

**A MISCELLANY
ON NICHOLAS OF CUSA**

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**THE ARTHUR J. BANNING PRESS
MINNEAPOLIS**

De Quaerendo Deum

The translation of *De Quaerendo Deum* was made from the Latin text contained in Volume IV (= *Opuscula I*) of the Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1959).

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 93-72933

ISBN 0-938060-43-0

Printed in the United States of America

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ON SEEKING GOD
(*De Quaerendo Deum*)

O truly venerable Brother-in-Christ,¹ in complying with your desire, as best I can, I will here attempt to repeat in writing, briefly and clearly, that which I endeavored to explain to the congregation at the Feast of Epiphany concerning the analysis of God's name. [I will do so] in order that meditating may be stimulated on the part of us both and that by the ascent of our intellects our inner man² may gradually be transformed from light unto light³—[transformed] I to the point that [having attained] unto clear recognition through the light of glory, it may enter into the joy of its Lord.⁴

To begin with, Excellent Brother, you well know that when on the Areopagus⁵ Paul (who says that he was caught up unto the third heaven, to the point of beholding sacred mysteries)⁶ preached the truth to those men who, in Athens, were then devoting themselves to the very celebrated study of philosophy, he stated in his sermon that he wanted to proclaim to them the good news about the Unknown God, to whom those pagans had consecrated an altar. And when he proceeded to explain this matter, he stated that God had created all men in one man and that He had granted a definite period of time for men's being in this world, in order that they might seek Him, to see whether they could gropingly find Him. And Paul added that, nonetheless, God is not far from anyone, since in Him we exist and live and are moved. Then, reproving idolatry, he added that in men's thought there can be no likeness at all to God.

Whenever reading the Acts of the Apostles, I marvel at Paul's procedure. For he wanted to make known to [these] philosophers the Unknown God, whom thereafter he affirms to be unable to be conceived by any human intellect. Therefore, God is made known by the fact that every intellect is too small to befigure or conceive Him. But Paul names Him *God*—or *Theos* in Greek. So given the fact that man entered this world in order to seek God and to cleave unto Him once found and by cleaving unto Him to find rest: since man cannot seek God, and grope for Him, in this sensible and corporeal world (for God is spirit rather than body and cannot be attained by the intellect's ab-

stracting, since man cannot conceive of any likeness to God, as Paul said), then how is it that God can be sought in order to be found? Assuredly, unless this world were useful to the seeker, man would be sent in vain to the world for the purpose of seeking God. Hence, it must be the case (1) that this world offers assistance to the seeker and (2) that the seeker knows that neither in this world nor in anything which man conceives is there any likeness to God.

- 19** Let us now determine whether the name “*Theos*,” or “God,” offers us assistance in these matters. For the name “*Theos*” is not that name of God which excels every concept.⁷ For that [name] which cannot be conceived, remains ineffable. For to express is to externalize an inward concept by means of words or other befiguring signs. Therefore, the name of Him whose likeness is not conceived is not known. Hence, “*Theos*” is the name of God only insofar as God is sought, by human beings, in this world. So let him-who-seeks take careful account of the fact that in the name “*Theos*” there is enfolded a certain way-of-seeking whereby God is found, so that He can be groped for. “*Theos*” is derived from “*theoro*,” which means “I see” and “I hasten.”⁸ Therefore, the seeker ought to hasten by means of sight, so that he can attain unto God, who sees all things. Accordingly, vision bears a likeness to the pathway by means of which a seeker ought to advance. Consequently, in the presence of the eye of intellectual vision we must magnify the nature of sensible vision and construct, from that nature, a ladder of ascent.
- 20** Our [sensible] vision results from the following: (1) a bright and clear spirit that descends from the top of the brain unto the organ of the eye; (2) a colored object that reproduces, in the eye,⁹ an image similar to itself; and (3) the concurrent presence of external light. Therefore, in the realm of visible things only color is found. However, sight is not of the realm of visible things but is established above all visible things. Accordingly, sight has no color, for it is not of the realm of colored things. So that it can see every color, sight is not contracted to any color; so that its judgment may be true and free, sight has no more of one color than of another; so that its power may be [directed] to all colors, sight is not restricted by any color. Sight is unintermingled with colors, in order that its vision may be accurate.
- 21** We learn by experience that sight is deceived by a colored medium—[e.g.,] glass or a transparent stone or something else. Therefore, sight is so pure and so without any blemish from visible things that

in comparison with it all visible things are a certain darkness and are a kind of material density in comparison with the spirit of vision.

22 But when through our intellect we view the world of visible things and ask whether a knowledge of sight is found in the visible world, [we recognize that] that entire world of color has no knowledge of sight, since [that world] does not attain unto anything not-colored. And if we said that sight exists but is not something colored, then if the world of visible things wanted to make a befiguring likeness of sight, it would not find among any of its concepts anything similar to sight. For its own concept cannot be without [reference to] color. And since within the circumference of its realm [the world of visible things] does not find sight or anything similar to sight, or analogous to sight, it cannot attain unto sight. Or better, it cannot attain unto [the knowledge] that sight is something, for it does not attain unto anything outside [the realm of] color; rather, it judges that whatever is not-colored is not anything. Consequently, no name among all the names that can be named in that realm [of visible things] befits sight—not, for example, the name “white” or the name “black” or the name of any of the mixed colors. For neither the name “white and not-white” conjointly, nor the name “black and not-black” conjointly, [befits, sight]. Therefore, whether [the world of visible things] takes note of all the names of its realm singularly and disjunctively, or whether it views the names of contrary colors conjointly, or whether it views the conjunction of all names nameable [within its realm], it does not attain unto anything regarding the name and the essence of sight.

23 Suppose that someone made the foregoing claim (since color is discriminated and known not by itself but by a higher cause, viz., sight). And suppose that he asked all visible things whether this claim were true and how they would conceive of that cause. They would reply that that ruler who named them, viz., sight, is (as far as pertains to whatever can be conceived [by them]), something *best* and *most beautiful*. And when they attempt to fashion a concept of this best and most beautiful thing, they resort to color, without [reference to] which they cannot construct a concept. Therefore, they say that sight is more beautiful than any white color whatsoever, for in the realm of color the color white is not so beautiful that it cannot be more beautiful and is not so bright and resplendent that it cannot be brighter. Hence, none of the visible things maintain that the king of their realm is himself any color that is actually present among the visible things of [that]

realm. Instead, they would say that the king [viz., sight] is the ultimum of [all] the possible beauty of the brightest and most perfect color.

- 24 Such points, O Brother, and many other similar ones you see to be most true. Ascend, then, by means of a similarity of relationship, from sight unto hearing and unto taste, smell, and touch—and, thereafter, unto the communal sense, which is situated above all [five] senses, even as hearing is above things audible, taste above things tasteable, smell above things discernible by smell, and touch above things tangible.
- 25 Thereafter, continue upward unto the intellect, which is above all [those] intelligible things that are rational. For rational things are apprehended by the intellect. But the intellect is not found in the realm of rational things, for the intellect is as the eye, and rational things are as colors. And if you like, dwell upon [this] reflection of yours, so that you may well apprehend how it is that the intellect is like unto free sight: viz., it is the true and simple judge of every [kind] of reason, and in it there is no mingling of the kinds of reason, so that there may be a clear intuitive judgment of the [kinds of] reason among the variety of reasons of that realm. For example, the intellect judges *this* to be a necessary reason, *that* to be a possible reason, a contingent reason, an impossible reason, a demonstrative reason, a sophistical and pseudo-reason, or a probable reason, and so on—even as sight judges *this* color to be white and *that* color not to be white but black, or judges *this* color to be more white than black, and so on. Within the entire realm of reasons the intellect is not attained. Instead, when the world-of-reasons, or the universe-of-reasons, wants to befigure its appointed king and judge, it speaks of him as the terminal and ultimate end of perfection.
- 26 Now, intellectual natures likewise cannot deny that a king is appointed over them. And as visible natures maintain that the king appointed over them is the ultimate end of all visible perfection, so intellectual natures, which are natures that *intuit* truth, state that their king is the ultimate end of all the perfection that is intuitive of all things. And they name this king *Theos*, or God—on the ground that in being the completeness-of-perfection of seeing-all-things He is Beholding itself, or Intuiting itself. However, within the entire realm of intellectual powers there is found nothing to which the King Himself is similar. Nor within the entire intellectual realm is there a concept of His likeness; rather, He whose name is not understandable (al-

though His name names and discerns between all intelligible things) is above all that is conceived and understood.¹⁰ And His nature infinitely precedes—in height, simplicity, power, might, beauty, and goodness—all intellectual wisdom. For everything possessing an intellectual nature is, in comparison with Him, a shadow, a lack of power, a density, a smallness of wisdom, and so on regarding an infinite number of similar modes.

27 And so, you will be able to hasten along that pathway through which God is found—found above all sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, speech, sense, reason, and intellect. Indeed, He is found to be none of these things but to be above all things as the God of gods and King of all kings. For the King of the intellectual world is the King of the kings—and the Lord of the lords—in the universe. For He is the King of the intellectual nature, which rules over the rational. And the rational rules over the sensible, and the sensible rules over the world of sensible things—a world over which sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell preside as kings. All these kings *discern* and *behold* (or *view*)—[all of them] all the way up to the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is Beholding itself and Theos itself, or God, who has all other kings in His power. From Him all other kings have that which they have: power, beauty, being, loveliness, joyfulness, life, and every good.

28 (1) Hence, within the kingdom of the supreme maximum King, all comeliness of visible forms, variety of colors, pleasing proportion, reflection of rubies, greenness of meadows, splendor of gold, and whatever gives delight to our sight and is that in which sight, while resting [its gaze] takes delight as in the treasure of its kingdom—in the court of the great King [all] these are counted as nothing, since they are of the lowest chaff of the court. (2) Likewise, in the kingdom of hearing, the concordant resonance-of-all-voices and the pleasant harmony there, as well as the indescribable variety of all [the musical] instruments, together with those melodies from golden organs, as well as the songs of sirens and of nightingales, and all other exquisite riches of the king of the kingdom of hearing—in the court of the greatest and best King of kings [all these] are [as if] residue that adheres to the floor. (3) Likewise, every sweet and tangy and tasteful thing—from the very many paradise-like apples, the very succulent fruit, the grapes of En Gedi,¹¹ the wine of Cyprus, the honey of Athens, the grain and oil, as well as everything that India and our entire world,

its pastures, and its waters furnish for our restoration and offer to our taste—are of small moment in the court of that most powerful Originator of the world. (4) Furthermore, none of the scents of ointments and of frankincense, myrrh, and musk, and none of the redolence that belongs to the kingdom of fragrance is of any value in the great palace of the most high King. (5) Still less does anything that by its softness or smoothness delights the sense of touch [have any value there]. For the kingdom of the king of touch seems wide-ranging and extended throughout the world; but it is scarcely [the size of] a dot—indeed, is almost undetectable—with respect to the kingdom of Him who is the universe's Beginning. (6) Great seems to be that king who commands these aforementioned kings and whose vassals these kings are: viz., the communal sense, which enfolds in its power all the power of the aforementioned [senses]. Yet, [this king] is [but] a hired servant and the lowest minister in the kingdom of the King who sees and contains all things.

29 (7) Because of its incomparable loftiness the intellectual nature has obtained a kingdom above all the previously mentioned things. All the kingdoms previously named and described depend on the intellectual nature's power; and the intellectual nature is set over them as their master. But the kings of the intellectual nature belong to the family of the Maximum Leader, and they rejoice in being enrolled in His army. Nor do they wish for anything other than to be able to obtain, in the court of their Master, any station at all wherein by means of an intellectual intuition they can be renewed by Him who is called *Theos*. And all things in all the aforescribed kingdoms fret about nothing, even as also they *are* nothing in comparison with the good which they recognize in their Originator. In Him all things are divinely and super-optimally present in completeness and in themselves, but in the other kings they are present not only imperfectly and outside themselves and in a shadow, or an image, but also with a contracted distance that is incomparable and disproportional [to Him].

30 Therefore, color, which in the visible kingdom is sensed by sight, does not see but is only seeable. It does not have life and vital movement; nor does it have the perfection of a growth stem or of a substantial form. But [as regards] the senses that are present in the kingdom of the communal sense: insofar as they are particular senses they have the nature of enfolding within themselves—in the vitality and cognitive power of their sensible spirit—the form of the sensible

world. Therefore, there is no less in the kingdom of the senses than there is in the kingdom of sensible objects. Rather, everything that is present in an unfolded manner in the kingdom of sensible objects is present in the kingdom of the senses enfoldedly and vitally and in a more vigorous and more perfect way. For the kingdom of sensible objects is quiescent in the senses. Likewise, the things that belong to the kingdom of the senses are present much more clearly and perfectly in the kingdom where they exist intellectually. For a color that has an incorruptible nature in the intellectual being of the intellectual kingdom differs in perfection from a color that belongs to the sensible world—just as what is perpetual differs from what is corruptible, and intellectual life differs from death, and light differs from shadow.

31 But in the kingdom of the Omnipotent One: [this] kingdom is the King Himself; and everything in all the other kingdoms is the King Himself; color is not sensible color or intellectual color but is divine, indeed, is God Himself; whatever in the sensible world lacks movement and life and whatever has vegetative, sensitive, rational, or intellectual life is the Divine Life itself, which is Immortality itself¹² which God alone possesses; in God all things are God. In that kingdom [the King] is the joyfulness of all the joys taken in by means of the eyes, the ears, taste, touch, smell, the senses, life, movement, reason, and intellect. [He is] joyfulness that is infinite, divine, and inexpressible. And [He is] the restfulness of all joyfulness and delight; for He is *Theos*, God, Beholding, and Hastening, who sees all things, who is present in all things, and who traverses all things. All things look unto Him as unto their King. By His command all things are moved and hasten about; and every hastening unto an end of rest is [a hastening] unto Him. Therefore, *Theos*—who is the Beginning from which things flow forth, the Middle in which we are moved, and the End unto which things flow back—is everything.¹³

In the foregoing way strive, my Brother, by most diligent contemplation to seek God, for He who is everywhere cannot fail to be found if He is sought rightly. And, in particular, He is rightly sought [by us], in accordance with His name, to the end that, in accordance with His name, praise of Him [by us] may continue even up to the limits of the power of our earthly nature.

32

II

But turning now more extensively to the second section of the

topic, let us see in what manner we will be led with regard to the aforestated theory's ladder of ascent, since we are not moved toward what is altogether unknown¹⁴ And to investigate this matter, let us examine sight.

33 To begin with: in order that sight may apprehend distinctly that which is visible, two paths of light meet.¹⁵ For it is not the spirit of vision that imposes a name on colors but is rather its father's spirit, which is in it. For the spirit that descends from the brain through the optic vessels unto the eye is met by the interposed image [*species*] of the object, and a confused sensation results. The power of the sensitive nature¹⁶ takes interest in the sensation and pays attention to it in order to discriminate. Accordingly, the spirit in the eye does not discriminate but rather in that spirit a higher spirit accomplishes the discriminating.¹⁷ Indeed, by our everyday experience we ascertain, in our own cases, this [fact] to be true. For oftentimes we do not recognize passers-by, whose images (*species*) are reproduced in the eye; paying attention to other things, we do not attend to them.¹⁸ Moreover, when several people are speaking to us [at once], we understand only the one toward whom our attention is directed. Indeed, these [experiences] show it to be true that the spirit that is in the senses manages to accomplish its activity by means of a higher light, viz., [the light] of reason. Therefore, when the eye¹⁹ says *this* thing to be red [or] says *that* thing to be blue, the eye itself is not speaking; rather, the spirit of its father speaks within the eye—i.e., that spirit-of-the-sensitive-nature, to which that eye belongs.

34 But a color is still not thereby visible, even if there is present the attention of one who wants to see [it]. For [the color] must be made visible by another light, from a source that illuminates the visible. For in a shadow and in darkness what is visible is not apt to be seen. The adapting of the visible is accomplished by [external] light, which illuminates it. Therefore, inasmuch as what is visible is not apt to be seen except in light (since in and of itself what is visible cannot be conveyed into the eye), it must be illuminated, since light is of the nature of that which is conveyed in and of itself into the eye. Therefore, what is visible can be conveyed into the eye when [what is visible] is in the light, which itself has the power to be [thus] conveyed. Now, color is present in light not as in something other [than itself] but as in its own beginning. For color is only a delimitation of light in a transparent medium,²⁰ as we experience in the case of a rainbow.

For in accordance with the fact that a ray of the sun is delimited in one way or another in a vaporous cloud, one or another color is generated. Hence, it is evident that color is visible in its own beginning, viz., in light, for both external light and a visual spirit share in producing clarity. Consequently, that light which illuminates what is visible (1) is conveyed to a corresponding light and (2) brings [with it] the image-of-color, which is presented to sight.

- 35 From the foregoing, O Brother, prepare for yourself a way to inquire into how it is that the unknown God excels all that by means of which we are moved unto Him. For although it is now clearly evident to you (1) that the spirit of the sensitive nature, present within the spirit of the eye, *discriminates* and (2) that light makes the visible apt to be seen, nevertheless [remember that] sight does not apprehend either the spirit itself or light. For light is not of the realm of colors, since it is not colored. Therefore, it is not found in any realm over which the eye rules. Therefore, light is unknown to the eye but, nevertheless, is pleasing to sight. Hence, just as the discriminating reason is that which, in the eye,²¹ discriminates between visible things, so the intellectual spirit is that which, in reason, understands, and the Divine Spirit is the one who illuminates the [understanding] intellect. But the sensitive nature's own discriminating light—present in the eye, the ear, the tongue, the nostrils, and the nerve in which touch flourishes—is *one* light, received variously in the various [sense] organs, so that in accordance with the variety of organs it discriminates variously between the things of the sensible world. And that light is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the senses, for the senses exist only for the purpose of discriminating between sensible objects. And [the senses] are not derived from anything other than from that spirit; nor are they moved in anything other [than in it]. Moreover, all the senses are alive in that spirit. For the life of sight is to see, and the life of hearing is to hear. And the more perfect this life is, the more discriminating it is. For example, that sight which the more perfectly discriminates the visible is the more perfect—and similarly regarding hearing. Therefore, life and perfection, joyfulness and quiescence, and whatever all the senses desire are present in the discriminating spirit;²² and they have from this spirit whatever they have. And when the [sense] organs become infected and, in them, the life is diminished in activity, it is not diminished in the discriminating spirit, from which they receive again this same life when the blemish or weakness is removed.

36 In like manner, conceive this same matter²³ as it regards the intellect, which is the light of discriminating reason; and from the intellect elevate yourself unto God, who is the light of the intellect.

When in these ways you hasten onwards by means of what is found to be true regarding sight, you will learn that just as discriminating light [is all that which is present] in the senses, and intellectual light [is all that which is present] in reasons, so our God, forever blessed, is all that which is present in each thing that is.²⁴ [And you will learn] that God is the one from whom creatures have that which they are and have their life and movement. And in His light all our knowledge is present, so that we are not the ones who know but rather God [knows] in us.²⁵ And when we ascend unto a knowledge of Him, then even though He is unknown to us,²⁶ nevertheless we are moved only in His light, which is conveyed unto our [intellectual] spirit, so that in His light we proceed onwards unto Him. Therefore, just as *being* depends on Him, so too does *being known*. [By comparison,] just as the being of color depends on material light, so too a knowledge of color depends on this same light, as I stated earlier.

37 Therefore, we must recognize that among His works our marvelous God²⁷ created light, which by its simplicity excels other material things, so that (1) light is a medium between spiritual natures and material natures and (2) through light this material world ascends, as if through its own simplicity, unto the spiritual world. For [light] brings forms [*figurae*] to sight, so that in this way the form (*forma*) of the sensible world ascends unto reason and unto the intellect and, by means of the intellect, attains its end in God. Indeed, the world was brought into being in such way that (1) by participation in light this material world is that which it is and (2) the more fully material things partake of light, the more perfect they are thought to be in their material genus—as we experience to occur gradationally in the case of the elements. Likewise, creatures that have a vital spirit are more perfect the more fully they partake of the light of life. Similarly, creatures having intellectual life are more perfect the more they partake of the light of intellectual life. However, God Himself cannot be partaken of²⁸ but is Infinite Light that shines forth in all things—even as discriminating light²⁹ [shines forth] in the senses. Now, the various delimitations of [Infinite] Light, which cannot be partaken of or be intermingled, display the various creatures—even as in a transparent medium the various delimitations of material light display vari-

ous colors, although the light itself remains unintermixable.

38

III

I do not doubt, O Brother, that on the basis of the foregoing [instructions] you will be able to proceed, clearly, to apprehend that just as color is not visible except by means of light—that is to say, just as color can ascend unto quiescence and unto its own end only in the light of its own beginning—so, indeed, our intellectual nature cannot attain unto the joyfulness of quietude except in the light of its intellectual beginning. And just as sight itself does not discriminate but in it a discriminating spirit discriminates, so too in the case of our intellect, illuminated by the divine light of its own Beginning, in accordance with its aptitude for [that light] to enter:³⁰ in and of ourselves we will neither understand nor live by means of our intellectual life; rather, God, who is Infinite Life, will live in us. And this is that [state of] eternal joyfulness, where eternal intellectual life dwells in us in closest unity and excels, in inexpressible joyfulness, every concept on the part of living creatures—even as in our senses, when fully intact, discriminating reason lives, and even as in most clear reason, intellect lives.

39

It is now evident to us that we are drawn unto the unknown God by means of the motion of the light of the grace of Him who cannot be apprehended in any other way than by His revealing Himself. Moreover, He wills to be sought; He wills also to give, to those who are seeking, the light without which they cannot seek Him. He wills to be sought; He wills also to be apprehended, for He wills to disclose and manifest Himself to those who are seeking [Him]. Therefore, He is sought [by those who come] with the desire of apprehending; and when He is sought with maximum desire, then He is sought contemplatively, on the pathway that leads him-who-is-hastening-onward unto the quiescence of motion. Hence, for attaining unto wisdom, we do not at all walk rightly unless we seek [God] by means of maximum desire. And when He is sought in that way, He is sought in the right way, wherein, assuredly, He will be found by His revealing Himself. No other way has been granted to us than that way; and in all the teaching of the saints, who have attained unto wisdom, no other [way] has been left for us.

40

Moreover, those who are proud-hearted, who are presumptuous, who seem to themselves to be wise, those who trusted in their own

intelligence, who in their proud ascent deemed themselves to be like the Most High, who exalted themselves unto a knowledge of the gods—all these have erred, since such ones as they foreclosed to themselves the pathway to wisdom when they deemed there to be no other [way] than that [way] which they measured by their own intellect. And in their vanities they fell short and embraced the tree of knowledge but did not apprehend the tree of life. Therefore, the end of those philosophers who did not honor God was none other than to perish in their own vanities.

41 But those who recognized that they could attain unto wisdom and unto abiding intellectual life only if these were given by the gift of grace, and who recognized that the goodness of Almighty God would be so great that He would hearken unto them calling upon His name— [these] have been saved. Accordingly, they have become humble, acknowledging that they are ignorant; and they have undertaken to live as desirers of eternal wisdom. And this is the life of the virtuous who are proceeding onward in their desire for that other life, which is commended by the saints. Moreover, the tradition of the holy prophets and of those who have obtained the grace of divine light in this lifetime is none other than the following: viz., that the one who desires to approach unto intellectual life and immortal divine wisdom must first believe that God exists and is the Giver of all best gifts;³¹ that we are to live in fear of Him and to journey onwards in love of Him; that with complete humility we are to seek from Him immortal life itself; and that whatever is ordained unto immortal life, so that immortal life can be acquired, is to be embraced in supreme religious devotion and in most earnest worship.

42 You now recognize, O Brother, that no virtue whatsoever—nor any worship or law or learning—justifies us so that we obtain because of our merit, this most excellent gift. However, virtuousness of life, observance of the commandments, outward devotion, mortification of the flesh, contempt of the world, and other such things rightly accompany the one who seeks the divine life and eternal wisdom. If these things are not present to the seeker, then it is evident that he is not on the pilgrim pathway but off it. However, from the works that rightly accompany a pilgrim we can gather signs by which [to ascertain] that he is not off the right pathway but is rather on it. For he who desires with utmost intensity to apprehend eternal wisdom, places nothing before it in his love. He fears offending against it, he affirms that in com-

parison with it all other things are nothing, and these other things he counts as nothing and despises. And he bends his every effort toward being conformable to this beloved wisdom, knowing that he cannot be conformable to it if he clings to that other, corruptible worldly wisdom [*prudencia mundi*] or to sensible delight. Hence, leaving behind all things, he hastens expeditiously onward in the fervor of love; as the hart desires a fount of waters, so his soul desires God.³² Indeed, then, we do not merit, on the basis of the works that we have done, the incomparable treasure of glory. Rather, [God] loves those who love Him, for He is love (*caritas et amor*); and He gives Himself to the soul, in order that the soul may enjoy this optimum Good forever.

43 You see now, O Brother, for what reason you entered into this world (as I stated in the beginning section): viz., in order to seek God. You see that He is said to be *Theos* with respect to those who seek [Him] and that you can seek Him by a certain pathway. If this pathway is tread upon by you, it will become your pathway and will become better known to you. And on it you will be delighted because of its pleasantness and because of the abundance of the fruit found on either side of it. Exert yourself, therefore, by repeated acts and by repeated contemplative ascents, and you will find pastures that nourish and strengthen you on your journey and that daily inflame you more greatly in your desire. For our intellectual spirit has within itself the power of fire. [This spirit] was sent by God to the Earth for no other purpose than to blaze and grow into a flame. It grows [inflamed] when it is aroused by wonder—as a wind blowing on a fire fans, as it were, its potentiality into actuality. And,³³ indeed, in apprehending the works of God we marvel at Eternal Wisdom. And we are aroused by the external wind both of works and of creatures of such varied powers and operations, in order that our desire may grow into love of the Creator and [may lead us] unto an intuition of that Wisdom which miraculously ordained all things.

44 For when we take note of a very small grain of mustard and behold its power and might³⁴ with the eye of our intellect, we find a vestige [of God], so that we are aroused unto marveling at our God. For although the grain is so small in physical size, nevertheless its power is endless. In this piece of grain there is present (1) a large tree with leaves and branches and (2) many other grains in which, likewise, this same power is present beyond all numbering.³⁵ Likewise, with my intellect I see that if the power of a grain of mustard were actually to

45 be unfolded, then this sensible world—or, indeed, ten worlds or a thousand or as many worlds as are countable—would not suffice [therefor]. What individual who reflects upon these points will not marvel when he adds (1) that the intellect of man encompasses all this power of a grain, (2) that it apprehends that the foregoing is true, and (3) that thereby in its apprehension it thus excels the whole capacity of the entire sensible world—not [the capacity] of one world [only] but [that] of infinite worlds? In this way our intellectual power encompasses every material and measurable nature. Accordingly, how great a magnitude is present in our intellect! Therefore, if our intellectual spirit's point-like, but infinitely further-capable magnitude encompasses all possible sensible and material magnitude, then how great and how praiseworthy the Lord is, whose magnitude is infinitely more excellent than is intelligible magnitude! And for this reason—viz., since He is so great—in comparison with Him all things are nothing, and in Him they can be nothing other than the forever-blessed God Himself.

Hereupon you will be able to ascend (by means of similar [contemplative] ascents) on the basis of [contemplating] the power of a grain of millet, and, likewise, on the basis of [contemplating] the power of all the seeds of plants and of animals, and [on the basis of the reflection that] the power of no seed is less than that of a seed of mustard and [that] there are an infinite number of such seeds.

46 O how great our God is, who is the actuality of all possibility³⁶ since He is the final goal of *all* possibility and not just [the final goal] of possibility that is contracted to a grain of mustard or [the final goal of the possibility] of a grain of millet or of a grain of wheat or of our father Adam or of others—and so on *ad infinitum*. But because in all these things there is immeasurable power-and-might that is contracted in accordance with a thing's respective genus, then in God there is, without contraction, absolute power [or possibility], which is also infinite actuality. Which [pilgrim] thus seeking the power of God would not be brought into a state of amazed marveling? Which one would not be kindled unto a maximum ardor of fearing and loving the Almighty? Who is he who if he considered the power of the smallest spark of fire, would not marvel at the God who is above whatever can be spoken of? If the power of a spark is so great that when it is actual (because the spark in potency has been brought to actuality by the motion of an iron fire-poker) it has the power to reduce all things unto its own nature and to actualize a potential fire wherever

it is (whether in this world or even if³⁷ there were an infinite number of worlds), then O how great is the power of our God, who is Fire-consuming-fire!³⁸ And when, O Brother, you take note of the nature of fire and of the characteristics-of-fire, which are twenty-four (as that very lofty contemplator of God, viz., Dionysius, distinguished in his *Angelic Hierarchy*),³⁹ then you will have a marvelous pathway for seeking and finding God. Consult that work, and you will be amazed.

47

IV

Hereupon if you are seeking still another pathway unto the wisdom of our Master, then take note of [what follows].

With the eye of the intellect you apprehend that in a small piece of wood and in this very small stone (or in a piece of bronze or a mass of gold or a grain of mustard or of millet) the following are present, in potency:⁴⁰ (1) all the outward forms of artifacts (for you do not doubt that in each object are present a circle, a triangle, a quadrangle, a sphere, a cube, and whatever [other figures] geometry names); (2) the forms of all animals, all fruit, all plants, leaves, trees. [And you apprehend that these forms] are a likeness of all the forms that exist in this world or that could possibly exist in an infinite number of worlds.⁴¹

48

Therefore, if that craftsman were great who knew how to bring forth from a small piece of wood a king's or a queen's face, an ant, or a camel, then of what great mastery⁴² is He who can bring to actuality all that is at all possible?⁴³ Therefore, God—who from any very small material object can produce all things in the likeness of all forms that are in this world or that could possibly be in an infinite number of worlds—is of marvelous subtlety. But He is of still more marvelous power and knowledge—He who created the grain of millet and concentrated in it the aforesaid power. And of stupendous mastery is that Wisdom which knows how to bring forth all the possible forms (present in that grain) not in an accidental *likeness* but in their true being. Furthermore, there is indescribable amazement, above all understanding, regarding the fact that not only does [God in His wisdom] know how to produce living men from stones⁴⁴ but also [He knows how to produce] men from nothing and [knows how] to call into being, as things which are, those things which are not.⁴⁵ And since it is certain that all the created arts attain only unto something in something else—

viz., unto some imperfect likeness present in some created thing ([attaining,] for example, as regards bronze material, unto a statue similar in certain respects to a man)—who is this Master Craftsman, who without any material source brings into being not an imperfect likeness but the true being?

By such journeyings one proceeds, in intense wonderment, onward unto God. And one's spirit will glow with the desire of finding [God] lastingly and will languish in love [of Him] until the day when this spirit is shown that ultimate salvation.

49

V

Finally, there remains *within yourself* a pathway of seeking God, viz., [the pathway] of removing boundaries. For when in a piece of wood a craftsman seeks the face of a king, he removes all things bounded otherwise than is that face. For through faith's conceiving, he sees in the wood the face that he seeks actually to behold with his eye. For to his eye that face is future—[that face] which, in his intellectual conception, is present to his mind by faith. Therefore, when you conceive God to be something better than can be conceived, you remove all that is bounded and contracted. You remove corporeality, saying that God is not a corporeal being, i.e., [is not] bounded by quantity, place, shape, and situation. You remove the senses, which are bounded. (You [can] not look through a mountain or into the earth's bosom or at the sun's full brightness—and so on regarding hearing and the other senses.) For all the senses are bounded in their might and power; and so, they are not God. You remove the communal sense, the fantasy,⁴⁶ and the imagination, for they do not transcend the corporeal nature. For imagination does not attain unto what is not corporeal. You remove reason, for often it fails, and it does not attain unto all things. You might wish to know why this thing is a man, that thing a stone; but you do not at all attain unto the reason for any of God's works.⁴⁷ Therefore, the power of reason is small, and, hence, God is not reason. You remove intellect, for even intellect is bounded in its power. Although it encompasses all things, nevertheless, it cannot perfectly attain unto anything's quiddity in that quiddity's purity; and unto whatever the intellect does attain, it sees it to be attainable in a more perfect manner. Therefore, God is not intellect. Now, if you seek further, you do not find within yourself anything like unto God; rather, you affirm that God is above all those things as the Cause, the Beginning, and the Light of the life of your intellectual soul.

- 50** You will rejoice to have found Him—beyond all your inmost depths—as the Fount of good, from whom flows forth unto you all that you have. You turn yourself toward Him by entering daily more deeply within yourself and leaving behind all that is outside, so that you may be found to be on that pathway whereby God is discovered—so that thereafter you can apprehend Him in truth. May this [apprehension] be granted to both you and me by Him who, forever blessed, generously gives Himself to those who love Him.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* [Vol. II (edited by Raymond Klibansky) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1932)].
- CA* *Cribratio Alkorani* [Vol. VIII (edited by Ludwig Hagemann) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1986)].
- DI* *De Docta Ignorantia* [Latin-German edition: *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung*, published by Meiner Verlag. **Book I** (Vol. 264a), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 3rd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1979. **Book II** (Vol. 264b), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 2nd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1977. **Book III** (Vol. 264c), Latin text edited by Raymond Klibansky; introduction and translation by Hans G. Senger, 1977].
- DP* *De Possess* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1986)].
- DVD* *De Visione Dei* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 2nd ed., 1988)].
- MFCCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, edited by Rudolf Haubst *et al.* A continuing series published in Mainz, Germany by Matthias-Grünewald Verlag.
- NA* *De Li Non Aliud* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1987)].
- PF* *De Pace Fidei* [Vol. VII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1970)].
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. Series published in Paris.
- TB* Theodor Bibliander, editor, *Machumetis Sarracenorum Principis Vita ac Doctrina*. Zurich, 1550 (2nd ed.).
- VS* *De Venatione Sapientiae* [Vol. XII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hans G. Senger) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1982)].

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 Beryllo* (1988); *Cribratio Alkorani; De Principio; De Venatione Sapientiae; Compendium; De Apice Theoriae*.

B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Meiner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia*.

C. Editions by J. Hopkins: *De Visione Dei* (1988); *De Possess* (1986); *De Li Non Aliud* (1987).

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.

2. All references to the Koran are in terms of the English translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1980 printing). A reference such as 'Surah 7:29' indicates Surah 7, verse 29.

3. References to the Bible are given in terms of the Douay version. (References to chapters and verses of the Psalms include, in parentheses, the King James' locations.) English translations of the Vulgate are sometimes taken from the Douay version, whether *in locis* this borrowing is explicitly indicated or not.

4. Where, for purposes of clarification, words from the Latin text are inserted into the translations, the following rule is employed: when the Latin term is noted exactly as it appears in the Latin text, parentheses are used; when the case endings of nouns are transformed to the nominative, brackets are used.

5. American-style punctuation is used, except where clarity occasionally requires placing a comma or a period outside of quotation marks.

NOTES TO *DE QUAERENDO DEUM*

1. The addressee of this treatise, written sometime during the first three months of 1445, is unknown.
2. Romans 7:22. II Corinthians 4:16. Ephesians, 3:16.
3. This transformation is from natural light unto supernatural light, the light of glory. Note II Corinthians 3:18.
4. Matthew 25:21 and 23.
5. Acts 17:18-34.
6. II Corinthians 12:2-4.
7. *DI I*, 24 (75:5-11): “Hence, as regards His own name, which we say to be ineffable and which is ‘tetragrammaton’ (i.e., ‘of four letters’) and which is proper because it befits God according to His own essence, not according to any relation to created things: He ought to be called ‘One-and-all,’ or better, ‘All-in-one.’ ”
8. The Greek verb “*theoro*” (“I see”) should be distinguished from the verb “*theo*” (“I hasten”; “I run”).
Note *De Deo Abscondito* 14. *DVD* 1 (6:4-6); 8 (33:1).
9. *De Quaerendo Deum* 2 (33:9). Cf. *DVD* 8 (32:4-10): “For the eye is like a mirror; and a mirror, however small, figuratively receives into itself a large mountain and all that is on the surface of the mountain. And in this way the visible forms of all things are mirrored in the eye. Nevertheless, by means of the mirroring eye our sight sees only and particularly that to which it turns; for the power of the eye can be determined by the object only in a particular way. Consequently, it does not see all the things which are captured in the mirror of the eye.”
10. Because of his doctrine that *nulla proportio infiniti ad finitum est*, Nicholas rejects the doctrine of *analogia entis*. All likenesses to God are metaphorical. *DI I*, 3 (9:4-5). *Ap.* 18: last sentence. See, above, n. 10 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.
11. Canticum of Canticles 1: 13.
12. 1 Timothy 6:16.
13. Nicholas is not a pantheist. God is everything in the sense that He is the ultimate Cause and Sustainer of all creatures. He is in all things as the power of a sustaining cause is in its effect and as the original is in a mirror image of itself. Nicholas never says “everything is God.” Instead, he repeatedly affirms that “in God everything is God.” For in God’s simplicity no thing exists as its finite self but exists only in God’s power to create it—exists, that is, as God, because God’s power *is* God Himself. Accordingly, ontologically prior (not temporally prior) to creation, the world is present in God as what is caused is present in its cause. The ontological gulf between God and creation is infinite, since what is finite is always, qua finite, infinitely incommensurable with what is infinite. God’s being is absolute, uncreated, undifferentiated, inconceivable (by finite minds), and ineffable; the universe’s being is contracted (i.e., restricted), created, differentiated, conceivable (though not precisely), and effable. God is the Ground-of-being of each finite thing. Yet, each finite thing has its own finite essence and essential form. It is not the case that each finite thing, in its essence, is God. However, in its Essence (viz., in God, who is the Essence of all essences) each finite thing is God rather than being its own finite, and finitely identifiable, self. See J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, Chap.

4. See also Nicholas of Cusa, *Ap.* 16-17 and 26-27. *De Genesi* 3 (162: Nicholas's speech) and 3 (163 and 164).

14. Cf. Augustine, *DT* 10.1.2 through 10.2.4 (*PL* 42:973-975 = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 50:312-316). See n. 26 below. Note also Nicholas of Cusa, *Ap.* 13:11-14.

15. The two sources of light are the spirit of vision (in association both with the spirit of the sensitive nature and with reason) and "external" light (e.g., sunlight). Note especially 33:12-13 and 35:10. See *De Coniecturis* II, 16(164).

16. In the expressions "*virtus animalis*" ("power of the sensitive nature") and "*spiritus animalis*" ("spirit of the sensitive nature") the word "*animalis*" is a genitive singular noun, not a nominative singular adjective. This fact emerges from a comparison of 33:5 and 33:16 with 35:3.

The power, or spirit, of the sensitive nature—as here mentioned—is also called both *the father of the spirit of vision* and *a higher spirit present within the spirit of vision*. Cf. the account of sensing that is given in *Idiota de Mente* 8.

17. Throughout this section Nicholas distinguishes between two spirits, or powers: the spirit of vision (*spiritus visionis*) and the spirit of the sensitive nature (*spiritus animalis*; see n. 16 above). His basic points are the following: (1.1) *Spiritus visionis*, also called *spiritus visivus* [34:14], does not discriminate; it is an internal light that in conjunction with external light gives rise to a confused sensation (*confusa sensatio*), which, though unclear, is an image (*species*) of its object. (1.2) *Spiritus visionis* descends from the brain, through the optic vessels, unto the eyes. (Nicholas here speaks of *opticae venae*, not of *optici nervi*; cf. 35:11, where the word "*nervus*" does appear, though not in conjunction with sight.) This spirit, or power, is said to be in the eye, and at times it is referred to as *spiritus oculi* [35:3]. (1.3) Present in this spirit is *spiritus animalis*, which is therefore also said to be in the eye. (1.4) External light serves to convey to the eye an image of a given object. This image is encountered by *spiritus visionis*, and the confused sensation of 1.1 is generated. (2.1) *Spiritus animalis*, or *virtus animalis*, is called the father of *spiritus visionis*, because it is a higher spirit (or power) than is *spiritus visionis* and because it is present in this latter. (2.2) *Spiritus animalis*, insofar as it is associated with the eye, discriminates between different objects and between their different colors [33:14-16]. (2.3) In accordance with its discriminations, *spiritus animalis* imposes names. (2.4) In its work of discrimination *spiritus animalis* is aided by *ratio discretiva* (discriminating reason)—aided by its light (*lumen rationis* [33:12-13]). Accordingly, just as *spiritus animalis* is said to discriminate (*discernere*) between visible things, so too is *ratio discretiva* thus spoken of [cf. 35:3 with 35:8]. This discrimination takes place with respect to the images-of-objects in the eye, but it also has reference to the objects themselves. (2.5) *Spiritus animalis*—unlike *Spiritus visionis*, which is present only in the eye—is present in all the senses. Moreover, *ratio discretiva* is said to live in the intact senses [38:13-14]. (2.6) Just as in being a power *spiritus animalis* is also a *lumen discretivum animale* [35:10], so *ratio discretiva* is an *altius lumen discretivum* [33:12-13]. *Lumen animale* illuminates *sensus* (the senses); *lumen rationale* illuminates *spiritus animalis*; and *lumen intellectuale* illuminates *ratio discretiva* [36]. (2.7) The visual image of the object—as this image is attended to and discriminated by *spiritus animalis*, in conjunction with *ratio discretiva*, is a likeness of the object that is perceived by means of it.

Nicholas does not distinguish between sensing and perceiving, though his differentiation of two distinct powers (*virtus visionis* and *virtus animalis*) would provide the basis for such a distinction. In this section Nicholas's terminology is especially confusing. The confusion testifies to one sad result of the wane of Scholasticism.

Nicholas's discussion of perception is not perfectly consistent throughout his works. Many of the details change. For example, his account of the mechanism of perception in *De Quaerendo Deum* 2 differs from his account in *Idiota de Mente* 8. And in *De Coniecturis* I, 8 (32) he claims, unlike in *De Quaerendo Deum*, that the senses do not discriminate—that reason discriminates in them (“Sensus enim sentit et non discernit. Omnis enim discretio a ratione est Ratio ergo sensu ut instrumento, ad discernendum sensibilia utitur; sed ipsa est, quae in sensu sensibile discernit.”) And whereas the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* looms large in *De Coniecturis*, it is minimal in the *Compendium*. However, it is misleading to assert that “während in anderen Schriften, vornehmlich in *De coniecturis*, scharf zwischen *ratio* and *intellectus* unterschieden wird, ist im *Compendium* diese Unterscheidung aufgegeben” [*Nicolai de Cusa Compendium*, translation, introduction, and notes by Bruno Decker and Karl Bormann (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1970), p. 61, n. 5]. Though in *Compendium* 1 (1:10) Nicholas does not list *ratio* as a distinct faculty, or operation, of the soul (he lists only *sensus*, *imaginatio*, and *intellectus*), he does not therefore suppose that *ratio* and *intellectus* are the same thing—or that *ratio* and *anima sensitiva* are the same thing. Instead, he draws the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* differently and less overtly than in *De Coniecturis*. According to *Compendium* 6 (16:15-16) man has a rational nature (*rationabilis natura*) and is capable of reasoning (*ratiocinari*). And according to *Compendium* 6 (17-18) man differs from brute animals because he uses *ratio* and because he has both a *vis ratiocinativa* and a *vis intellectualis*. Nicholas later refers to the rational power as *spiritus discretionis*, which is in *rationalis nostra anima* [*Compendium* 13 (42:5)]. Indeed, *vis ratiocinativa* is present in the sensitive soul, where it is “quaedam potentia cognitiva, quasi imago sit intelligentiae, quae in nobis ipsi intelligentiae iungitur”: “a certain cognitive power that is an image, as it were, of the intellect and that, in us, is joined to the intellect” [*Compendium* 13 (40:8-9); cf. 11 (35)]. (Similarly, even in *De Quaerendo Deum* the discriminating light of reason is said to be present in the senses [36:5]—i.e., present in the spirit of the sensitive nature, which is present in the senses.) Without *vis ratiocinativa* the sensitive soul could not be the image of the intellect and could not rightly be said to know (*cognoscere*).

Had Nicholas, in the *Compendium*, abandoned a distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*, he would not have bothered, in the later *De Apice Theoriae*, to refer to rational light. (“Posse igitur ipsius per quosdam sanctos lux nominatur, non sensibilis, aut rationalis sive intelligibilis, sed lux omnium quae lucere possunt ...” [8:5-7].) For there cannot be rational light without there being reason. Though in *De Apice* Nicholas does not make anything of the distinction between reason and intellect, we are not entitled to infer that he therefore rejected any such distinction, which he nowhere expressly disavows. In *De Apice* when he transfers his attention from sensible things directly to intelligible things [margin numbers 9-10], he does so in the interest of brevity, having no desire to belabor points made elsewhere concerning *rationabilia*. (This same phenomenon of brevity occurs in *De Filiatione Dei* 2 (57 &

61), though later in that treatise Nicholas introduces the fuller distinction.) The German translators of the *Compendium* should not have claimed that the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* was abandoned, or given up (*aufgegeben*), in the *Compendium*. Instead, they should have maintained only that no systematic distinction was therein made. And perhaps this latter judgment is what they really meant to express—and would actually have expressed had they chosen their words more cautiously. [Similarly, some interpreters have claimed, erroneously, that in his later works Nicholas gives up the metaphysic of contraction.]

Although what the German translators of the *Compendium* say about Nicholas's distinction between “*ratio*” and “*intellectus*” is at least misleading, what they go on to say in their subsequent note (p. 61, n. 6) is just plain wrong: “Hier tritt Nikolaus in offenen Gegensatz zu einer Erkenntnislehre für welche die extramentalen Seienden selbst Gegenstand der Erkenntnis werden können. Nach Thomas von Aquin z.B. ist das, was erkannt wird, das Ding selbst ... ; das Erkenntnisbild (*die species*) ist nur das Erkenntnismittel. Nach Nikolaus dagegen wird nicht das Ding selbst erkannt, sondern nur dessen Bild oder Zeichen; das Ding selbst bleibt unerkant.” But the first and the last sentences are mistaken. The last sentence states: “According to Nicholas, however, the thing itself is not known but only its image or sign; the thing itself remains unknown.” This interpretation is erroneous because in the *Compendium* Nicholas indicates, repeatedly, that the object is known by means of the sensible image (*sensibilis species*): (1) “Similitudo igitur intelligentiae [scilicet, anima sensitiva] mediante similitudine obiecti sentit seu cognoscit” [11 (35:15-16); italics added]. (2) “Aer igitur corpus vitae spiritus nostri sensitivi existit, quo mediante [spiritus sensitivus] vivificat totum corpus et sentit obiecta, et non est [spiritus sensitivus] naturae alicuius obiecti sensibilis, sed simplicioris et altioris virtutis” [13 (39:13-16); italics added]. (3) “Sentit enim [anima sensitiva] diaphani eius superficiem penitus incoloratam in similitudine tingi, et se convertens ad obiectum, unde splendor venit, medio illius splendoris, quem in superficie corporis sui diaphani sentit, obiectum cognoscit” [13 (41:3-6); italics added]. These passages clearly teach that the objects themselves are known by means of the sensible likenesses that inform the transparent medium (of the eye). From the fact that Nicholas denies that we know precisely what anything's essence is, there does not follow that perception is not perception of the material object itself by means of a sensory likeness. We know, for example, according to him, that such and such a thing exists and is a tree, even though we do not know fully and precisely what a tree is. Imperfect knowledge of this sort he sometimes refers to as surmise (*coniectura*). See n. 1 of the Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*. We know something about an observed object, but we do not know everything. Because we do not know everything about the object—i.e., do not know the object from a synthesis of every possible perspective (a knowing which, for Nicholas, is tantamount to knowing the object apart from any particular, conditioning mode of cognizing)—we are said by Nicholas not to know its essence precisely; on the other hand, the reason that we do, nonetheless, know something about the object is that the sensory image is also a sensory likeness.

See also, above, n. 1, n. 5, and n. 6 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*, as well as, below, n. 25 and n. 41 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

Sometimes interpreters of Nicholas of Cusa combine the claim that “the thing itself remains unknown” with misapprehensions regarding his illustration of the car-

tographer (*Compendium* 8). They then go on to depict Nicholas as a forerunner of Kant and as a philosophical nominalist or conceptualist. See my article “A Detailed Critique of Pauline Watts' *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*,” *Philosophy Research Archives*, 9 (1983), Microfilm Supplement, pp. 26-61. Also see, below, n. 39 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

18. DVD 22 (97:1-14). *Compendium* 13 (41:6-9).

19. Nicholas here says “eye” (*oculus*) but means “spirit of the eye” (*spiritus oculi*)—i.e., the spirit of vision, or the visual spirit. This meaning is evident from his going on to state that, really, the spirit of the sensitive nature speaks in the eye. But the spirit of the sensitive nature is in the eye by way of being in the spirit of vision, which is in the eye [35:3 & 33:6-7].

20. *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (100:3-13).

21. See item 2.4 in the first paragraph of n. 17 above.

22. I.e., they are present in the spirit of the sensitive nature.

23. By “this same matter” Nicholas means the matter of how we may be led, in contemplation, stepwise unto a contemplation of God. See 32:2-5.

24. See n. 13 above.

25. See n. 6 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*. This theme becomes expanded in Hegel: the Absolute Spirit knows himself in and through the knowledge of him had by finite minds.

26. God's nature remains unknown to us even in the next life, where we will “behold” it in the risen Christ. In this life we may know *that* God exists; but we cannot know what His nature either is or is like, since it is not like anything finite. See n. 10 and n. 14 above.

27. At 2 (37:2) of the printed Latin text of *De Quaerendo Deum* the word “*deus*” is redundant and should be editorially deleted.

28. Only God's likeness can be partaken of, maintains Nicholas [VS 22 (65:23-24); 7 (16:7-17)]. See also NA 10 (36:7-8); 16 (79:5). *De Coniecturis* 11, 6 (98:4-7). VS 21 (62:5-7).

29. “Discriminating light” here indicates, primarily, light from the spirit of the sensitive nature.

30. Regarding the sense of “in accordance with its aptitude for [that light] to enter,” note *De Quaerendo Deum* 2 (35:11-13) and *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (99:1-17).

31. ‘God as the Giver of all best gifts’ is the theme of *De Dato Patris Luminum*.

32. Psalms 41:2 (42:1).

33. At 43:12 of the printed Latin text of *De Quaerendo Deum* I am reading “Et” in place of “ut”.

34. The words “power and might” translate “*virtus et potentia*.” Here Nicholas is making no distinction between the meaning of these terms. A few lines later (44:4) he uses the word “*vis*” as interchangeable with “*virtus*” and “*potentia*”.

35. DVD 7 (23-25).

36. *DP* deals with the theme of God as Actualized-possibility (*Possessit*). God's all-mighty power (*omnipotentia*) coincides with His being absolute possibility (*absoluta potentia*). See especially *DP* 8.

37. At 46:14 of the printed Latin text of *De Quaerendo Deum* I am reading “et si” in place of “etsi”. And at 46:12 I regard “et” as rightly deleted by the editor,

Wilpert.

38. Hebrews 12:29. Deuteronomy 4:24.
39. Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Celesti Hierarchia* 15.2 [*Dionysiaca*, Vol. II, pp. 993-1000].
40. This part of Section IV of the printed Latin text is wrongly punctuated by the editor.
41. *DI* 11, 5.
42. *PF* 12 (37).
43. See n. 36 above.
44. *DP* 8. Luke 3:8.
45. Romans 4:17.
46. Nicholas is not here implying any significant distinction between *phantasia* and *imaginatio*. See *Idiota de Mente* 8 (114:7 - 115:3) and *Compendium* 4 (9), where also no special distinction is either made or implied.
47. *NA* 9 (32).