

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA
ON
WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE**

BY JASPER HOPKINS

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To the memory of my brother

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

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IDIOTA DE SAPIENTIA
(The Layman on Wisdom)

by

NICHOLAS OF CUSA

(Codex Cusanus Latinus 218, ff. 107^r - 114^v)

THE LAYMAN ON WISDOM¹

Book One

A certain poor layman came upon a very wealthy orator in the Roman Forum. Smiling good-naturedly, the layman addressed him as follows: “I am amazed at your pride, because although in perusing countless books you tire yourself with continual reading, you have not yet been brought to a state of humility. Assuredly, this [lack of humility results] from the fact that the knowledge that pertains to this world—a knowledge in which you deem yourself to excel others—is, in the eyes of God, a certain foolishness; and, hence, it puffs one up.² By contrast, true knowledge makes one humble. I could wish that you would devote yourself to true knowledge, since therein is a treasure of joy.”

Orator: O poor, utterly unschooled Layman, what is this presumption of yours [that leads] you thus to make light of the study of written learning,³ without which study no one makes progress?

- 2 *Layman:* O Great Orator, it is not presumption, but love, that does not allow me to keep silent. For I see you engaged in seeking wisdom with much futile effort. If I could recall you from this labor, so that you would carefully weigh your error, I think that you would rejoice to have escaped from a grievous snare. The opinion of authority has held you back, so that you are as a horse that by nature is free but that by contrivance is tied with a halter to a stall, where it eats nothing but what is served to it. For your intellect, restricted to the authority of writings, is fed by strange and unnatural food.

Orator: If the nourishment that comes from wisdom is not present in the books of the wise, then where is it present?

- 3 *Layman:* I do not claim that no [such nourishment] is present there; rather, I maintain that no [such] *natural* [nourishment] is to be found there. For those who first devoted themselves to writing about wisdom did not derive their growth from the nourishment of books, which did not yet exist; rather, by means of natural foods they were brought unto the state of being grown men. And, by far, they excel in wisdom those others, who suppose that they have learned from books.

Orator: Although, perhaps, some things can be known apart from the study of written learning, nevertheless difficult and important

things cannot at all [thus be learned], since the [various] disciplines have grown incrementally.⁴

Layman: This is what I was saying—viz., that you are being led by authority and are deceived. Someone has written the word that you believe. But I tell you that wisdom proclaims [itself] openly in the streets;⁵ and its proclamation is that it dwells in the highest places.⁶

4 *Orator:* As I understand you, you think that although you are a layman you are wise.

Layman: Perhaps the difference between you and me is the following: you think that you are someone knowledgeable, although you are not; hence, you are haughty. By contrast, I know that I am a layman; hence, I am quite humble. In this respect, perhaps, I am more learned [than you].⁷

Orator: Since you are a layman, how are you able to be led to a knowledge of your ignorance?

Layman: Not from your books but from God's books.

Orator: Which books are they?

Layman: Those that He wrote with His finger.

Orator: Where are they found?

Layman: Everywhere.

Orator: Therefore, even in this Forum?

Layman: Yes, indeed! I have already said that wisdom proclaims [itself] in the streets.

Orator: I would like to hear how [it does so].

Layman: If I saw that you were not motivated by idle curiosity, I would disclose to you important matters.

Orator: Can you at this moment bring it about that I sense what you mean?

Layman: I can.

Orator: Then, let's withdraw, I ask, into this near-by barber shop, so that while we are seated you may speak more relaxedly.

5 [This suggestion] was agreeable to the Layman. And after they had entered the place and had turned to face the Forum, the Layman began to speak as follows: "Since I told you that wisdom proclaims [itself] in the streets, and since its proclamation is that it dwells in the highest places, I will endeavor to get you to see this point. But first I would like for you to say what you see being done there in the Forum."

Orator: I see money being counted there; and in another spot I see goods being weighed; and in an opposite spot I see oil and other

items being measured out.

Layman: These are the works of that power-of-reason by which men excel the beasts. For brute animals cannot number, weigh, and measure. Look, now, O Orator, and see by means of what, in reference to what, and from what these [activities] are done, and tell me [what you find].

Orator: [They are done] by means of discriminating.

Layman: Correct. But by means of what is there discriminating? Don't we discriminate numerically [*numerare*] by means of *one*?

Orator: How so?

Layman: Isn't it the case that one is one taken once, that two is one taken twice, that three is one taken three times, and so on?

Orator: Yes, it is.

Layman: Therefore, every number is constructed by means of one?

Orator: So it seems.

6 *Layman:* Therefore, just as one is the beginning of number, so the smallest weight is the beginning of weighing and the smallest measure is the beginning of measuring. Therefore, let that [smallest] weight be called an ounce, and let that [smallest] measure be called an inch.⁸ Isn't it the case that just as we number by means of *one*, so we weigh by means of the ounce and measure by means of the inch? Likewise, too, numbering is from the one, weighing is from the ounce, and measuring is from the inch. Similarly, numbering is in reference to the one, weighing is in reference to the ounce, and measuring is in reference to the inch. Don't these things hold true in the ways just mentioned?

Orator: Indeed.

Layman: Now, by means of what do we attain unto the one, by means of what unto the ounce, and by means of what unto the inch?

Orator: I don't know. But I do know that oneness is not attained unto by number, because number is subsequent to the one.⁹ Likewise, the ounce is not attained unto by means of weight, nor is the inch attained unto by means of measure.

Layman: Most excellently stated, O Orator. For just as what is simple is by nature prior to what is composite, so the composite is by nature subsequent.¹⁰ Hence, the composite cannot measure the simple—but [only] conversely. Herefrom you know how it is that (1) that by means of which, from which, and in reference to which everything enumerable is enumerated is not attainable by means of number and (2) that by means of which, from which, and in reference to

which everything weighable is weighed is not attainable by means of weight. Similarly, too, that by means of which, from which, and in reference to which everything measurable is measured is not attainable by means of measure.

Orator: I see this point clearly.

7 *Layman:* Transfer unto the highest levels, where wisdom dwells, this proclamation of wisdom's in the streets, and you will find vastly more delightful [truths] than [you find] in all your most ornate books.

Orator: Unless you explain what you mean by this [statement], I won't understand [it].

Layman: Unless you are asking longingly, I am prohibited from doing so. For wisdom's secrets are not to be revealed to just anyone.¹¹

Orator: I greatly desire to hear [these secrets] from you; and from the few things [already heard] I am impassioned. For the things you have already stated announce that some important [disclosure] is forthcoming. So I ask that you continue with the points with which you have begun.

Layman: I don't know whether it is permitted to disclose such great secrets and to show that such deep profundity is readily grasped. Nevertheless, I cannot refrain from satisfying you. Behold, O Brother, supreme wisdom is the following: viz., that you know, by means of the illustration just indicated, how it is that the Unattainable is attained unto unattainably.¹²

Orator: You say strange and discordant things.

8 *Layman:* The reason that hidden things ought not to be communicated to everyone is that when these things are revealed, they seem to everyone to be discordant. You yourself are amazed at my having said things that contradict themselves. [Still,] you will hear, and will taste of, the truth. But I say *this*: viz., that just as I mentioned a moment ago about oneness, the ounce, and the inch, so too [something similar] must be asserted about all things as regards the Beginning of them all. For the Beginning of all things is that by means of which, in which, and from which whatever can be originated is originated; and, nevertheless, [that Beginning] cannot be attained unto by any originated thing. It is that by means of which, in which, and from which everything that can be understood is understood; and, nevertheless, it cannot be attained unto by the intellect. Likewise, it is that by means of which, from which, and in which everything that can be spoken of is spoken of; and, nevertheless, it cannot be attained unto

by speech. Similarly, it is that by means of which, from which, and in which everything that can be bounded is bounded and everything that can be limited is limited; and, nevertheless, it cannot be bounded by any bounds and cannot be limited by any limit.

You will be able to make countless such very true statements; and you will be able to fill all your rhetoric books with these statements and will be able to add to these books other books without number, so that you will see how it is that wisdom dwells in the highest places.

- 9 Now, that is the highest which cannot be higher. Only Infinity is this Highness. Hence, Wisdom¹³ (which all men seek with such great mental longing, since by nature they desire to know¹⁴) is known in no other way than [through the awareness] that it is higher than all knowledge and is unknowable and is inexpressible by any speech, incomprehensible by any intellect, unmeasurable by any measure, unlimitable by any limit, unboundable by any bounds, disproportional in terms of any proportion, incomparable in terms of any comparison, unbefigurable by any befiguring, unformable by any forming, immovable by any movement, unimaginable by any imagining, unsensible by any sensing, unattractible by any attracting, untasteable by any tasting, inaudible by any hearing, unseeable by any seeing, inapprehensible by any apprehending, unaffirmable by any affirming, undeniable by any negating, undoubtable by any doubting, inopinable by any opining.¹⁵ And because [Wisdom] is not expressible by any expression, the intended object of these expressions cannot be thought, for Wisdom is unthinkable by any thought—Wisdom, through which and in which and from which are all things.

- 10 *Orator:* Assuredly, these [utterances] are loftier than I was hoping to hear from you. Please do not cease guiding me [until I reach] the point at which I may very pleasingly taste with you something of these very lofty speculative-doctrines. For I see that you never become weary of speaking about that Wisdom. Now, your [not becoming thus weary] results, it seems to me, from [Wisdom's] exceeding deliciousness; unless you savored this deliciousness with an inner relishing, [it] would not attract you as much [as it does].

Layman: Wisdom is what is intellectually relishable; nothing is more delightful to the intellect than is Wisdom. Those men are not to be deemed in any way wise who speak [about Wisdom] only nominally and not with relish. But the following speak with relish about Wisdom: viz., those who know that Wisdom is all things in such a way that it is nothing of all things.¹⁶ For all inner relishing [of Wisdom]

is by means of Wisdom and in Wisdom and from Wisdom. But because Wisdom dwells in the highest places, it is not tasteable by means of any savoring. Therefore, it is tasted untasteably, since it is higher than everything tasteable, everything sensible, everything rational, and everything intelligible. But this tasting-untasteably-and-from-afar occurs, as it were, just as a certain fragrant scent can be said to be an untasteable foretasting. For a fragrant scent, replicated from its perceived source and received in something else [viz., in our sensory apparatus,] attracts us to its pursuit, so that because of the fragrant perfumed scents, we seek after the perfume itself. Similarly, because eternal and infinite Wisdom shines forth in all things, it attracts us by means of a certain foretasting of its effects, so that we are brought unto it with wondrous desire.¹⁷ For Wisdom is the life of the intellectual spirit—a spirit which has within it a certain concreated foretaste [of Wisdom]. Through this foretaste the intellectual spirit seeks, with very great endeavor, the Source of its life. Without a foretaste it would neither seek this Source nor know that it had found it, if it did find it. Accordingly, the intellectual spirit is moved toward Wisdom as toward its own life.

And for every [intellectual] spirit it is delightful to ascend continually unto the Beginning of its life, although [this Beginning remains] inaccessible. For to ascend [progressively] unto Life is to live progressively more happily. And when the intellect, while seeking its own life, is led to the point that it sees that its life is infinite, then the more it sees its own life to be immortal, the more it rejoices. And thus it happens that the inaccessibility, or incomprehensibility, of the infinity of its own life is its most desired comprehension. For example, if someone had a treasure consisting of his life and if it pertained thereto that he knew that this treasure of his was uncountable, unweighable, and immeasurable: this knowledge of his incomprehension would be a joyous and most desired comprehension—[joyous] not with reference to the act of comprehending but with reference to the most beloved treasure-of-life.¹⁸

By way of [further] illustration: If someone loved something because it was lovable, he would rejoice that in the lovable object there were found infinite and inexpressible grounds for love. And the following is the most joyous comprehension on the part of the one who loves: viz., when he comprehends the incomprehensible lovable-ness of the object of his love. For he would not rejoice as much over the fact that he loved an object comprehensible in certain respects as he

would if he knew that the loveliness of the loved object were altogether immeasurable, unlimitable, interminable, and incomprehensible. This would be a most joyous comprehension of incomprehensibility.¹⁹

- 12** *Orator:* I think I understand; but you be the judge thereof. Your intended points seem to be (1) that when our Beginning's life-giving sweetness is tasted untastefully through our affections, and when it is comprehended incomprehensibly through our intellect, then our Beginning (by means of which, in which, and from which we exist and are moved) is tasted by us as the Beginning, the Middle, and the End; and (2) that someone who endeavors to taste tastefully of this Beginning and to comprehend it comprehendingly is altogether without a taste and an understanding [thereof].

- Layman:* You have understood superbly, O Orator. On account of the reasons [that you just mentioned], those who think that wisdom is nothing other than that which is comprehensible by the intellect and that happiness is nothing other than the happiness that is attainable by them are far from true Wisdom, which is eternal and infinite. They have turned toward a certain limitable rest wherein they consider life's happiness to be present, though it is not. Hence, finding themselves deceived, they are vexed, because where they thought there to be happiness (to which they turned themselves with all their effort), they find misery and death. For Infinite Wisdom is our life's unailing nourishment. From this nourishment our [intellectual] spirit—which can love only wisdom and truth—lives eternally. For every intellect desires to exist. Its existing is its being alive; its being alive is its understanding; its understanding is its being nourished by wisdom and truth. Hence, an intellect that does not taste of Wisdom's clarity is as an eye amid darkness. For [that eye] is an eye, but it does not see, because it is not amid light. And because it lacks the delightful life that consists in seeing, it exists in misery and vexation; and this [condition] is death rather than life. Similarly, when the intellect turns to anything at all other than to the nourishment of Eternal Wisdom, it will find itself to exist apart from life—as if it were enveloped in the darkness of ignorance—and to be dead rather than alive. And herein is unending vexation: viz., to have intellectual being but never to understand. For Eternal Wisdom alone is that by means of which every intellect is able to understand.

- 14** *Orator:* You relate beautiful and uncommon things. Explain now, I ask, how I can be elevated unto some kind of tasting of Eternal Wis-

dom.

Layman: Eternal Wisdom is tasted in everything tasteable. It is the delightfulness in everything delightful. It is the beauty in everything beautiful. It is the deliciousness in everything delicious. And you may say something similar about any desirable things whatsoever. How, then, is it possible that Wisdom *not* be tasted of? Isn't life joyous to you when it accords with your desire?

Orator: Yes, exactly right.

- 15** *Layman:* Therefore, since this desire of yours exists only by means of Eternal Wisdom (from which and in which it exists), and since the happy life that you desire is, likewise, only from the same Eternal Wisdom (in which it is present and outside of which it cannot exist): in every desire on the part of your intellectual life, you desire nothing other than Eternal Wisdom,²⁰ which is the fulfillment of your desire and is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of your desire. So if this desire for immortal life—the desire to live eternally in happiness—is something delicious to you, then you are experiencing in yourself a certain foretaste of Eternal Wisdom. For nothing that is altogether unknown is sought after.²¹ For example, amidst the inhabitants of India there are fruits that we do not desire since we have no foretaste of them. But since we cannot live without nourishment, we desire nourishment. Now, we have a certain foretaste of nourishment in order that we may live in the sensible world. And, hence, a child has in his nature a certain foretaste of milk. Therefore, when he is hungry, he is motivated toward milk; for we receive nourishment from the things from which we exist. By comparison, the intellect has its life from Eternal Wisdom and has a kind of foretasting of Wisdom. Hence, in every feeding that the intellect needs in order to remain alive, the intellect is moved only in order to be fed from that from which it has its intellectual being. Therefore, if in the intellectual life's every desire you would take note of that from which the intellect derives, that by means of which the intellect is moved, and that unto which the intellect is moved, then you would find within yourself that the sweetness of Eternal Wisdom is that which makes your desire so sweet and delightful to you that you are conveyed by indescribable affection unto a grasping of Eternal Wisdom—conveyed as unto the immortality of your life.

16 For example, consider iron and a magnet. Iron has, in the magnet, a certain beginning of its movement. When the magnet, through its presence, arouses the heavy and weighty iron, the iron is conveyed,

with marvelous desire, even beyond the movement of nature (by which movement it ought to tend downwards in accordance with its heaviness), and is moved upwards, becoming united to its own beginning. Unless there were in the iron a certain natural foretasting of the magnet, the iron would not be moved toward the magnet, or loadstone, more than toward some other stone. And unless there were present in the loadstone a greater inclination toward iron than toward copper, there would not be that attracting.

17 Therefore, our intellectual spirit has from Eternal Wisdom the beginning of its existing intelligibly—has it in such a way that its being is more conformed to Wisdom than is anything non-intellectual. Hence, [Wisdom's] radiating, or infusing, [of wisdom] into a holy soul is a movement that inflames with [intellectually] arousing desire. For if someone seeks Wisdom by an intellectual movement: being affected inwardly and becoming oblivious of himself, he is caught up (in the body but as if outside the body) unto [that] foretasted Delightfulness (the weight of all sensible objects cannot hold him down)—caught up unto the point where he is united to [that] attracting Wisdom. His leaving behind the senses renders the soul senseless because of stupefying amazement, so that he esteems as nothing all things except Wisdom. And it is delightful to these men to be able to leave behind this world and this life, so that they can be conveyed more expeditiously unto Immortal Wisdom. This foretasting causes everything that appears delectable to be abominable to the saints and causes [them] to bear all physical torments with a most imperturbable mind—bear them for the sake of obtaining Wisdom the sooner. This [foretasting] teaches us that our [intellectual] spirit, turned toward Wisdom, can never perish. For if our present body cannot by any sensible bond restrain our spirit so that it is not conveyed most avidly unto Wisdom when its bodily operations are suspended, then our spirit cannot at all perish when the body perishes.²²

18 This assimilation²³ [of our intellectual spirit] to Wisdom—an assimilation which is naturally present in our spirit and through which our spirit is not at rest unless it is present in Wisdom—is as a living image of Wisdom. For an image is not at rest except in that of which it is the image; from *that* thing the image has its beginning, its middle, and its end. But a living image, through its being alive, produces from itself a movement toward its exemplar; only in its exemplar does the image find rest. For the life of the image cannot find rest in itself,

since the [image's] life is not its own but is derived from the original's²⁴ life. Hence, [the image's life] is moved toward the exemplar as toward the truth of its own being. Suppose, then, that the Exemplar is eternal and that the image has a life in which it has a foretaste of its Exemplar and is moved very desiringly toward its Exemplar. Since that vital movement cannot rest except in Infinite Life, which is Eternal Wisdom, then that spiritual movement (which never infinitely attains unto Infinite Life) cannot cease. For [the intellectual spirit] is always moved by most joyous desire, so that it will attain unto never becoming satiated with the delightfulness of its contact [with Wisdom]. For Wisdom is a most delicious food—one which, in satisfying, does not diminish the desire of the consuming [intellect], so that [the consuming intellect] will never cease to take delight in its eternal repast.²⁵

- 19** *Orator:* Assuredly, I consider you to have spoken most excellently. But I see there to be a very great difference between (1) an [actual] taste of wisdom and (2) those things which can be said about a taste [of wisdom].

Layman: You are right. And I am pleased to have heard this statement from you. For just as all knowledge of the taste of a thing-never-tasted is empty and sterile until the sense-of-taste attains unto [that taste], so too [a similar thing holds true] of that Wisdom, which no one tastes through hearing but [which] he alone [tastes] who receives it in terms of an inner tasting. He gives testimony not about things which he has heard but [about what] he has tasted experientially within himself. (To know the many descriptions of love that the saints have left us is, without a tasting of love, a certain emptiness.) Therefore it does not suffice for one who is seeking Eternal Wisdom to know those things which are read about Wisdom. Rather, it is necessary that after he has found, by means of his intellect, where Wisdom is, he make it his own. By way of illustration: he who finds a field in which there is a treasure cannot rejoice over a treasure in a field that is not his own but is someone else's. So he sells everything and buys the field, in order to have the treasure in his own field.²⁶

- 20** Hence, [one who seeks Eternal Wisdom] must sell or give away all his own [possessions]. For Eternal Wisdom cannot be possessed except in a case where the possessor, in order that he might possess Wisdom, has retained nothing of his own. Now, moral failings are what we have of our own, whereas from Eternal Wisdom we have only

things that are good. Therefore, the Spirit of Wisdom does not dwell in a body subjected to sins or in a malevolent soul but dwells, rather, in its own [morally] pure field—its [morally] pure image—as in its own holy temple.²⁷ For where Eternal Wisdom dwells, *there* is the Lord's field, producing immortal fruit. For it is a field-of-virtues, which Wisdom cultivates and from which the fruits of the Spirit spring forth. These fruits are justice, peace, courage, moderation, chastity, patience, and the likes.

21 *Orator:* You have amply explained these matters. But now I ask you: isn't God the Beginning of all things?

Layman: Who doubts it?

Orator: Is Eternal Wisdom anything other than God?²⁸

Layman: Far be it that it is anything but God!

Orator: Didn't God form all things by His Word?

Layman: He did.

Orator: Is [God's] Word God?

Layman: It is.

Orator: So [God's Word] is also Wisdom?

22 *Layman:* To say that God made all things in Wisdom is to say nothing other than that God created all things by His Word. But consider how it is that every existing thing (1) was able to exist and (2) was able to be such [as it is] and (3) [actually] exists. Now, God, who gives to everything the actuality-of-existing, is the one with whom there is omnipotence; through this omnipotence [every existing] thing was able to be brought from not-being to being. And [in this respect God] is God the Father, who can be said to be *Oneness*, or *Being*, because by His omnipotence He causes-to-exist that which previously was nothing. Moreover, God causes each [existing] thing to exist in such a way that it is *this*—e.g., the sky—and not something else or something more or something less. And in this respect God is the Father's Word, Wisdom, or Son and can be said to be *Equality of Oneness*, or *Equality of Being*. Finally, [each thing] is both being and being such-and-such—unified in such a way that it [actually] exists. And it has this [unitedness] from God who is the *Union* that unites all things; and [this Union] is God the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit unites—in us and in the universe—all things. Hence, just as Oneness is not begotten by anything but is the First Beginning, altogether unoriginated, so the Father, who is eternal, is not begotten by anything. But Equality proceeds from Oneness; likewise, the Son pro-

ceeds from the Father. And Union proceeds from Oneness and Equality-of-Oneness. Hence, each thing—in order to exist and to be a thing such as it is—has need of the triune Beginning, viz., the trine and one God. A longer discourse could be held on this topic if time permitted.

23 Therefore, Wisdom that is Equality-of-being is the Word,²⁹ or Rational Ground, of things. For it is as an infinite intellectual Form. For form gives formed being to a thing. Hence, Infinite Form is the actuality of all formable forms and is the most precise Equality of all such [forms]. For example, if there were an infinite circle,³⁰ it would be the true exemplar of all befigurable figures and would be the equality-of-being of each figure (for it would be a triangle, a hexagon, a decagon, etc.) and would be the most adequate measure of all [figures], although it would be an altogether simple figure. By comparison, Infinite Wisdom is Simplicity that enfolds all forms and is the most adequate Measure of them all. For example, in the most perfect Form of the Omnipotent Art everything formable through the Art is [that] most simple Form,³¹ the Art itself.³² Consequently, if you consider a human form, you will find that the Form of the Divine Art is the most precise Exemplar of the human form—as if the Divine Form were nothing at all other than the Exemplar of the human form. Likewise, if you consider the form of the sky and turn toward the Form of the Divine Art, you will be able to conceive the latter to be nothing at all other than the Exemplar of the form of the sky—and so on with respect to all formed or formable forms. Accordingly, God the Father's Art, or Wisdom, is a most simple Form; and, nevertheless, it is the singular most equal Exemplar of an infinite number of formable forms—most equal no matter how variable they are.

24 O how wondrous is that Form, whose infinite simplicity cannot be [exhaustively] unfolded by all formable forms!³³ Only he who elevates himself above all opposition, by means of a most lofty intellect, sees this point to be altogether true. For example, suppose that someone were to take note of the natural power that is present in oneness. If he were to conceive that power actually to be present, he would see it as a certain formal being that was visible, from afar, by the intellect alone. And because the power of oneness would be most simple, it would be a most simple infinity. Thereupon, if he were to turn toward the form of numbers by considering twoness or tenness, and if he were then to turn back to the actual power of oneness, he would see that that form which is stipulated to be the actual power of one-

ness is the most precise exemplar of twoness—and, similarly, of tenness and of whatever other numerable number. For the infinity of the form that is called the power-of-oneness would bring it about that when you consider twoness, then that [infinite] form cannot be either greater or lesser than the form-of-twoness, of which it is the most precise exemplar.

25 By comparison, you see that because the singular and most simple Wisdom of God is infinite, it is the most true Exemplar of all formable forms.³⁴ And this [serving as an Exemplar] is the reaching forth whereby Wisdom extends unto all things, delimits all things, and disposes all things. For Wisdom is present in all forms as an original is present in its image, as an exemplar is present in its exemplification, as a form is present in a figure, and as precision is present in an assimilation.³⁵ And although Wisdom communicates itself to all things most generously, since it is infinitely good, nevertheless it cannot be grasped, as it is, by anything; for, [as it is], Infinite Sameness cannot be received in and by anything else, since in something other [than itself] it would be received in another manner [than it exists in itself].³⁶ And since it cannot be received in something [other than itself] except in a manner other [than it exists in itself], it is received in the best way it can be. Now, unmultipliable Infinity is unfolded in the best way by means of a *varied* reception, for a great diversity best expresses the unmultipliability.³⁷ Consequently, it happens that Wisdom, received in various forms in various ways, brings it about that each form, called to sameness [with Wisdom], partakes of Wisdom in the best way it can. Thus, some things partake of Wisdom by means of a certain spirit that is exceedingly far removed from the First Form—a spirit that scarcely imparts elemental being. Other things partake [of Wisdom] by means of a more formed [spirit], which imparts mineral being. Still other things [partake] by means of a more noble grade-[of-spirit], which furnishes vegetable life. Still other things [partake] by means of respectively higher [grades], which [impart, respectively,] sensible life, then imaginative life, then rational life, and then intellectual life.

26 This [intellectual] grade [of spirit] is the highest grade, i.e., is the closest image of Wisdom. It alone is a grade that has an aptitude for elevating itself unto a tasting of Wisdom. For in these intellectual natures the image of Wisdom is alive with an intellectual life, and the power of this life consists in bringing forth from itself a vital move-

ment. This movement is a proceeding—by means of understanding—unto its own object, which is Absolute Truth, which itself is Eternal Wisdom. Now, since that proceeding is understanding, it is also intellectually tasting. For to apprehend with the intellect is to attain—in the best way possible and by means of a most pleasant tasting—unto quiddity. For through a sensible tasting, which does not pertain to the quiddity of a thing, we perceive—by means of the sense [of taste]—a pleasing deliciousness (*suavitas*) in [the properties] external to the quiddity. In a similar way, we taste—by means of the intellect and with regard to the quiddity—an intellectual delightfulness (*suavitas*), which is the image of the delightfulness of Eternal Wisdom, the Quiddity of quiddities. And a comparison of the one delightfulness to the other is disproportional.³⁸

27 So, then, let these [reflections], articulated in the foregoing way, suffice at the moment³⁹ for your knowing the following: viz., that wisdom is not present in the art of rhetoric or in large books but in a separating from these sensible things and in a turning toward [that] infinite and most simple Form and in receiving Wisdom in a temple purged of all moral failing and in clinging to Wisdom with fervent love until you are able to taste of it and to see how delightful is that which itself is every delight.⁴⁰ Once you have tasted of Wisdom, everything that now seems important to you will become of no account to you, and you will become humble, so that no arrogance will remain in you. Nor [will there remain in you] any moral failings at all, since you will cling unrelinquishingly, and with a most chaste and most pure heart, unto that once-tasted Wisdom—even abandoning this world and everything that is not Wisdom in preference to abandoning Wisdom. And after having lived with unspeakable joy, you will die. And after death you will eternally find rest in Wisdom, clinging to it most lovingly. May Divine Wisdom, forever blessed, grant all of this to you and me.

28

THE LAYMAN ON WISDOM¹

Book Two

It happened that the Roman Orator—caught up with highest admiration subsequently to the statements that he heard from the Layman on wisdom—went to visit the Layman. Finding him in seclusion

near the Temple of Eternity,² the Orator addressed him as follows: “O man whose presence is most longed for, come to the aid of my inability, so that with a certain ease I may feed on difficult matters that transcend my mental power. Otherwise, it will profit me little to have heard from you so many lofty speculative-doctrines.”

Layman: Nothing is an easier difficulty than is speculating on things divine, where delight coincides with difficulty. But tell me what it is that you want.

Orator: [I want you] to tell me how I am to form a concept of God, since He is greater than can be conceived.³

Layman: [You may do so] just as [you form a concept] of concept.

Orator: Explain.

Layman: You have heard⁴ how it is that in every conceiving the Inconceivable is conceived. Therefore, the concept of concept approaches the Inconceivable.

29 *Orator:* How, then, may I form a more precise concept [of God]?

Layman: Conceive of precision, for God is Absolute Precision.⁵

Orator: What, then, am I to do when I propose to form a correct concept of God?

Layman: Direct your attention toward rectitude itself.

Orator: And what am I to do when I endeavor to form a true concept of God?

Layman: Look unto truth itself.

Orator: What [am I to do] if I propose to form a just concept [of God]?

Layman: Direct your attention unto justice.

Orator: And what shall I do when I seek how to arrive at a good concept of God?

Layman: Raise your mind’s eyes upward toward goodness.

Orator: I am surprised at whither you are directing me in all [these instances].

Layman: Notice how easy the difficulty is, in the case of God— [so easy] that [the solution to the difficulty] always becomes apparent to the questioner in the very way in which the question is posed.

Orator: Assuredly, nothing is more amazing.

Layman: Every question about God presupposes what is being asked about; and, in regard to every question about God, that which the question presupposes is that which is to be given as the answer.

For example, in every term's signification God is signified—even though He is unsignifiable.⁶

30 *Orator:* Explain, I ask. For I am so exceedingly amazed that I am not fully listening to what you are saying.

Layman: Doesn't the question as to whether something exists presuppose being?

Orator: Indeed.

Layman: So when you are asked whether God exists, reply by stating what is presupposed, viz., that He exists, for *being* is presupposed by the question.⁷ Likewise, if someone asks what God is, then since this question presupposes that there is quiddity, you will reply that God is Absolute Quiddity.⁸ A similar point holds true in all cases. And there is no doubt about this point. For God is the Absolute Presupposition of all things that are in any way presupposed—even as in the case of every effect a cause is presupposed. See, then, O Orator, how easy [a difficulty] a theological difficulty is.

Orator: Assuredly, this easiness is maximal and stupendous.

Layman: Indeed, I tell you that God is infinite facility and that it does not at all befit God to be infinite difficulty. For it is necessary—as you will hear a bit later regarding a curve and a straight line—that difficulty pass over into facility if difficulty is to befit the infinite God.

31 *Orator:* If what is presupposed by any question is, in the case of theological matters, also the answer to the question, then no question about God is a proper question, since the answer coincides with the question.

Layman: Your inference is very excellent. But add that since God is Infinite Rectitude and Absolute Necessity, a *puzzling* question does not apply to Him; rather, in God, every uncertainty is certainty. Hence also, no answer to a question about God is a proper or precise answer, for there is only one, infinite Preciseness, which is God. For every answer partakes of the Absolute Answer, which is infinitely precise. But what I said to you—viz., that, in the case of theological questions, that-which-is-presupposed is itself the answer—must be understood in the [same] way as is the question. And, hereby, you may grasp that the following sufficiency obtains: viz., that since neither the question about God nor the answer to the question can attain unto preciseness, the answer in terms of what-is-presupposed [approaches unto preciseness] in the way in which the question approaches unto preciseness. And this is the sufficiency that we have from God:⁹ viz., to

know that unattainable Preciseness can be attained by us only in a way that partakes of a *mode* of Absolute Preciseness. Among these various and multiple ways that partake of a single mode of Preciseness, the mode just-mentioned comes closest to absolute facility and is our sufficiency, because we cannot attain unto another mode that is both easier and truer.

32 *Orator:* Who would not be astounded upon hearing these things? For since God is Absolute Incomprehensibility, you say that our comprehension approaches nearer to Him the more our mode-of-comprehension partakes [of God's incomprehensibility] with ease.

Layman: He who recognizes with me that absolute facility coincides with absolute incomprehensibility can only affirm the foregoing point with me. Hence, I steadfastly assert that the easier the general way is with regard to all questions formable about God, the truer and more fitting [this way is]—insofar as affirmation befits God.

Orator: Explain this point.

Layman: This point holds insofar as we admit that some things can be said *affirmatively* of God.¹⁰ For in the theology that denies everything of God, we must speak otherwise, because in that theology the truer answer is the *negative* answer to every question.¹¹ But by this way [of negative theology] we are not led unto a knowledge of what God is but, rather, unto a knowledge of what He is not. Then too, there is a consideration about God insofar as neither affirmation nor removal befits Him but, rather, insofar as He is beyond all affirmation and removal.¹² In this latter case the answer [to a question about God] excludes affirmation, negation, and a combination [of affirming and negating]. For example, when it would be asked whether God exists, then according to [the way of] affirmation the answer should be taken from what is presupposed—viz., that He exists and that in this respect He is absolute, presupposed Being.¹³ But according to [the way of] removal the answer should be given that He does not exist, since by this way nothing whatsoever that can be said befits the Ineffable. But in accordance with the fact that God is beyond both all affirmation and all removal, we ought to answer that He neither is Absolute Being nor is not Absolute Being nor both is and is not Absolute Being—but, rather, is beyond [being and not-being].¹⁴

I think that now you understand what I mean.

33 *Orator:* Now I understand that you mean [the following]: that with regard to locutional theology (viz., where we admit locutions

about God and where the meaning of a word is not altogether excluded) you have reduced the sufficiency concerning difficult matters unto an ease in the manner of forming more nearly true propositions about God.¹⁵

Layman: You have understood correctly. For if I am to disclose to you the concept that I have of God, then if my locution is to be of help to you, it must be such that its words are significative—so that in this way I can lead you (through the meaning-of-the-word which is known to us both) unto what is sought. Now, it is God who is being sought. Hence, this is locutional theology, by which I am endeavoring to lead you unto God—in the easiest and truest way I can—through the meaning of a word.¹⁶

34 *Orator:* Let us return now, I ask, to the things set forth by you earlier. And please explain [these] in order.

In the first place, you stated that since God is the Concept of concepts,¹⁷ then the concept of *concept* is the concept of God. [Now,] isn't it mind that conceives?

Layman: Apart from mind no concept occurs.

Orator: Therefore, since to conceive is characteristic of mind, to conceive of the Absolute Concept is nothing but conceiving of the Absolute Mind's Art.¹⁸

Layman: Continue, because you are on the right path.

Orator: Now, the Absolute Mind's Art is nothing but the Form of all formable things. So I see that the concept of concept is nothing but the concept of the Divine Art's Form.¹⁹ Tell me whether I am speaking the truth.

Layman: Yes, you most certainly are. For the Absolute Concept cannot be anything other than the ideal Form of all that can be conceived. This Form is the Equality of all formable things.²⁰

35 *Orator:* This Concept, it seems to me, is called God's Word or Reason.

Layman: No matter what it is called by the learned, in it all things are present—just as those things which do not come to be without [some] preceding reason are said to exist antecedently in reason. Now, all the things that we see to exist have a reason for their existing, so that they exist in the way they do and not otherwise. Therefore, if someone looks, with profundity of mind, unto the simplicity of Absolute Reason, which antecedently enfolds within itself all things, he makes a concept of the Concept-per-se, i.e., of the Absolute Concept.

And this was the first point that I set forth.

Orator: Enough of that point! Add now how it is that the concept of absolute preciseness is a more nearly precise concept of God.

36 *Layman:* I do not have time now to be able to speak again of the same topic in detail.²¹ (Nor do I see that my doing so would be useful to you, for from one detail an access to all the details will be evident to you.) But consider [the following point] very briefly: preciseness, rectitude, truth, justice, and goodness—about which you have heard—are the same thing. Do not suppose I mean [that they are the same] in the way that the whole of our knowledge of God is positioned in a circle,²² so that one of the [divine] attributes is predicated truly of another [of them]. For example, we say (because of the necessity of God's infinite simplicity) that God's greatness is His power (and conversely) and that God's power is His strength—and so on with regard to all the things attributed by us to God's essence. But the points which our present discourse concerns are experienced by us to coincide with our ordinary way of speaking. For example, when we hear someone describing a thing as it is, one [of us] says that the describer has described it *precisely*, another [of us says that he has described it] *correctly*, another *truly*, another *justly*, and another *well*. We experience this in everyday discourse.

37 Moreover, the one who says that some man has spoken precisely and correctly means nothing other than does another who says that the man has spoken truly and justly or well. And you find this to be the case with yourself when you note that the man who has said neither more nor less than he ought to have, has attained unto all these. For that which is precise is nothing other than that which is neither more nor less [than it ought to be]. Likewise, what is correct or true or just or good does not admit of more or less. For how would the following be precise or correct or true or just or even good?: viz., that which would be less than precise, less than correct, less than true, less than just, and less than good. And if what is less than precise is not precise, and what is less than correct is not correct, and what is less than true is not true, and what is less than just is not just, and what is less than good is not good, then it is evident that what admits of *more* is [also] not among these. For preciseness that admits of more—i.e., preciseness that can be more precise—is not absolute preciseness. A similar point obtains regarding the correct, the true, the just, and the good.

38 *Orator:* Therefore, the concept of God is not to be formed by reference to those things that admit of more and less.

Layman: You infer most excellently. For since God is infinite, things that admit of more and less are less assimilated to Him.²³ Therefore, among those things there is no ascent or descent [that attains] unto infinity—as we experience in the case of number and in the case of the division of a continuum.²⁴

Orator: Therefore, in this world there is neither preciseness nor rectitude nor truth nor justice nor goodness, since we experience one thing to be more precise than another thing—as one depiction is more precise than is another. The same point obtains regarding rectitude, for one thing is more correct than is another. And one thing is more true than is another; and one thing is more just than is another; and one thing is better than is another.

Layman: Your conception is right. For insofar as those things²⁵ are free of more and less they are not of this world. For nothing that can be found [here] is so precise that it cannot be more precise. And nothing [here] is so correct that it cannot be more correct, or is so true that it cannot be more true, or is so just that it cannot be more just, or is so good that it cannot be more good. Therefore, preciseness, rectitude, truth, justice, or goodness as they are findable in this world are certain participants and images of such [corresponding] absolutes; [and] these absolutes are exemplars of these [images and participants]. I speak of a *plurality* of exemplars since we are referring to the various [respective] rational grounds of various things. Yet, [these “exemplars”] are one Exemplar, because they coincide in the Absolute.²⁶

39 *Orator:* I am exceedingly desirous to hear you [discourse] on the topic of how it is that there is one Absolute Exemplar of so great a variety of all things.

Layman: One who is little versed in these theological speculations thinks this issue to be very difficult. But to me it seems that no issue is easier and more delightful. For the Absolute Exemplar—which is nothing but Absolute Preciseness, Absolute Rectitude, Absolute Truth, Absolute Justice, and Absolute Goodness—enfolds all exemplifiable things. (It is the Preciseness, the Rectitude, the Truth, the Justice, and the Goodness of all exemplifiable things.) [It enfolds these] much more perfectly than your face enfolds all the images that are formable of it. (Your face is the preciseness, the rectitude, and the truth of all these images.) For all possible depictions of your face are precise, correct, and true to the extent that they partake of, and imitate, the form

of your living face. Now, it is not possible for one depiction to be exactly like another, since preciseness does not belong to this world and since, of necessity, that which is other [than something else] exists in another way [than does that something else].²⁷ Nevertheless, there is only one exemplar of all those varieties [of depicting your face].

40 *Orator:* As concerns [this] exemplar's oneness, you speak the truth—not, however, as concerns its equality [with all its exemplifications]. For although my face is the measure-of-the-truth of its depictions, inasmuch as from beholding the face we judge whether the image falls little or far short with respect to its depicting, nevertheless it is not true that my face is the most adequate measure of all [the images of it] in every way of measuring, for my face is always either greater or lesser [in some respect].²⁸

Layman: You speak the truth regarding your face, which, since it is quantitative and is of the nature of that which admits of more and less, cannot be preciseness and, thus, also cannot be an *adequate* measure of anything else. For in the world, which lacks preciseness, there cannot be an adequate measure or an adequate likeness. But the case is otherwise if you conceive of the Absolute Exemplar, for it is neither large nor small. For *large* and *small* cannot be characteristics of the essence of the Exemplar. (For example, when an ant is depicted, it is no less an exemplar than is a mountain that is to be depicted—and conversely.) Therefore, the Absolute Exemplar—which does not admit of more or less, since it is preciseness and truth—cannot be either greater or lesser than what it exemplifies. That which cannot be lesser we call the minimum, and it is maximally small. That which cannot be greater we call the maximum, and it is maximally great.

41 Therefore, [regarding your concept of] Maximality: free it of what is maximally small and of what is maximally large, so that you may see Maximality in itself rather than as contracted to *small* or *large*. In this way, you will see Absolute Maximality antecedently to large and small, so that it cannot be greater or lesser but is the Maximum with which the Minimum coincides.²⁹ Therefore, insofar as such-a-Maximum-as-this is the Absolute Exemplar, it cannot be greater or lesser than any givable exemplification. Now, that which is neither greater nor lesser we call equal. Therefore, the Absolute Exemplar is Equality, Preciseness, Measure, or Justice—something which is the same as its being Truth and Goodness, which are the perfection of all exemplifiable things.

42 *Orator:* Teach me additionally, I ask, how it is that infinity befits Absolute Rectitude.

Layman: Gladly. You know that the larger a circle is, the larger its diameter also is.

Orator: Granted.

Layman: And although a circle, which admits of greater and lesser, cannot be infinite or unqualifiedly maximal, nevertheless let us conceive that a circle would be infinite.³⁰ In that case, wouldn't its diameter be an infinite line?

Orator: Of necessity.

Layman: And since the circumference would be infinite, it would be the diameter. For there cannot be two infinite things, since either one of them could become greater by means of the addition of the other to it. Moreover, the circumference could not be curved. For if it were curved, it would be impossible for it to be neither greater nor lesser than the diameter, since for all circles of curved circumference there is a single relation of the diameter to the circumference—viz., a relation that is more than triple. Therefore, if the circumference were equal to the diameter, it would *be* the diameter and would be a straight line. Accordingly, you also see that the arc of a large circle is more like a straight line than is the arc of a small circle. Hence, in accordance with this consideration, the circumference of an infinite circle would be a straight line.³¹ Herefrom it is evident to you that curvature, which admits of greater and lesser, is not found at infinity but that only straightness [is found there].

43 *Orator:* The points you make please [me] very much, since they easily elevate me unto that which is being sought. Please continue [to explain] how it is that Infinite Rectitude is an Exemplar.

Layman: You see by yourself most clearly the fact that Infinite Rectitude is to all things as an infinite line (if there were one) would be to [all] figures. For if infinite rectitude (which, of necessity, is absolute) is found (when [considered as] contracted to a line) to be, of necessity, the enfolding, the preciseness, the rectitude, the truth, the measure, and the perfection of all befigurable figures, then Absolute Rectitude, considered in a way that is altogether absolute and that is uncontracted to a line or to anything at all, is likewise, in an absolute way, the Exemplar, the Preciseness, the Truth, the Measure, and the Perfection of all things.

Orator: None of these points are at all doubtful. But show how it is that an infinite line is the preciseness of all figures. For the other

day³² you stated that an infinite circle is the exemplar of all figures, but I did not understand. Hence, I have come to you this time with the desire to be informed more clearly about this matter. But now you say that an infinite line is the preciseness [of all figures]—something that I understand even less.

44 *Layman:* You have heard³³ that an [infinite] circle is an infinite line. Likewise, an [infinite] triangle, quadrangle, pentagon—and, similarly, all infinite figures—coincide with an infinite line. Hence, an infinite line is the exemplar of all the figures that can be constructed from lines, since an infinite line is the infinite “actuality” or [infinite] form of all formable figures. And if you consider a [finite] triangle and elevate yourself unto [considering] an infinite line, then you will find, in the following way, that the infinite line is the most adequate exemplar of that triangle: Consider an infinite triangle. This infinite triangle is neither greater nor lesser than the designated [finite triangle]. For the sides of an infinite triangle are infinite. But since an infinite side is the maximum, with which the minimum coincides, it is neither greater nor lesser than a designated side [of the finite triangle]. Thus, the sides of an infinite triangle are neither greater nor lesser than the sides of the given triangle. Likewise, the triangle as a whole is neither greater nor lesser than the designated [triangle]. Therefore, an infinite triangle is the absolute preciseness and absolute form of a finite [triangle]. Now, the three sides of the infinite triangle would, of necessity, be a single infinite line, since there cannot be more than one infinite line.³⁴ Thus, it would happen that the infinite line would be the most precise exemplar of the given [finite] triangle. And just as my statement holds true of a triangle, so it likewise holds true of all figures.

45 *Orator:* O the marvelous ease of difficult matters! I now see that from positing the infinity of a line there follow very clearly all these points: viz., that the line would be the exemplar, the preciseness, the rectitude, the truth, the measure or the justice, and the goodness or the perfection of all figures that are befigurable by a line. And I see that in the simplicity of the infinite line’s straightness all befigurable things are present in an enfolded way and in a most true, most formal, and most precise way—present without any confusion and without any defect, present infinitely more perfectly than they can be exemplified.

46 *Layman:* Blessed be God, who has used me, a very unschooled

man, as an instrument of sorts, so that He could open the eyes of your mind for beholding Him with wondrous ease—beholding Him in the way in which He has manifested Himself as visible to you. For when you transfer your attention from the rectitude contracted to a line unto absolute, infinite Rectitude, you will behold that in Infinite Rectitude are enfolded³⁵ both everything formable and the forms of everything, just as I stated already regarding geometrical figures. [And you will find] that Infinite Rectitude (1) is the Exemplar, the Preciseness, the Truth, the Measure or the Justice, and the Goodness or the Perfection of all the things that exist or can exist and (2) is the precise and unconfused Actuality of all existing things and of all things that can possibly come to be. Consequently, no matter unto what form or what existing thing you turn your eyes: if you elevate your mind unto Infinite Rectitude, you will find it to be the unfailing and most precise True Exemplar of that [form or existing thing].

For example, when you see a man who is a correct and true man (which is nothing other than the fact that rectitude, truth, measure, and perfection—as contracted and delimited in this way—are a man), and when you consider his rectitude (which is finite) and elevate yourself unto Infinite Rectitude, then you will immediately behold the fact that absolute and infinite Rectitude cannot be either greater or lesser than the rectitude contracted to the man (by means of which rectitude the man is a correct and true man) but is that rectitude's most true, most just, and most perfect Preciseness. Likewise, Infinite Truth is the Preciseness of finite truth; and the absolutely Infinite is the Preciseness, the Measure, the Truth, and the Perfection of everything finite. Therefore, just as I have stated with respect to a man, thus conceive it to be the case with respect to all things.

47 So now you have knowledge of that which it is granted us to contemplate concerning Eternal Wisdom, so that [now] you may behold all things in most simple Rectitude—behold them unconfusedly, most truly, most precisely, and most perfectly (although by means of a symbolism, without which, in this world, there can be no vision of God) until God grants that He be rendered visible to us apart from [any] symbolism.³⁶ And this [direct vision] constitutes a facility with the difficult matters of wisdom. May God, in proportion to your fervor and devotion, make this wisdom daily clearer to you and, I ask, to me—until He transfers us unto the glorious fruitfulness of eternally abiding Truth. Amen.

ABBREVIATIONS

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

PRAENOTANDA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES TO IDIOTA DE SAPIENTIA I

1. Nicholas wrote Book One of *De Sapientia* on July 15, 1450 at Rieti, Italy.
2. I Corinthians 3:19 and 8:1.
3. Though the Layman is without book learning, he is not necessarily illiterate. In the dialogue *De Mente* he shows himself ready to interpret certain aspects of the writings of Plato and Aristotle. (See both n. 145 and n. 44 of Notes to *Idiota de Mente*.) In *De Staticis Experimentis* 161:14-15 he expresses the wish for a written document of recorded weights.
4. That is, they have grown by building upon the knowledge of past scholars and sages. This knowledge, for the most part, has been left to us in books.
5. Proverbs 1:20.
6. Ecclesiasticus 24:7.
7. Concerning the theme of learned ignorance, see *DI* I, 1 (4:7-18). I, 2 (8:7-10). *Ap.* 2-4. *Ap.* 27 (end).
8. The Layman is speaking in common parlance and not technically. The smallest measure (*petitum*) best corresponds to what we Americans regard as a basic unit

of measurement, viz., the inch.

9. *DI I*, 5 (14). *De Filiatione Dei* 4 (72-73).

10. *De Deo Abscondito* 15.

11. The esoteric tradition was very strong in the Middle Ages and is found not only in Christianity but also in both Judaism (Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*) and Islam (Averroës' *The Decisive Treatise*).

12. *DI I*, 4 (11:6-7). *De Filiatione Dei* 4 (72). Cf. the Letter to Cardinal Julian, *DI III* (263:7-8).

13. Throughout this dialogue Nicholas speaks of wisdom (*sapientia*) on two levels: the non-ultimate and the ultimate. On the ultimate level *sapientia* is God. Like Augustine, Nicholas regards the desire for wisdom as, ultimately, a desire for Wisdom (i.e., for God). In *De Sapientia I* (21) he explicitly identifies *sapientia* with God, as he does also in *De Pace Fidei* 4-5. In particular, at *De Pace* 5 (14:4) God is referred to as "the Wisdom of created wisdom."

14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, opening words. Cusanus, *DI I*, 1 (2:12-13).

15. See *De Deo Abscondito*, as well as *DI I*, 26.

16. *Ap.* 17:17-18.

17. *DVD* 17 (80).

18. *DVD* 16 (71).

19. *DVD* 16 (72). The "comprehension of incomprehensibility"—i.e., the comprehension that God is incomprehensible—is an essential aspect of the doctrine of learned ignorance.

20. See n. 13 above.

21. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8.4.6 (*PL* 42:951). *De Trinitate* 10.1.2 - 10.2.4 (*PL* 42: 973-975).

22. See the other arguments for immortality, in *De Mente* 15. Cf. *De Filiatione Dei* 6 (85-87). In the present passage Nicholas is discussing a *visio intellectualis*, not a *visio mystica*.

23. An assimilation (*assimilatio*) is a likeness (*similitudo*). See n. 30 of Notes to *Idiota de Mente*.

24. Nicholas contrasts *veritas* with *imago*—i.e., contrasts a thing qua original with an image of itself. In the very next sentence, however, "*veritas*" is best translated, in the usual way, as *truth*.

25. *DI III*, 12 (258). *DVD* 16 (74).

De Sapientia I has mystical overtones, particularly in sections 15 to 20. Mystical encounter and mystical vision take place beyond all intellect and understanding. Speaking metaphorically in *DVD*, Nicholas indicates that the mystical vision of God occurs beyond the wall of Paradise, which is also the wall of absurdity and the wall of the coincidence of contradictories [*DVD* 9 (38-39) and 12 (50) and 13 (52)].

The emphasis upon learned ignorance lends itself readily to the language of mysticism (and to the doctrine of mysticism). See *DI III*, 12 (258-259) and *DI III*, 11 (245). Note also *DVD* 13 (53).

Giovanni Santinello makes out a case for Nicholas's having been influenced even by Plato's view of wisdom in the *Phaedrus*. See Santinello's "La nozione di sapienza nel Cusano dal tardo medioevo alla tradizione classica platonico-aristotelica," pp. 207-231 (Vol. I) in Stelio Zeppi *et al.*, contributors, *Ethos e Cultura. Studi in onore di Ezio Riondato* [in the series: *Miscellanea Erudita* 51]. Padua: Antenore, 1991 (2

vols.).

26. *DVD* 16 (71).
27. I Corinthians 3:16.
28. See n. 13 above.
29. *DI* I, 8 (22) and I, 9 (26).
30. Nicholas teaches that an infinite circle or an infinite line does not actually exist. Cf. *DI* I, 13 (35:4-8). *Ap.* 32:10-11. *De Sapientia* II (42:6-9).
31. At *De Sapientia* I (23:14) “*simplicissima forma*” is in the nominative case, not the ablative. Cf. *De Sapientia* I (23:22)
32. In God everything is God. *DI* I, 24 (77). *DI* II, 5 (119:15-19). *Ap.* 27:3-14.
33. *DI* II, 3 (105-108). *Ap.* 31 (end).
34. *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (98).
35. Regarding the meaning of “assimilation,” see n. 23 above.
36. *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (99). *De Genesi* 1 (149-150). *De Genesi* 2 (157).
37. *De Genesi* 1 (151:2-5). Cf. Aquinas *SCG* II.45.3
38. *DI* I, 3 (9:4-5). As for quiddity, it is not *precisely* attainable by the intellect in the ordinary modes of cognizing; the intellect attains only unto approximations. The Divine Quiddity is attainable only *aenigmatically*—i.e., through symbol and metaphor. See n. 5 of Notes to the *Compendium*.
39. Regarding the expression “*pro hoc brevi tempore*,” cf. *De Sapientia* I (4:19).
40. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 25.

NOTES TO *IDIOTA DE SAPIENTIA II*

1. This work was written on August 7 and 8, 1450 at Fabriano, Italy. In this book there appear the same two fictional discussants as in Book One.
2. See n. 7 of Notes to *Idiota de Mente*.
3. *VS* 26 (77:5-6). *DP* 41. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 15.
4. *De Sapientia* I (8) and I (12). See n. 19 of Notes to *Idiota de Sapientia I*. See *DP* 41.
5. *DI* II, 1. *DP* 43-44.
6. *De Filiatione Dei* 4 (77-78). At *DI* I, 5 (13:4-5) God is said to be “unnamably nameable.”
7. God is being. *DI* I, 8 (22). *DP* 14 & 65. But He infinitely transcends any humanly formable conception of being. *DP* 25 & 26 & 62 & 74. *De Deo Abscondito* (entire). See especially *DI* I, 6 (17). Cf. what Nicholas says about calling God *one*: *DI* I, 24 (77:12-15). *DP* 26:4-7.
With regard to the argument about presupposition cf. *De Coniecturis* I, 5 (20).
8. *DI* I, 23 (70:23-24). *Ap.* 26 and 33:19-25. But note *DI* I, 26 (88:15-20). *NA* 8. *NA* 10 (37:14). *NA*, Proposition 16 (121:8-10).
9. II Corinthians 3:5.
10. *DI* I, 24.
11. *DI* I, 26. *De Coniecturis* I, 5 (21).
12. See n. 71 on p. 175 of my *Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1986). *NA* 4 (12:7). *NA* 14 (71:4). *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (83).

13. See n. 7 above. *NA*, Proposition 9 (116:8-16).
14. God is beyond being and not-being insofar as these are distinguished from each other and insofar as they are positively conceivable by us. Yet, Nicholas symbolizes God as the Being of being and the Not-being of not-being [*NA*, Proposition 5 (115:4-5)].
15. Locutional theology (*theologia sermocinalis*) is the same thing as affirmative theology (*theologia affirmativa*).
16. *VS* 33.
17. The *Concept of concepts* (viz., God the Word) is also called the *Absolute Concept* and the *per se Concept*. *DP* 40:14. *DP* 40:21. Cf. *De Sapientia II* (35:1) with II (35:9-10).
18. The Absolute Mind's Art, or Knowledge, or Know-how is the Son of God. Cf. *CA II*, 2-3 (especially section 95).
19. "... the concept of the Divine Art's Form": that is, the concept of the Form that is identical with the Divine Art, i.e., with the Divine Word.
20. *DI I*, 7 (21) and I, 8 (22). *DP* 9:14-25.
21. The earlier discussion was in section 29.
22. *DI I*, 21 (66:3-8). *DI II*, 3 (111:8-9). *Ap.* 23:10-12. *DVD* 3 (9:11-12). Nicholas seems to have taken this point from Raymond Lull.
23. "... are less assimilated to Him": i.e., are less symbolically like Him. See n. 30 of Notes to *Idiota de Mente*.
24. *DI I*, 5 (13).
25. "... those things": viz., preciseness, rectitude, truth, justice, goodness.
26. *DM* 2 (67). *DI I*, 14 (37:6-7).
27. We must be sure to distinguish between Nicholas's expression here ("*aliud aliter existere necesse [est]*") and his expression in *De Filiatione Dei* 1 (54:21-22): "*omne existens in alio aliter esse necesse [est]*."
28. For example, my face today might be fuller, or cleaner, or more sun-tanned than it was yesterday. This point about more and less goes back to Plato. See Gregory Vlastos's "Degrees of Reality in Plato," pp. 1-19 in Renford Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965).
29. *DI I*, 4 (11).
30. See n. 30 of Notes to *Idiota de Sapientia I*.
31. *DI I*, 13 (35).
32. *De Sapientia I* (23:6-10).
33. *De Sapientia II* (42).
34. *DI I*, 14.
35. *DI II*, 3.
36. I Corinthians 13:12. Though the soul will see God as He is in Christ, it will not know God as He is in Himself, teaches Nicholas.