinite Essence, is the most congruent and most precise measure of all essences. But this statement neither means nor implies that God is a given thing more than this thing is itself. On the contrary, with regard to things in their unfolded state, God is not any of all things!⁸³ Moreover, the passage in *DI* I, 16 neither means nor implies that a thing is only approximately itself, that it is a copy of itself. Though Nicholas does teach that no thing is a perfect thing *of its kind*, he does not teach that a thing is a *copy of itself*.

According to Rombach, Nicholas claims that finite beings are God in nothing (*Deus in nihilo*), God as created (*Deus creatus*), God as restricted to a contingent condition (*Deus occasionatus*).⁸⁴ However, regarding the expressions

"*Deus creatus*" and "*Deus occasionatus*," Rombach neglects Nicholas's very important word "*quasi*" ("as if," "as it were").⁸⁵ Moreover, Nicholas does not mean that a creature is God as created, God as restricted; he means that a creature is, *as it were*, a created god, a god manqué. Similarly, Nicholas does not say that finite beings are God as present in nothing. What he says is that "the plurality of things arises from the fact that God is present in nothing."⁸⁶ However, for a plurality to arise from the fact of God's presence is not equivalent to that plurality's being God—something which Nicholas does not maintain. Because of the foregoing misconstruals, Rombach's further inference does not follow: "The possibility of the dispersion of primordial Oneness and Simplicity can only be understood if we conceive beings functionalistically. The fact that Cusa regarded this presupposition as a clarification of the relationship between identity and difference is to his enormous credit within intellectual history. It makes him the Father of the modern, scientific mode of thought."⁸⁷

"Nothingness," writes Rombach, "is the viewpoint under which the One Content branches out into a plurality. This plurality is *correctly* seen if the particulars are viewed in strictest connection with the whole (functionalism). It is seen *falsely* if solitary particulars are viewed as themselves, i.e., as respective beings (substantialism)."⁸⁸ Yet, what reason does Rombach have for judging—on Nicholas's behalf—that the one viewpoint is correct and the other incorrect? This particular judgment is here question-begging, since it is based on no textual support whatsoever but is the product of Rombach's preconception.

Rombach indirectly boosts his functionalist interpretation by minimizing such texts as the following, which he does not even bother to cite: "Aristotle was right in dividing all the things in the world into substance and accident."⁸⁹ "Individuating principles cannot come together in one individual in such harmonious comparative relation as in another [individual]; thus, through itself each thing is one

and is perfect in the way it can be."⁹⁰ Rather than taking such texts as decisive, Rombach takes them as evidence that Nicholas's functionalism is inchoate: "In his [i.e., Nicholas's] concept of *function* the viewpoint of substance still figures in."⁹¹ According to Rombach, Nicholas's ontology is even contradictory—unless we keep separate the substance dimension, the functionalist dimension, and the identity dimension, recognizing that these constitute different ontologies, which have nothing to do with one another. When we examine Rombach's examples of statements which, if not kept separate, are contradictory, then we see just how inchoate are Rombach's own ideas about Nicholas's texts. On the one hand, functionalist ontology is said to posit a radical separation of the world from God, in that the world is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself. On the other hand, the ontology of identity posits an absolute identity of all beings, in that everything which is is God.⁹² Unfortunately for Rombach, Nicholas nowhere maintains that the world is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself. Instead, he subscribes to the view that the world was created *ex nihilo* by God⁹³ and that we cannot know the quiddity of the world unless we know the Divine Quidity.⁹⁴ Since Rombach once again cites no Cusan text, it is difficult to know what possible passage he might have in mind when he makes the foregoing assertion. Perhaps he is thinking of a passage in *DI II*: "A created thing has from God the fact that it is one, distinct, and united to the universe However, it does not have from God (nor from any positive cause but [only] contingently) the fact that its oneness exists in plurality, its distinctness in confusion, and its union in discord."⁹⁵ But even this passage would not support his point.

Contrary to Rombach, Nicholas does not have three different ontologies; nor do these alleged ontologies give rise, systematically, to propositions that are contradictory. We have already seen a host of mistakes which Rombach

makes in "eliciting" functionalist ontology from Nicholas's texts. Not the least of his mistakes is his misconstrual of the statement "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."⁹⁶ From this passage, together with Nicholas's statement, in *DI II*, 5, that everything is in everything, Rombach "elicits" functionalism: (a) from any given fact in the whole world, the state of the world as a whole can be read off;⁹⁷ (b) the individual is the whole;⁹⁸ (c) nothing has its being in itself;⁹⁹ (d) nothing about a thing is determined otherwise than through its ordering toward the framework;¹⁰⁰ etc. But none of these tenets is either asserted or implied by Nicholas, whose statements do not resemble *a* through *d* and whose examples also are completely different. In *DI II*, 4 and 5 Nicholas offers two examples which are especially noteworthy. For they are offered in order to explain the sense of such statements as "in the moon the universe is the moon." The first example is the following: "*Universe* bespeaks *universality*—i.e., a oneness of many things. Accordingly, just as humanity is neither Socrates nor Plato but in Socrates is Socrates and in Plato is Plato, so is the universe in relation to all things."¹⁰¹ None of Rombach's points, *a* through *d*, accord with this example. For instance, in a world consisting of Socrates and Plato, and their humanity, it would not be true that from a knowledge of Socrates, someone could, in principle, read off the entire truth about Plato—and, consequently, the entire truth about the world as a whole. Moreover, neither Socrates nor Plato is humanity—let alone being the whole world. And there is nothing in the example to suggest that Socrates and Plato do not exist in themselves. (In *DI II*, 6 we are told that universals exist only in particulars and that in a particular they are contractedly the particular.) Finally, Socrates' being is independent of Plato's, so that Socrates' death *need not* diminish Plato's being, though it *may indeed* modify it by inducing grief.¹⁰²

Nicholas's second example is the following:

Since the eye cannot actually be the hands, the feet, and all the other members, it is content with being the eye; and the foot [is content with being] the foot. And all members contribute [something] to one another, so that each is that which it is in the best way it can be. Neither the hand nor the foot is in the eye; but in the eye they are the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man. And in like manner, in the foot all the members [are the foot] insofar as the foot is immediately in the man. Thus, each member through each member is immediately in the man; and the man, or the whole, is in each member through each member, just as in the parts the whole is in each part through each part.¹⁰³

Just as the first example does not accord with Rombach's points *a* through *d*, so this example also does not. For instance, it is not the case that from a knowledge of a man's hands we can, in principle, arrive at a knowledge of his humanity—or even of every other organ in his body. (At least Nicholas, who is not a chiromancer, does not believe this.) Moreover, the hand is not the man, though it is the man's hand.¹⁰⁴ And there is nothing in the example to suggest (1) that the hand owes its being either to all the other organs or to the man or (2) that the man or the other organs owe their being to the hand. Finally, the man and the other organs can function without the hand, even though the perfection of the man depends upon his having two hands and even though the hand would not continue to be a hand apart from the body.¹⁰⁵

Though Nicholas teaches that the various *functions* of the body contribute to the man's perfection, he does not teach *functionalism*. He does think that the whole is in the part. But in the part the whole is present not qua whole but qua that part; moreover, the whole is in the part only insofar as the part is immediately in the whole. Because the whole is present in the part in one way and the part is present in the whole in another way, the whole is not identical with the part, and the part is not identical with the whole. To say, as Nicholas does, that in the part the whole is the part is not at all tantamount to saying, *simpliciter*, that the whole is the part.

Nicholas's motivation in propounding the view that in the sun the universe is the sun—that all things are in all things—arises in conjunction with his wanting to consider the universe as so perfect that no one of its parts “envies” another, so to speak.¹⁰⁶ Each thing in the universe is content to be what it is; and no thing in the universe could be more perfect and still be that thing, for each thing (apart from its having been injured or damaged) is as perfect as it can be.¹⁰⁷ Each thing, in its functioning, is of use to each other thing, even though it does not *aim* to be of such use.¹⁰⁸

Nicholas's way of showing how it is that all things can be content to be what they are seems strange to the contemporary mind, which cannot easily remain sanguine about such claims as “In the eye the hand is the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man.” The reason for this contemporary sense of disquietude can be found in the triumph of empiricism: there is no observable difference between a hand in which all other things are present as the hand itself and a hand in which they are not present at all. Yet, Nicholas himself is not perturbed by the nonempirical character of his doctrine. For he is making a theologico-metaphysical point—a point which he does not suppose to be justifiable on an observational basis. Accordingly, when we interpret his doctrine of *quodlibet in quolibet*, we must recognize that it cannot be separated from his doctrine of God: he does not say merely that in the moon the universe is the moon; he says that in the moon the universe is the moon *because* (1) all things are in *God* through the “mediation” of the universe, as it were, and (2) through the “mediation” of the universe, as it were, *God* is in all things. To detach the doctrine of God and to press toward a philosophical functionalism, as Rombach's interpretation does, is necessarily to distort the fact that Nicholas of Cusa's philosophical roots are deeply and inextirpatably implanted in the medieval world.

We must remember that Nicholas's example of the members of the body is an example in which the *members*

are the *parts* and the *man* (not the body) is the *whole*. Now, by “the man” (“*homo*”) Nicholas means the *human nature*, which consists of a body and a soul; he is not considering the man to be the mere sum of the bodily parts. Similarly, the whole of the universe is in one respect not the mere summation of its parts: viz., the respect that it, too, has a “soul,” so to speak.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the perfection of the universe so exceeds the perfection of each of the parts that no part could be more perfect independently of its ordering to the universe.¹¹⁰ The very distance between the stars has been so harmoniously fixed by the Creator that if these distances were altered, the stars—indeed, the universe itself—would no longer exist, since the cosmos would have become chaos.¹¹¹ Rombach seems to think that Nicholas has no notion of *cosmos*.¹¹² Yet, in *De Possesse* 72 Nicholas accepts the name “cosmos” as appropriate for the world; and he seems to adopt the concept as well as the name. In *DI*, by contrast, he does not use the word “cosmos” but, instead, talks about the *harmony* of all things. This harmony is emphasized to such an extent that creation is regarded as instantaneous: there never was a *time* when all the elements of the universe did not exist.¹¹³

There is little need to dwell upon Rombach's many other misconceptions and inaccuracies. Perhaps a final example will suffice. On p. 169 he writes: “Above all, we must proceed on the basis of the consideration that in *DI* II, 4 Cusa desires to attain nothing other than clarity regarding the following: viz., that only as God is ‘mediated through the world’ is He one with things.”¹¹⁴ But in II, 4 Nicholas does not at all affirm that *God is one with things* through the mediation of the world. He does not even say that *in the world* (or *in a given thing*) God is one with the world (or one with that thing). What he says is

We can [now] understand the following: (1) how it is that God, who is most simple Oneness and exists in the one universe, is in all things as if subsequently and through the mediation of the universe, and (2) [how it is that as if] through the mediation of the one universe the plurality of things is in God.

And what he denies is that "God is in the sun sun and in the moon moon." For it is rather the case that, in them, "He is that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference."

2.6. *Unclarities and imprecisions.* From its very beginning Rombach's interpretation of Nicholas of Cusa is imprecise. For in his opening paragraph on p. 150 he asserts:

It is scarcely possible to overestimate the importance of Cusa for the development of the modern scientific disciplines [*Wissenschaft*] The horizon of his thought not only encompasses the sphere of Descartes' thinking and contains the most important impulses for the metaphysics of Spinoza and of Leibniz but also is exemplary and fundamental for the Kantian turn in philosophy and, therewith, for German Idealism too.¹¹⁵

Now, this statement certainly appears to be making an *historical* claim; for it talks about Cusa's importance to the *development* of the modern scientific disciplines, about how his thought contains *impulses* for the metaphysics of Spinoza and of Leibniz, and about how it is *fundamental* for the Kantian *turn* in philosophy. Rombach seems to be doing more than merely suggesting that, say, from the viewpoint of the history of ideas, we can develop a narrative which conceptually links Nicholas with the modern period. Given any ordinary understanding of his words, he must be interpreted as asserting that certain developments within modern philosophy result, in part, from the *influence* of Nicholas's thought. Yet, his footnote leads us to wonder what in the world he intends his point really to be. For in the note he acknowledges that Nicholas had almost no historical influence at all: "After Giordano Bruno, and with Bruno, Cusa was forgotten. The rediscovery of him depends on the rediscovery of Bruno. F. H. Jacobi presents an excerpt of Bruno's *De la causa* as an appendix to his book on Spinoza. Also Hamann, Schelling, and Goethe know only Bruno. Even Hegel knows nothing of Cusa. The first one who mentions his name is the outsider B. Clemens

(*Giordano Bruno und Nicolaus von Cusa. Eine philosophische Abhandlung.* First published in parts in 1844)."¹¹⁶

Turning to another topic, we find a series of unclarities in Rombach's interpretation of Nicholas's doctrine of *world*. First of all, the following idea is unclear: "Precisely because (1) the world nowhere has a necessary boundary and (2) in its own way it extends *ad infinitum*, it must at some point experience its factual limitation as a restriction *from outside*."¹¹⁷ That is, it is not clear why the world has to *experience* any factual limitation at all—let alone from outside. Indeed, talk about the world's *experiencing* limitation is bizarre. Furthermore, Nicholas nowhere so much as hints along these lines. Secondly, the following statement on Rombach's p. 161 is misleading: "The infinity of the world is identical with its finitude; thus, Cusa can speak of the *finita infinitas* of the world."¹¹⁸ The word "identical" is objectionable because, for Nicholas, the world is infinite in one respect and finite in another. Thirdly, the following sentence is cryptic: "To be sure, the universe, *by its very essence*, extends—on all sides and in every respect—*ad infinitum*. Nevertheless, this extending stops *de facto* at a determinate place, with the result that the world does not fulfill its own infinity."¹¹⁹ The problem here is to give a sense to the universe's having an infinity which could or could not be *fulfilled*. This entire mode of discourse seems totally foreign to Nicholas's texts.

A major difficulty with Rombach's whole approach stems from the fact that no effort is made to distinguish, for the reader, the times when something is being ascribed to Nicholas and the times when only the logic of functionalism is being worked out, independently of anything Nicholas himself says. For instance, how much of the long discussion about *world* is really being attributed to Nicholas? And, likewise, how much in the section on *cosmos*? Or what about the section entitled "*Auflösung der Ontologie überhaupt*"?

Let us take a final example of an imprecision. On p. 173

Rombach declares, on behalf of Nicholas: "A thing could not exist alone; it could not constitute itself. It needs passage through otherness in order to come to itself."¹²⁰ Taken in an ordinary way, this statement implies that, on Nicholas's view, the universe could not consist of one object only (e.g., a star), which would obtain "passage through otherness" by virtue of the fact that its parts were other than one another. If this is what Rombach has in mind, then he owes us some documentation of the point, which, *prima facie*, is foreign to Nicholas's ideas. Of course, Rombach might be using the word "thing" in a special philosophical way, so that his point could be construed as: 'It is not possible, on Nicholas's view, that there be a universe consisting of an absolutely simple object, i.e., an object having no parts; for God alone is Absolute Simplicity.' If this is his point, then it does accord with Nicholas's texts. But to obtain this understanding of Rombach's words we would have to strain the ordinary meaning of the German language.

2. 7. *Lack of adequate documentation.* We have already noticed many instances of Rombach's inadequate documentation. Perhaps two further typical examples will suffice for now. On p. 179 we are told that Nicholas, in his notes, seems to anticipate the Copernican system; but we are not given the reference to which note and to where it is published, if at all. Secondly, Rombach mentions, on p. 169, John Wenck of Herrenberg's complaints against Nicholas; but no reference to Wenck or his work is furnished.

In last analysis, Rombach has not showed that Nicholas of Cusa operates with three autonomous ontologies, one of which is functionalism. Rather, through his unrigorous handling of Nicholas's texts, his convoluted interweaving of what is and what is not Nicholas's doctrine, and his pervasive incoherence and imprecision, he has presented us with an exegetical hodge-podge. This jumbled interpretation obscures the true thought of the Renaissance figure

Nicholas of Cusa, while at the same time betraying Rombach's own unfamiliarity with the twentieth-century science of hermeneutics.

III

Now that the defects of Rombach's account have been uncovered, a concluding—textually oriented—interpretive résumé of *DI* II, 4 and 5 can be presented. But beforehand let us take note of some passages, in II, 4 and 5, which, by posing special exegetical pitfalls, render these two chapters more difficult to understand than almost any other pericope in the Cusan corpus.

3.1. *Special exegetical difficulties.* 3.1.1. An initial problem is that of knowing how to construe the phrase "*id quod sunt omnia*" in the clause (1) "*Quae absolute est id quod sunt omnia . . .*"¹²¹ and in the clause (2) "*mundus . . . existens contracte id quod sunt omnia . . .*"¹²² Is the phrase tantamount, in its context, to "*essentia*"?—so that what is meant is, respectively, "Absolute Maximality is, absolutely, the Essence of all things" and "The world . . . is, contractedly, the essence of all things." This reading seems to make perfectly good sense. But when we compare the latter sentence with the sentence "*Universum . . . in ipsis est id quod sunt contracte*,"¹²³ we begin to have doubts about whether the phrase "*id quod sunt*" does refer to essence. Yet, if in the first two sentences "*id quod sunt omnia*" is not tantamount to "*essentia*," then how else should these sentences be interpreted?—especially sentence 1.¹²⁴

3.1.2. A further difficulty arises with regard to the punctuation of II, 4 (113: 4-16). There is a significant difference between Wilpert's punctuation in the Latin-German edition (1967) and Klibansky's in Volume One of the *Opera Omnia* (1932). Moreover, even where Wilpert and Klibansky agree, there are doubts about whether their agreed-upon punctuation is fully acceptable.¹²⁵ Is there a clearly *best* way to punctuate this passage?

3.1.3. In II, 4 we have to make a number of crucial judgments about whether or not a word or a phrase which is not actually present is meant to be *understood*. For example, how are the following four sentences to be interpreted?: (1) "*Cum quodlibet non possit esse actu omnia, cum sit contractum, contrahit omnia, ut sint ipsum.*"¹²⁶ (2) "*Unde omnia sine pluralitate praecesserunt quodlibet ordine naturae.*"¹²⁷ (3) "*Non sunt igitur plura in quolibet actu, sed omnia sine pluralitate sunt id ipsum.*"¹²⁸ (4) "*Deus autem non est in sole sol et in luna luna, sed id quod est sol et luna sine pluralitate et diversitate.*"¹²⁹ In each of these sentences, what (if anything) needs to be supplied by a translator or an interpreter, on the grounds that it is tacitly present?¹³⁰

3.1.4. In the sentence "*Non est ergo aliud dicere 'quodlibet esse in quolibet' quam deum per omnia esse in omnibus et omnia per omnia esse in deo*"¹³¹ does "*omnia*" sometimes mean *universum* and sometimes mean, as at II, 4 (116: 16), *omnia particularia*? That is, is the sentence equivalent to?: "*Non est ergo aliud dicere 'quodlibet esse in quolibet' quam deum per universum esse in omnibus particularibus et omnia particularia per universum esse in deo.*"¹³² If so, then just where else can we—should we—make such substitutions? For instance, is "*Deus est absque diversitate in omnibus, quia quodlibet in quolibet, et omnia in deo, quia omnia in omnibus*"¹³³ equivalent to?: "*Deus est absque diversitate in omnibus, quia quodlibet in quolibet, et omnia in deo, quia quodlibet in quolibet.*" Moreover, to just what extent is Nicholas's choice of "*universum*," "*omnia*," and "*quodlibet*" governed by the desire to avoid repetition, for stylistic reasons?¹³⁴

3.1.5. How is the following sentence to be construed?: "*Deus, cum sit immensus, non est nec in sole nec in luna, licet in illis sit id quod sunt absolute*"¹³⁵ Does it mean ". . . although in them He is that which they are absolutely" or ". . . although in them He is, absolutely, that which they are"?¹³⁶

3.1.6. In II, 5 (117: 15-16) is "*videntur*," in the sentence

"*omnia videntur quodlibet praecedere*" to be taken as "are seen" or as "seem"?¹³⁷

3.1.7. What is meant by?: "In each thing all things are tranquil, since *one degree [of contractedness] could not exist without another*"¹³⁸ Does it imply functionalism, or does it bespeak something else? For example, does it indicate?: (1) that there must be degrees of contractedness, since no two things can be in any respect exactly alike and (2) that each thing's degree of perfection contributes to another's, so that without this interrelationship there would not be a cosmos.¹³⁹

3.1.8. How, if at all, can we render consistent the statement that "each actually existing thing is *immediately* in God, as is also the universe"¹⁴⁰ and the statement that "the plurality of things is in God as if through the *mediation* of the one universe"?¹⁴¹

3.1.9. What is the sense of "Everything which exists actually, exists in God, since He is the actuality of all things"?¹⁴² Does "exists in God" here mean the same thing as "is enfolded in God"? Or is it rather the case that there are two senses in which a thing exists in God?: viz., it exists₁ in God as enfolded in God ontologically prior to its creation; and even in its created (i.e., unfolded) state it also exists₂ in God. And is it this latter sense which also accords with the later statement, in III, 4?: viz., "All things are in God according to themselves with a [respective] difference of degree."¹⁴³

Given all the foregoing complicated exegetical issues, we need not be surprised that Rombach, who pays so little attention to what Nicholas says, should have strayed so far from what Nicholas means. The following interpretive résumé of *DI* II, 4 and 5—expanded by reference to other passages in *DI* and spoken as if by Nicholas himself—cannot compete with the bold inventiveness of Rombach's speculations. Nevertheless, it does purport to excel in accuracy.