

PART TWO: ANALYSIS OF SPECIALIZED TOPICS

1. *Interpretive Translations: their unavoidability.*

1.1. Even if Nicholas of Cusa had written in better Latin style, a translator would still be called upon to make a myriad of interpretive decisions in order to render Nicholas's meanings with presumed accuracy. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the Latin language itself has inherent limitations. In order to realize this fact, one need only recall the lack of both a definite and an indefinite article in Latin syntax.²⁹³ Moreover, the use of verbs such as "*est*" (and "*sunt*") to mean both "it is" and "there is" ("they are" and "there are") causes its own havoc.²⁹⁴ Thirdly, there are problems caused by the punctuation, or the lack thereof, in the extant manuscripts. Given the lack of adequate punctuation, adjectives can oftentimes be construed, syntactically, as modifying either of two different nouns, so that a translator, in deciding what to do, is dependent mainly upon his sense of the context and of the drift of the reasoning. In *De Coniecturis* II, 15 (147:5-6) Nicholas writes: "Et quoniam omnibus hominibus inest ... a natura specifica religio quaedam altiolem immortalem finem promittens varie" Some translators have taken "*specifica*" with "*religio*";²⁹⁵ others have taken it, more rightly, with "*natura*".²⁹⁶ Similarly, a sentence such as "Omnia autem in quantum sunt unum sunt"²⁹⁷ is amphibolous. It might easily be construed as meaning "All things insofar as they exist are, [respectively], something one" were it not for a comparison with *De Pace Fidei* 8 (22:10) and *De Venatione Sapientiae* 21 (59:21-22), two texts which let us know that the foregoing sentence is to be punctuated as: "Omnia autem in quantum sunt unum, sunt."

Fourthly, interpretive problems are unavoidable for a translator of medieval Latin philosophical texts inasmuch as the editing of the compiled Latin text is itself open to challenges. For example, in *LG* II (82:23-25) the following manuscript-wording can be challenged: "Suntque ideo ad unum conexas, quia in omnibus et singulis est entitas et aequalitatis nexus ab unitate et aequalitate procedens." For although one of the two extant manuscripts²⁹⁸ here has (1) "*entitas*" and (2) "*aequalitatis nexus*," elsewhere Nicholas expresses himself threefoldly: (1) "*entitas*" (or "*unitas*"), (2) "*aequalitas*," and (3) "*unitatis et aequalitatis nexus*." Someone might, therefore, surmise (along with the Paris edition) that the text of the foregoing sentence is cor-

rupt and that the more reliable reading would be “*aequalitas et*” in place of “*aequalitatis*”: “Suntque ideo ad unum conexa, quia in omnibus et singulis est entitas et *aequalitas et* nexus ab unitate et aequalitate procedens.” This textual adjustment, when carried over into the translation, would bring Nicholas’s statement into line with his references [both at *LG* II (82:30-33) and outside of *De Ludo Globi*] to *unitas*, *aequalitas*, *et nexus* as symbols of the Divine Trinity and as images, in us, of that Trinity. Yet, a more conservative textual interpretation is both possible and viable, so that, all things considered, it is preferable. For Codex Cracow 682 has “*entitatis*” instead of “*entitas*”. And “*entitatis*” makes perfectly good sense. For Nicholas has just finished mentioning *entitas* and *aequalitas*, so that now he refers to “*entitatis et aequalitatis nexus ab unitate et aequalitate procedens*.” Hereby he completes his usual mention of this trinity of conceptions. Since Cracow 682 has “*entitatis*”, the incorporating of it into the main text is preferable both to selecting Codex Cusanus’s word “*entitas*” and to selecting the more contrived reading of the Paris edition.

A reliable translator, in other words, cannot relegate to an editor all decisions about the text that is being translated. That is to say, a translation will be the more reliable, *ceteris paribus*, the more attention the translator pays to textual issues. After all, the translator seeks to capture the thought of the author; and he can do so only in conjunction with his excluding the errors of the manuscript-copyists.²⁹⁹ When the meaning of the Latin seems wrong to the translator, he will have to rethink the editing of the text: Is the Latin pericope corrupt? Or has the editor made the right selection from among the variant manuscript-readings? We have just seen an example of such a rethinking. At *LG* I (48:10) we find the need for another such rethinking. For there the printed, editorialized text reads (48:9-11): “Ita deus est tricausalis, efficiens, formalis et finalis omnis creaturae et ipsius materiae, quae non causat aliquid, cum non sit aliquid.” But a translator might well question the editor’s decision here to follow Latin manuscript Cracow 682, which has “*non causat*”, rather than to follow Latin manuscript Cusanus 218, which has only “*causat*”.³⁰⁰ For Cusa’s point here is that matter is a cause,³⁰¹ even though matter is not an actual existent. As John, the discussant in *De Ludo Globi* I, states:

You do not deny that although the possibility-of-being-made is not something, it is the possibility-of-being-made-to-be-something. Therefore, it is not alto-

gether nothing, since from nothing nothing is made. And since it is not God or is not something actually existent or is not from something else or is not nothing, then whatever it is it is from nothing. It is not from itself, since it cannot create itself from nothing. Therefore, it seems to be a creature of God, [who created it from nothing].³⁰²

So what Nicholas is saying in the sentence under investigation is readily intelligible as: “Similarly, God is a tricausal Cause (viz., efficient, formal, and final) of every creature and of matter itself, which causes something, although it is not anything [actual].”

Sometimes exegetes invoke the rule-of-thumb which states that a copyist is more likely to have inadvertently left out a word than he is intentionally to have added a word. Accordingly, the reasoning goes, whenever there are only two (non-autographical) manuscripts and they differ in the way that they do above, then it is more likely that the one copyist unintentionally left out the word “*non*” than that the other copyist added it. However, this rule of thumb is valid primarily as regards sacred texts. As regards non-sacred texts, the redactors, the glossists, and even the scribes would, not rarely, correct what they regarded as a sentence whose meaning was foreign to the surmised overall sense of the reasoning. This process of “correction” was carried out even by the editors of incunabula, as is evident (all too starkly) in the Paris edition (1514) of the Cusan texts—though it is much less evident in the Straßburg edition (1488), upon which the Paris edition is based.³⁰³

Fifthly, translations of Cusa’s works are inevitably interpretive because Nicholas does not seek to develop a consistent, technical vocabulary—with the result that nouns (such as “*intellectus*”) are sometimes used by him as interchangeable with other nouns (such as “*ratio*”) and are at other times used in contradistinction to those other nouns.³⁰⁴ Similarly, adjectives such as “*perpetuus*” and “*aeternus*” are sometimes intended by him to be interchangeable,³⁰⁵ but at other times they are not so intended.³⁰⁶ Moreover, we have already noted³⁰⁷ the fluctuating uses of the noun “*ens ipsum*” and of the adjective “*absolutus*”.³⁰⁸

A sixth reason that translations of medieval Latin philosophical texts must be interpretive is that medieval authors frequently economize by leaving aside words that they may reasonably expect a reader to supply. In cases where a translator does not recognize the inten-

tional conciseness-of-expression, he will produce a translation whose meaning differs from the author's. A noteworthy example of just such a happening is found at *LG II* (66:2-4): "... puta: Interrogo te, an cuncta quae vides putas aliquid exsistere? Credo dices cuncta exsistere." One might unwittingly translate these two sentences in the way that Gerda von Bredow does: "So z.B. frage ich dich: Ob du alles, was du siehst, für etwas Existierendes hältst? Ich glaube, du wirst sagen, daß es alles existiert."³⁰⁹ Graziella Federici-Vescovini translates the passage in much the same way: "Per esempio, ti chiedo: credi che esistano tutte le cose che sono qualcosa? Credo che dirai che esistono tutte."³¹⁰ And Pauline Watts's English rendition is: "For example if I ask you whether you think that everything you see is something that exists, I believe that you will say that everything that you see exists."³¹¹ Yet, all of these translators miss the point that in the second of the two sentences Nicholas is understanding the word "*aliquid*" as having to be supplied, so that "*exsistere*" (or "*existere*") does not mean "to exist" but "to be"—and so that the two sentences, together, mean: "For example, I ask you whether you believe to be *something* all the things that you see. I think you will reply that all things are [something]." And Albert, Nicholas's discussant, replies: "Since they are something, it must be the case that they exist."³¹²

Seventhly, translations of medieval Latin philosophical texts are invariably interpretive because (and insofar as) lengthy works will contain some passages that are garbled or whose Latin is erroneous. In *De Ludo Globi* we see an instance of erroneousness when we look at II (62:11-15):

ALBERTUS: Brevisissime declarasti. Nam certissime video: Cum exemplatum nihil habeat nisi ab exemplari, sitque unum omnium exemplar, quod in omnibus et in quo omnia, clara est ostensio, postquam videro unitatem exemplaris omnium variorum exemplarum, me ad altam contemplationem deduxisti.

When we compare corresponding German, Italian, French, and English translations,³¹³ we see that they all construe Nicholas's meaning in such a way that Albert has *already*, at that point in the dialogue, been led to a lofty contemplation; and most of them indicate that Albert at that point has *already* come to see the oneness of the exemplar. Yet, such understandings are errant. Albert, at that moment, wants Nicholas to *go on to* show him that there is but a single exemplar and

to *go on to* lead him to a lofty contemplation. Nicholas has made a mistake in his verb tense (using “*deduxisti*” instead of “*deduxeris*”, as the Paris edition rightly recognizes); moreover, the printed Latin text would better be punctuated in conformity with the punctuation in the following translation:³¹⁴

Albert: You have given a very concise explanation. Indeed, I see very clearly. Since an exemplification has nothing except from its exemplar, and since of all [the exemplifications] there is [only] one exemplar, which is present in them all and in which all of them are present, your explanation is clear. After I come to recognize the oneness of the exemplar of all the different exemplifications, you [will] have led me to a lofty contemplation.

Nicholas proceeds to give Albert his requested explanation, whereupon Albert declares (64:10-12): “You have now shown me what I desired to see. For nothing prevents my seeing that oneness is the beginning of all multitude. From this fact I see the oneness of the exemplar of all exemplifications.”

Eighthly, translations of medieval Latin philosophical texts cannot escape being interpretive inasmuch as, at times, a translator will come up against his own (linguistic and philosophical) limitations and simply will not be able to detect the inherent rationale of what the author is asserting;³¹⁵ and, therefore, he will give a confused translation of the text. An example of this phenomenon is seen at *LG II* (101:20-24):

Rationalis enim spiritus, natura scire desiderans, quid aliud quaerit quam omnium causam et rationem? Nec quiescit, nisi se ipsam sciat, quod fieri nequit, nisi suum sciendi desiderium, scilicet rationis suae aeternam causam, in se ipsa, scilicet virtute rationali, videat et sentiat.

One translator takes this passage to mean: “Denn was sucht der denkende Geist, der sich von Natur aus nach Wissen sehnt, anderes als die Ursache und den Wesensgrund von allem? Und er kommt ja nicht zur Ruhe, wenn er nicht um sich selbst weiß. Das kann aber nur geschehen, wenn er seine Sehnsucht nach Wissen, d.i. aber die ewige Ursache seiner Vernunft, in sich selbst, nämlich in der denkenden Kraft, sieht und spürt.”³¹⁶ An English translator has: “For what else does the rational spirit, desiring by nature to know, seek but the cause and reason of all things? It does not rest unless it knows it [the cause and reason of all things]. This cannot be done unless it sees and perceives its own desire of knowing, namely the eternal cause of its own

reason, in itself, that is, in the rational power itself.”³¹⁷ Other translators have still different renderings.³¹⁸ However, what the text really says and means is the following:

For what else does the rational spirit, which by nature desires to know, seek other than the Cause and Reason for all things? Nor does the rational spirit find rest unless it comes to know itself—something which cannot occur unless it sees and senses within itself, i.e., within its rational power, the Eternal Cause of its knowing its own desire, i.e., the Eternal Cause of its own reason.

A ninth factor that necessitates interpretive translations when it comes to medieval Latin philosophical texts is that medieval authors often fail to make clear the referents of demonstrative and relative pronouns—and the referents of intensive pronouns that are used as substitutes for demonstrative pronouns. We notice this fact especially in the inelegant Latin that characterizes much of the philosophical literature that falls outside the domain of Scholasticism, whose expressions are more stylized and whose language is more technical and more subtle than are the language and the style of these non-Scholastics. A prime instance of a misleading use of the intensive pronoun “*ipse*” occurs in Nicholas’s *De Dato Patris Luminum* 3 (106:2-3), where Nicholas writes: “Mundus igitur non habet principium, ut in ipso aeternitas est omne esse eius.” Here “*ipso*” functions as a demonstrative pronoun (such as “*illo*” or “*eo*”). The most natural way of understanding its referent is to take the referent as *mundus*: “Therefore, the world does not have a beginning insofar as, in it, eternity is its entire being.” And yet, this would be a misleading translation. For what Nicholas means is: “Therefore, the world does not have a beginning insofar as *in the Father (in ipso)* its entire being is eternity.” For in God, the world is God. Indeed, Nicholas goes on to indicate that the eternity of the world is an originated eternity and that Unoriginated Eternity is God. The originated eternity descends from God the Father, who is Unoriginated Eternity. Nicholas makes a similar point in his *Sermones*,³¹⁹ where he also uses “*ipse*” as a pronoun referring to God.

Of course, someone could argue that the first-given translation of “*in ipso*” (as “in it,” viz., in the world) is correct because eternity is the entire being of the world only insofar as the world is in God and, in God, *is* God. But that construal makes “*in ipso*” superfluous. For one could just as well say, without “*in ipso*”: “... the world does not

have a beginning insofar as eternity is its entire being.” Moreover, that translation would be dangerous, since it would occasion the notion that the world, in its being, is God—as well as occasioning the corresponding notion that God “in His contracted mode of being” is the world. But these notions are decidedly non-Cusan. So it is evident that the world is without beginning insofar as in God it is God, rather than insofar as in it God is it. For although God is in all things, He is not in any thing as being that thing.³²⁰ For God is in all things as their Sustaining Cause; but a cause—even a sustaining cause—is never identical with what it causes. God sustains all things insofar as they are things originated; insofar as they may be viewed as unoriginated, they must be viewed as in God and as being (in God) God, rather than as being (in God) their finitely contracted selves. So although it is not true that in the world God’s Eternity is the world or is the world’s entire being, nonetheless it is true that in God’s Eternity the world, ontologically prior to its origination as world, is entirely God. In short, eternity is never the entire being of the world insofar as the world is world (but only insofar as *in God* the “world” is God).

A plethora of examples such as the foregoing can readily be found. One really intriguing example has to do with Anselm of Canterbury’s sentence in *Proslogion* 2, where “*quod*” (a relative pronoun) has what could be called an “indefinite” antecedent: “*Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re—quod maius est*”: “For if it [viz., that than which a greater cannot be thought] were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality—something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding].” Yet, some interpreters have supposed that “*quod*” should be read differently, as might occur if one editorially removed the dash (or the comma) after “*in re*”: “*Si enim vel in solo intellectu est potest cogitari esse et in re quod maius est*”: “For if it is only in the intellect, what is greater can be thought to be in reality as well.”³²¹ In the introduction of my *New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm’s Monologion and Proslogion* (pp. 26-33) I have shown at length why this latter understanding is really a misunderstanding, though a remarkably captivating one, at that.

A tenth (and, for our purposes,³²² final) instance of how and why translations are interpretive relates to the fact that a word such as “*motus*” can be either a noun or the past participle of the verb

“*moveo*,” a phenomenon that, in places, requires an interpretive decision. Such a place is *LG I* (35:1-2), where Nicholas writes: “Sed sicut conditor legis, motus ratione, legem sic ordinavit, quae movet subditos ...” Many translators³²³ take “*motus*” as a noun, when, in fact, it is a verb-form: “... a law-maker, moved by reason, ...”³²⁴ Sometimes, too, the nominative plural of the past participle of the deponent verb “*nitor*” can be mistaken for the conjunction “*nisi*”. Still other problems are caused by the fact that fourth-declension nouns such as the masculine noun “*motus*” have the same form for the nominative singular, the genitive singular, and the accusative plural—even as third-declension i-stem nouns such as “*collis*” or “*ignis*” also have the same form for the nominative singular and the genitive singular. Such sameness-of-form will sometimes create situations in which a translator must decide between two differing, but *prima facie* equally viable, renderings.

1.2. Difficulties such as are typified by the foregoing ten varieties highlight how treacherous can be the attempt to translate medieval Latin philosophical texts. All translators of lengthy texts (including myself) have made grave errors of rendering. Although occasionally such errors may be naive or foolish, most of the time they are a consequence of the ineptly expressed Latin sentences—or the consequence even of corrupted or garbled passages. An example of a passage that I myself earlier failed to comprehend is *De Mente* 6 (91:7-11). In Codex Cusanus 219 (folium 120^v) this passage is written as follows: “Ad hec ex habitudine semitonii et medietatis duple que est coste quadrati ad diametrum numerum simpliciolem intueor quam nostre mentis ratio attingere queat.” I editorially transcribed this as: “Ad haec, ex habitudine semitonii et medietatis duplae—quae est costae quadrati ad diametrum—numerum simpliciolem intueor quam nostrae mentis ratio attingere queat.” And I translated it as: “Moreover, from the relation between a semitone and a double half-tone [i.e., a full tone]—which is [like] the relation of the side of a square to its diagonal—I behold a number that is simpler than our mind’s reason can grasp.” Nonetheless, my punctuation and my understanding of the text were incorrect. Had I understood better the (to be sure, confusing) Latin, I would have used the following punctuation: “Ad haec, ex habitudine semitonii, et medietatis duplae, quae est costae quadrati ad diametrum, numerum simpliciolem intueor quam nostrae mentis

ratio attingere queat.” And I would have made the following translation: “Moreover, from the relation of a half-tone [to a full tone]—and from the relation of half a double [proportion],³²⁵ this latter being that of the side of a square to its diagonal—I behold a number that is simpler than our mind’s reason can grasp.” One likes to believe that with experience comes the savvy whereby one may avoid the perils that result in mistranslation. And to some extent this avoidance does increase, although never to perfection.

From the fact that the translations are to some degree inescapably interpretive, there does not follow that we can never be certain of capturing the author’s thoughts. For we *can* and *do* very often accurately capture these thoughts as they are expressed by the author. What we may fail to capture is the richness of the author’s unexpressed thought—a richness that is the source, or fount, of his expressed thought. The attempt to arrive at this fount involves us in interpretation of a different sort: viz., interpretation of the *significance* of the author’s expressed thought. What is presupposed, we want to know, by what the author actually says? What is implied thereby? How does what is said by the author cohere with what is said by him elsewhere? Is what-is-said philosophically tenable? Can it be further clarified or better justified? And so on. Interpretation in this sense must not be confused with interpretation in the previous sense. This second level of interpretation belongs not to the mission of the translator qua translator but to the domain of the expositor or of the commentator, of the critic or of the defender, of the detractor or of the admirer.

2. *Manuscript Collations: anatomy of an edition.*

2.1. Those who do not work with medieval and Renaissance manuscripts tend to underestimate, rather than to overestimate, the difficulty of doing so. And even those who do work sporadically with them may fail to appreciate either the enormous power of concentration or the delicate exercise of skill that is required in order to collate them into a critical edition. The editor of a critical collated-edition would fain cast the beam out of his own eye before seeking to remove the mote in the medieval copyists’ eyes (cf. Matthew 7:5). But he knows that such a beam is the hardest of all things to be rid of and that even its successful removal leaves various blind spots in its aftermath. In other words, an editor, in the course of his editing, is bound to make

mistakes, so that the quality of his edition will not be measured by whether or not it contains any mistakes but rather, as Alexander Patschovsky³²⁶ once said to me, by how many or how few mistakes it embeds.

There can be such a thing as a critical edition from a *single* extant manuscript of a work. Ironically, it is more difficult to produce such an edition than it is to produce a critical edition where there are two and only two extant manuscripts. And it is more difficult to produce the edition from the two manuscripts than would be the case were there three extant manuscripts of the work. At some point the difficulty is reversed: It may be more difficult, for example, to work with five manuscripts than with only four, and more difficult to work with six than with only five; and so on. That which contributes to the overall difficulty is not just the degree of legibility or illegibility of the copyists' handwriting, not just the number of ambiguous or unambiguous abbreviations, and not just the mutual inter-dependence or mutual independence of the manuscripts, but something even more disquieting: viz., the proverbial oversights that inevitably accompany the task of transcribing, collating, and proofreading. For whereas the beam that blocks the editor's sight may lead him not to see a word that is there to be seen, it can also conduce to his "seeing" as there a word that is not really there. His only safeguard comes from taking a second look, a third look, a look through someone else's eyes, and so on. Let us examine an actual edition in order to get a better sense of why precision is always a community affair, accompanied by the necessity for scholars to look over the shoulders of other scholars in order to help descry details that may otherwise have been missed. We may take as our focal point Hans Gerhard Senger's respectable critical edition of *Dialogus de Ludo Globi*, published in 1998 by Felix Meiner Verlag as Vol. IX in the series *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*. We may focus on this edition both because it relates inherently to the present book of translations and because it is so very recent. It will serve as a paradigm of what a critical edition is and of what it can never hope to be.

2.2. Let there be no doubt about the Editor's capabilities or about his carefulness and insightfulness in taking account of the two extant manuscripts³²⁷ and in recording his findings for us. At II (104:10-11) he helpfully expands the Latin text by adding the words "*elementati-*

va mineralis, in minerali vegetativa et in". At II (87:13-14) he likewise insightfully adds: "*vides deum ante creaturas non proprie dici fuisse*". Similarly, at II (77:5) he rightfully unpacks "*ex qua*" as "*ex qua <distinctione>*". As a good editor, he seeks to inform us of such putative facts as that at II (62:2-4) "*Eo ... exemplar*" is written in denser letters both in *C* [= *Codex Cusanus* 219] and in *K* [= *Codex Cracow* 682] and that in *C* the letters are also in red; thereby the Editor means to inform us that Nicholas is accentuating this thought.³²⁸ Moreover, at II (98:8-9) the Editor discerns that the true reading is "*in stabili intentione*" instead of *C*'s "*instabili intentione*" or *K*'s "*immutabili intentione*". And at I (38:9) he perceptively substitutes for both manuscripts' word "*quae*" the word "*qui*", just as at I (55:9) he acceptably supplies "*solum*" and at I (24:15) supplies "*habet*₂". The Editor is so conscientious that he even indicates in *C* all the passages that are "highlighted" by markings in the margin.³²⁹ And, likewise, he records for us the glosses in the margins both of *C* and of *K*.

Furthermore, the Editor's notes are rich both with references to Nicholas's sources and with references to merely parallel ideas in still other authors; wherever it is known to be likely that Nicholas drew a reference from a secondary source, this secondary source is mentioned. At I (14:10-11) we are astutely reminded that Nicholas's words "*unus ... in toto orbe vultus*" are drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* I, 6; and at I (17) we are referred, as regards Nicholas's views on eternity, not only to Meister Eckhart and Pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus but also to Albertus [misspelled in the n. for I (17:6-9)] Magnus and Aurelius Augustinus. Furthermore, the notes mention not only such other major figures as Aristotle, Proclus, Boethius, Peter Lombard, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Thomas Aquinas but also lesser figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Heimeric de Campo, Clarenbald of Arras, William Conches, Gottschalk of Orbais, Hermannus Contractus, Michael Scotus, and Henry of Ghent. A wealth of cross-references to Nicholas's own works serves as an invaluable aid. Finally, the introductory section—which assesses the two manuscripts and furnishes information about the dates of the *Dialogus* and about the two discussants Duke John of Mosbach and Albert IV of Munich—provides essential data.

2.3. But like all editions this one, too, has certain types of shortcomings. In making ourselves aware of these types, we should not sup-

pose that their presence indicates carelessness or ineptitude on the part of the Editor. Although no single one of the problems is inevitable, it is inevitable that there be some such kinds of problems.

2.3.1. One kind of difficulty—a kind feared by every editor—is the following: viz., during the typesetting of the edition some omission or other occurs that goes undetected in the course of proofreading. And, indeed, at *LG* II (66:9) just such a significant omission does occur. For the printed line reads: “*CARDINALIS: Nonne quae existunt in ipso existunt?*” But both manuscripts have: “*CARDINALIS: Nonne quae existunt in ipso esse existunt?*”³³⁰ Thus, the correct reading is “*in ipso esse*” and not simply “*in ipso*”. The missing word “*esse*” can be presumed to have resulted from a typing-and-proofreading error rather than from an error at the stage of the Editor’s transcription. By contrast, a second such omission, at *LG* I (4:13) is of trivial significance and may have originated at either stage of the edition: viz., the omission of “*et*”: “... *variari et semper ...*”³³¹

2.3.2. A second type of problem relates to the variant readings: an editor will usually fail to take cognizance of a number of these variants. Such a failure is more likely to be the result of a simple oversight at the time of comparing the manuscripts than it is to be a proofreading problem. In the edition now under examination this kind of situation arises, for example, where there is no note at II (82:10) indicating that *K* has “*enim*” in the place where *C* has “*igitur*”. Moreover, at II (112:5) there is no note to the effect that whereas *C* has “*videt*”, *K* has “*vidit*”. At II (115:14) there is no mention of *K*’s having “*illa*” although *C* has “*illo*”. At II (61:22) it is not noted that *K* has “*liberis*” instead of *C*’s “*libens*”. Also unnoticed is that at II (79:2) *K* has “*sive*” (or “*sine*”) in place of *C*’s “*nisi*”, even as at II (79:3) *K* has “*sed*” in lieu of *C*’s “*seu*”.³³² Likewise, at II (95:17) *K* has “*colloquia*” instead of *C*’s “*colloquio*”. And at II (107:14) *K* has “*illum nos*”, whereas *C* has “*nos illum*”. At II (88: 17) *K* omits “*sic*”. No matter how careful an editor is, such variants will elude his best efforts to spot them.

2.3.3. Closely related to an editor’s overlooking of discrepancies between two or more manuscripts is his sometimes failing to take note of variations that occur within a single manuscript. For example, in the present edition there is no note at II (77:20) indicating that, in *C*, “*cognitionis debilitatio*” is transposed from “*debilitatio cognitionis*”. Sim-

ilarly, although the Editor does tell us that at I (15:19) *C* adds, and then deletes, “*non non*” after “*rotunditas*” and that at I (24:12) *C* adds and deletes “*est motus*” after “*non*”, he does not tell us that after “*circuli*” at II (104:20) *K* adds and deletes “*terminantur in*” or that after “*linea*” at I (20:11) *K* adds and deletes “*moveri non possit*”. More importantly, we are not told that at II (95:18) *C* adds and deletes “*rationalis*” after “*quod*”,³³³ and that at II (108:10) *C* adds and deletes “*homine*” after “*creato*”. Less importantly, we are not told that at II (105:8) *C* adds and deletes “*progressione*” after “*de*” and at II (115:15) adds and deletes “*et*” after “*aureas*”. And so on.

2.3.4. Editors must be allowed a certain amount of latitude as to what they will choose to itemize in their notes concerning the contents of the manuscripts. Some editors, proceeding along the lines indicated in 2.3.3 above, prefer to cite each instance of a copyist’s having written and deleted something.³³⁴ An editor might choose to proceed in this way as an aid to other scholars who may have occasion to look at a microfilm of the manuscript but not at the manuscript itself. A note from an editor who himself has examined the manuscript will prove reassuring as to what is really true of the manuscript, since not every ink-stroke in a manuscript can with confidence be presumed to be visible in the microfilm. Consistency will then dictate that the editor take explicit note of all such instances where words or letters have been written-down and deleted.

Other editors will choose not to “clutter up” their critical notes with such entries as the kind just mentioned. Like the Editor of the edition under consideration, they will make no entry such as might be made for *LG* I (40:10): “*omnia: bis C (omnia₁ del. C)*”—or for II (69:20): “*punctus: bis C (punctus₁ del. C)*.” They will, however, not hesitate to “clutter up” their notes by recording differences of capitalizations between corresponding words in different manuscripts. In the edition of *LG*, for example, such differences are noted with great frequency. One must be generous enough to accept the Editor’s decision that such items have importance, even though it is well-known how impulsive and sporadic are the punctuation and the capitalizations in medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. One is entitled to demand only that if an editor chooses to call attention to such differences of capitalization, he do so uniformly and consistently. In this light such entries as the following will be necessary in the edition of *LG*:

2:2	musica: Musica <i>K</i>
4:4	Pars: pars <i>K</i>
16:2-3	imaginem: Imaginem <i>K</i>
25:2	Homo: homo <i>K</i>
26:4	ita: Ita <i>K</i>
48:2	globum: Globum <i>K</i>
28:5	sed: Sed <i>K</i>
37:3	Unam: unam <i>C</i>
52:3	Illi: illi <i>C K</i>
57:7	Hi: hii <i>C K</i>
101:22	quod: Quod <i>C</i>

And so on.

2.3.5. Likewise, as regards spellings, one might question the need for an editor to make entries that call attention to variant spellings such as the following: mysterio|misterio I (2:3); imum|ymum; I (11:6); Quidquid|Quicquid I (11:7), quitquid I (13:9); proicere|proijcere I (20:7); intentionem|intencionem I (55:8); assistunt|adsistunt II (77:11); polygonias|poligonias II (92:18). The presence of such entries gives the appearance of “padding” the notes. However, if an editor, making use of his editorial license, chooses to include such material, then he should include it consistently. Thus, he should also cite:

2:5	exercitium: exercicium <i>K</i>
24:20	quam: <i>non proprie abbreviat K</i>
38:3	vegetative: vegetiva <i>C</i>
54:17	mystica: mistica <i>K</i>
55:3	quemque: quenque <i>C</i>
58:24	similatur: simulatur <i>K</i>
61:21	periucundum: perucundum <i>K</i>
62:24	omnia: <i>non proprie scribit K</i>
71:9	diabolo: diabulo <i>K</i>
76:4	designationes: designaciones <i>K</i>
90:6	atingimus: attingimus <i>K</i>
98:9	imperium: imperim <i>K</i>
104:1	sapientium: sapientum <i>C K</i>
112:11:	cognoscit: congoscit <i>K</i>
116:9	cuius: <i>non proprie scribit K</i>

And so on.

Especially curious is the fact that in his edition of *LG* Editor Senger consistently uses, for the proper name of Nicholas's discussant in Book One, "Ioannes", even though both manuscripts have "Iohannes", with an "h". Yet, when Senger writes his own first name on the cover of the edition, he writes it in Latin as "Iohannes" and not as "Ioannes".³³⁵

2.3.6. Furthermore, if an editor chooses to signal, in his critical notes for the text, such differences as "Immo|Imo" I (11:3), "ad verissime|adverissime" I (21:2), "Quomodo|Quo modo" I (22:1), "quamdiu|quam diu" I (23:7) "adhuc|ad huc" I (26:5), "quoad|quo ad" I (29:7), "Latentne|Latent ne I (48:1), "eo ipso|eoipso" II (87:3), then he should be consistent and register also such items as the following:

- 14:4 In tantum: Intantum C K
- 14:6 in quantum: inquantum C K
- 14:11-12 in qua: inqua K
- 45:14 in se: inse C K [cf. II (102:4) with II (85:4) in K]
- 95:7 in se ipsa: in seipsa C K

2.3.7. Editors of critical editions also exercise their editorial prerogatives when they decide to mention or not to mention that a correction to the text has been made "above the line" or "on the line" either by the copyist himself or by a subsequent reader or reviewer. These mentionings have the appearance of arbitrariness unless the editor either refers, in his critical notes, to *all* such occasions or lays out his criteria of selection. In this light the critical edition of *LG* might well have included (but need not have included) such further annotations (in the notes) as the following:

- 2:2 arithmetica: Arithmetica ex Arithmetica (r supra lin.) corr. C [cf. the notes at I (28:18) and I (42:19)]
- 91:13 quod: habet C; s. lin. reabbrev. in alio modo C²
- 113:4 sive,; habet C (v clarius s. lin. rescribit C)

By contrast, the recommended annotations listed below are at odds with the editorial notes that correspond to them in *LG*, so that those notes should be corrected to read:

- 53:12-13 spe firma ducitur: habet C (spe ducitur firma

	ducitur scribit C; prius ducitur ₁ firma in firma ducitur transponit, et postea ducitur ₁ del., C)
65:19	ipsam: ex ipsum corr. C
94:15	faciendam: ex faciendum corr. C
104:8	extrinseci intrinsecum: extrinsecum in extrin- seci in corr., et postea trinsecum scribit, C
108:15	quaternaria: habet C (sine alteratione)

2.3.8. Critical editions will sometimes also contain inaccurate interpretive notes. In the edition under discussion, for example, the Editor, at I (5:14), understands Cusa as subscribing to the Aristotelian conception of motion, whereas, in fact, Cusa endorses the anti-Aristotelian impetus-theory of John Buridan. In *LG* Cusa even uses the word “*impetus*”. A further inaccurate editorial note is one that we have already looked at:³³⁶ viz., the mistaken interpretation of the meaning of “*ens*” in the explanatory note for II (87:1).

2.3.9. Another problem that besets critical editions is a lack of full documentation in the notes. This problem is certainly inevitable, since no editor is omniscient, and therefore he cannot possibly be familiar with all of those references that are relevant in an essential way. In the edition of *LG*, for example, the Editor should have supplied, for I (19:1-2), the Scripture references “Psalms 113:3^b” and “Jonah 1:14”. Similarly, at II (75:20-22) there should be a reference to Cusa’s *De Visione Dei* 21 and to *Cribratio Alkorani* III, 19. And at *LG* II (98:2-4) there should be a reference not only to Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* but also, and more importantly, to his *Metaphysics* XII, 7 (1072^a24 - 1072^b4). Furthermore, at II (87:7-8) the note “*dictum non inveni*” should be replaced by a reference to *Liber de Causis* XVII (XVIII), 143. And at II (75:22-23) the correct Scripture verse to be referenced is John 10:10, not Hebrews 2:18 or Hebrews 3:12. Likewise, at *LG* II (71:8-9) the correct Scriptural references are John 8:44 and Revelation 12:9, not II Timothy 3:11 (or even 3:13).

2.3.10. Critical editions also usually contain references and notes that are more or less irrelevant, if not altogether superfluous. These otiose notes originate because of an editor’s zeal to avoid the failing just alluded to in section 2.3.9. Instances of over-zealousness occur in the notes to *LG*, for example, at I (51:23), where the references to John 6:38, John 6:41-42, and Ephesians 4:9-10 are not needed. A similar point holds for the Scriptural verses cited at I (52:2), viz., John

6:70, John 20:31, and I John 4:15.

2.3.11. An editor will also sometimes unintentionally omit from his critical notes annotations in the margins of a manuscript that he is using for his collation. In the critical edition of *LG* this phenomenon occurs at II (109:27-28), where the Editor does not record the following note: “Optimus philosophandi modus *in marg. adnotav. K*”. Sometimes an editor’s citing of such a marginal notation contains an error, as occurs at II (72:13-14), where the Editor should change his “quare sunt nouem circuli” to “quare sint nouem circuli”. Likewise, at II (110:12-13) the Editor’s note should be corrected to read: “est in quoque valent exis. *in marg. K*”.

2.3.12. An editor of a collated edition will also have to decide just how much of a manuscript’s punctuation he wishes to have reflected in his critical apparatus. In the edition of *LG*, for example, the Editor has decided—without objection, as far as I am concerned—not to indicate that at II (66:9) *C*, but not *K*, has the question mark that is found at the end of the sentence in the printed edition. And at II (80:1) he does not indicate that neither *C* nor *K* has a question mark but that he himself has supplied one editorially.

2.3.13. Finally, an editor will, of necessity, make decisions about whether the corrections that are found in the various manuscripts are those of the original scribe or are those of a subsequent proofreader or reader. Such decisions can often be challenged, since, for many corrections, either of the alternatives will be arguable from the character of the handwriting and of the ink. Thus, one might well question—given that at II (84:1) “*scilicet boetii*” was supplied above the line by *K*—whether it is true that in manuscript *K* “*sunt scilicet*” at II (63:9) was supplied above the line by *K*². And so on.

2.4. The foregoing thirteen kinds of problems³³⁷ occur with a greater or a lesser degree of frequency in virtually every critical edition of a medieval or a Renaissance work that is collated from Latin manuscripts. Therefore, our assessment of the critical edition of *LG* must not only bear this fact in mind but must also recall Patschovsky’s assertion that a critical compilation of manuscripts is not to be judged by whether or not it contains errors but, rather, by how many or how few errors it embeds. In this light, then, the compiled printed text of *LG* that the Editor has presented us with is, basically, a reliable text. The unnoticed variants, the missing Scripture verses, the irrelevant

Scripture verses, the capitalization-discrepancies, and all the rest, make no important difference to the body of the text that the Editor has finalized. Even the unintentional omission of “*esse*” at II (66:9) is not a crucial loss, since a keen translator will, anyway, observe that “*esse*” would have to be “understood” as the referent of “*ipso*”. Moreover, the critical apparatus contains the information that a translator or a commentator requires in order to make his own decision regarding the important issue of “*causat|non causat*” at I (48:10). [Re “*causat|non causat*” see pp. 62-63 above.] Furthermore, the overlooking of “*et*” at I (4:13) makes no significant difference, as also does not the overlooking of *K*’s having “*est*” after “*creatura*” at II (87:16). All in all, then, we may be satisfied with the published edition—except for one aspect which, for all that anyone could know in advance, might have led to a serious problem.³³⁸ The one thing for which the Editor can be faulted, from a scholarly point of view, is found in his compromising words regarding Codex Cracow 682: “*codicem non inspexi, sed taeniolis photographis et imaginibus luce depictis usus sum*” (p. XII of the edition, my italics). Here the Editor has taken a major risk. For there are sometimes things in a manuscript that are not captured either on a microfilm or on a photo-reproduction.³³⁹ Users of a critical edition deserve the assurance of knowing that the editor has examined the codices themselves—provided that they are still extant.³⁴⁰

3. Genetic Analysis: application to Cusa’s thought.

In a remarkable book—*Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung. Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*³⁴¹—Kurt Flasch endeavors to undertake, as concerns Nicholas of Cusa’s works, *eine genetische Analyse*,” which he also calls “*eine genetische Untersuchung*,” “*eine genetische Betrachtung*,” “*eine genetische Darstellung*,” and “*ein genetisches Verfahren*.”³⁴² The outcome of such an analysis will be, he implies, the bringing of Cusa’s thought into a different, and presumably a truer, perspective than has hitherto ever been done. Just what a genetic analysis is supposed to be we discover in leisurely fashion in the course of reading Flasch’s book, for he nowhere summarizes his method. Obviously, “genetic” has to do with genesis, with origins (p. 399), so that Flasch is examining Cusa’s ideas as they originate work by work and as they change, or even disap-

pear, from work to work.

3.1. When we piece together what we are told about genetic analysis, we come up with at least twenty-five distinct, but not always separate, points: such an analysis **(1)** is “*biographisch informiert*” but not “*biographistisch-reduktiv*”³⁴³ (p. 24); **(2)** involves taking account of an author’s self-correction (p. 29); **(3)** envisions the possibility that an author may not have a system-of-thought that develops progressively (p. 43); **(4)** does not lose sight of that which remains constant throughout an author’s works (p. 71); **(5)** takes account of an author’s own self-interpretations (p. 122); **(6)** does not hesitate to disagree, at times, with an author’s self-interpretation (pp. 49, 113); **(7)** seeks to avoid undue subjectivism on the interpreter’s part (p. 121); **(8)** holds strictly to chronology (p. 122); **(9)** assesses the reliability of the redacted versions of an author’s texts and makes judgments about whether, and where, these editions introduce errors when reproducing an author’s writings (pp. 40, 122); **(10)** aims at an appropriately balanced presentation and discussion of an author’s corpus of writings (p. 122); **(11)** arranges theses in conformity with motifs, without trying to force the author into a predetermined tradition (p. 122); **(12)** is suspicious of applying rubrics such as “Humanist,” “Scholastic,” “Renaissance figure,” etc., and is equally suspicious of clichés, such as that the author stood at the threshold between Middle Ages and Modernity (pp. 11, 308, 326, 327-328, 461); **(13)** openly acknowledges the inconsistency of an author’s ideas whenever such inconsistency occurs (p. 10); **(14)** clarifies terminology, viz., both the author’s and the interpreter’s own (pp. 34, 37, 55-56, 97, 275, 411-412, 417-418, 520, 535); **(15)** avoids the enumeration of mere parallelisms with other writers (p. 308); **(16)** seeks always to discover what is *new* in a given work (pp. 387, 541); **(17)** recognizes that even when an author repeats himself, he nonetheless says something new (pp. 122, 612); **(18)** does not assume that just because a given thesis does not appear in a work, the author has abandoned that thesis (p. 344); **(19)** identifies the author’s presuppositions (p. 65); **(20)** aims to understand each work in and of itself, but without losing sight of its relation to other of the author’s texts (p. 534); **(21)** makes presuppositions of its own, such as that each work of an author contains something that is not found in his other works and that the interpreter knows what philosophy is (or what whatever other relevant subject-matter is) (p. 541);

(22) knows that an author's correspondence often discloses his philosophical intentions (p. 542); (23) does not confuse the notion that an author's thought *changes* with the notion that his thought *progresses* (p. 647); (24) acknowledges its having to decide, about an author's works, which ones are more worthy, and which ones are less worthy, of considered attention (p. 647); (25) assesses the influence of historical events upon the author's changing patterns of thought (pp. 219 ff.).

Although many of these characteristics might seem to some people to be little more than "exegetical common-sense," they do nevertheless, when taken collectively, give us the flavor of a genetic investigation: it is an investigation that proceeds by examining an author's works in chronological order and partly from an author's own professed point of view, letting each work speak for itself, while the investigator keeps an eye out for what is new and while he compares each individual work with others by the author and takes some account of biographical and historico-cultural influences in order to situate the author (and his ideas) historically. Making use of these guidelines, Flash sets out to examine the development of Cusa's philosophical thinking from beginning to end—from *Sermo* I (December 25, 1430) to *De Apice Theoriae* (1464). Taking his cue partly from passages in which Cusa speaks of his own philosophical development,³⁴⁴ Flasch orients Cusa's thought preliminarily, and heuristically, in terms of temporal stages:³⁴⁵

- (a) the time of the early sermons—around 1430-1432—when Cusa's philosophical thought was still inchoate.
- (b) the time of Cusa's first systematic philosophy, viz., around 1440, when *De Docta Ignorantia* was written and when Cusa emphasized God's transcendence and the difficulty of approaching Him cognitively.
- (c) the time of the writing of *De Coniecturis* (viz., around 1442), a work that represents a new philosophical orientation on Cusa's part.
- (d) the time around 1450, when Cusa's interest turned toward the world of art, of technology, of medicine, of empirical matters, being the period when he wrote the *Idiotae*.

(e) the very last years, when Cusa was occupied with “the philosophy of pure possibility,” i.e., of “*absolutum posse*,” with its fewer presuppositions and its more simplified approach.

The delineation of these divisions Flasch regards as but a working-hypothesis that serves as an initial *point de repère* for organizing a narrative of Cusa’s philosophical development. Nonetheless, this working-hypothesis becomes firmer as Flasch continues onward; for, in continuing, he comes to regard the initial hypothesis as confirmed, though it becomes modified and nuanced in subtle ways.

3.2. In principle, Flasch’s approach is a most welcome one, (1) since it aims to focus on Cusa’s texts themselves and on his “self-correcting” turns-of-thought and (2) since the approach takes pains to avoid easy generalizations, tantalizing catchwords, and gratuitous assumptions. Especially intriguing about Flasch’s *Geschichte einer Entwicklung* is how much it tells us about Flasch’s own intellectual development from the time that he wrote his *problemgeschichtliches* book *Die Metaphysik des Einen bei Nikolaus von Kues* (1973) until the writing of this present book, which leans more toward being *literarhistorisch*. In commenting, for example, on Nicholas’s varying statements regarding negative theology, Flasch confides:

Eine genetische Darstellung bietet den Vorteil, ihm [d.h. dem Kusaner] in dieser Beweglichkeit zu folgen; eine systematisch völlig einhellige Gesamtposition zu dem Problem der negativen Theologie hat Cusanus nicht vorgelegt, und sie läßt sich auch nicht entwickeln. Ich habe dies früher versucht, bin dabei gescheitert und nahm dies als einen der Indikatoren, der eine genetische Untersuchung nahelegt.³⁴⁶

But even when Flasch is not so direct about himself, we as readers still will discern much about his own philosophical interests and presuppositions—as, for example, his own fierce interest in philosophy more than in theology, an interest accompanied by the corollary concern to accentuate Cusa-the-philosopher over Cusa-the-theologian.³⁴⁷ We learn, too—this time through direct expression—that Flasch is no historian of mathematics³⁴⁸ and no expert in Arabic studies.³⁴⁹ (But these self-disclosures are honorable, for they show that he is cautious not to exceed his own range of specialization.) Stanley Fish, the literary critic, once observed that “biographers are all autobiographers, although the pretensions of their enterprise won’t allow them to admit

it or even see it.”³⁵⁰ So, too, *genetische Analyse* insofar as it is *biographisch* is also *selbstbiographisch*; but that enterprise is unpretentious in a way that allows Flasch both to recognize and to admit the implicit and the explicit *selbstbiographische* details.

The book *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* contains a wealth of materials; and in its rich variety it succeeds in highlighting the multi-dimensionality of Cusan thought. In discussing *De Staticis Experimentis* Flasch perceptively introduces the Arabic thinkers who also dealt with the issue of weights (p. 328). Elsewhere he discerningly explores the significance of the mathematical texts *De Geometricis Transmutationibus* (pp. 175-180) and *De Mathematicis Complementis* (pp. 389-392). Moreover, he insightfully points out the conceptual connections between *De Theologicis Complementis* 11-12 and *De Visione Dei* 8’s treatment of the angle of the eye (Flasch, p. 409). Flasch poses provocative questions—questions such as the following one: Suppose that of Cusa’s *Idiota*-series (*De Sapientia* I & II, *De Mente*, *De Staticis Experimentis*) the last book were lost and that we would have to surmise what its contents had been? (p. 318). This question immediately calls attention to just how surprisingly different *De Staticis Experimentis* is from the other works in the series. For no one would have surmised that Nicholas would have written a dialogue on empirical matters.

Flasch’s book is laudable in many other respects as well. For example, it states clearly that Nicholas is no pantheist (pp. 293, 295), that he is not a nominalist as regards names (p. 622), that he is not a proto-Kantian (pp. 282-283, 301, 462, 542). Theologically, Flasch discerns clearly that, on Nicholas’s view, the human nature in Christ remains finite (p. 427). Philosophically, Flasch does not contrive to modernize Cusa—to Kantianize or Hegelianize or existentialize him (e.g., 282-283, 301, 462, 542). Occasionally, however, eisegetic Hegelianisms do creep in, as when Flasch sees Cusa as characterizing late-medieval thought as “*unglückliches Bewußtsein*” (p. 255), sees him as alluding to the “*List der Gottheit*” (p. 148), and further sees him as teaching that Christianity is “*die Vollkommenheit und die Vermittlung der Gegensätze*,” these opposites being Judaistic monotheism and heathenistic polytheism (p. 334). Still further, Flasch understands Cusa to need, and to be struggling toward attaining, the Hegelian concept of *Moment* (p. 417; cf. pp. 334 & 315). In his *opus* Flasch strives to

be comprehensive: he touches even upon the oft-neglected Cusan treatise *Coniectura de Ultimis Diebus* (pp. 44-45); and when he leaves aside further discussion of *Tres Epistolae contra Bohemos* (i.e., *De Usu Communione*), he expresses scruples for doing so (p. 542).³⁵¹ He also recognizes the perils encountered by translators; and, accordingly, he includes a section that exposes some of these perils (pp. 517-521). Finally, he provides a wide span of historico-cultural information not only in the section entitled “*Jahrhundertmitte. Die Welt des Cusanus*” but throughout his lengthy *opus*.

3.3. Yet, any work of 679 pages is bound to have problems of all sorts. Let us catalogue some of these problems, beginning with the least important and then ascending to the most important and, finally, descending again to lesser difficulties.

3.3.1. *Misprints; mistaken references, quotations, etc.* Errors in this category are virtually inevitable. The making of them belongs to the human condition. No one should fault an author for such mistakes unless they are so repetitious and so pervasive as to betray carelessness on his part.

In *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* there are a number of mistaken or missing references: Note 334 on p. 423 should refer to *De Visione Dei* 25 (instead of to 24). On p. 117 the reference in n. 203 is mistaken and should be changed to, perhaps, “ib. II, 4 p. 73, 11-12”. In n. 72 on p. 279 the reference should be corrected to: “ib. c. 3 n. 73, 6-9 p. 111-112”. Some references are confusing. For example, on p. 491 the reference in n. 97 cites lines 5-12 on f. 16^v of the Paris edition of Nicholas’s sermons. But the direct Latin quotation that it appears is being cited is found on lines 8-11 (not 5-12). Flasch must mean also to be including in his reference the ideas that immediately precede the Latin quotation of lines 8-11. On p. 591: n. 341 should be corrected to read: “ib. 155 r 31-32”. On p. 151: note 263 should be corrected to read: “ib. II 6 n. 98, 4-5 p. 95”. On p. 671 the reference to Ritter should include mention of p. 411. The references to the Paris edition should always include the line numbers, as they do not on Flasch’s pp. 73-75. In n. 66 on p. 75 Flasch should indicate that in the passage that he excerpts from P II 2 fol. 8 v [i.e., from Paris edition, Vol. II (2nd half), folio 8^v (lines 5-6)] he has corrected “*vestiges*” to “*investiges*”. On p. 405 in n. 302 (and elsewhere such as in the quotation marked by n. 366 on p. 437) Flasch should

indicate that the emphasis is his own and not Nicholas's. On p. 407, n. 304, the reference should be corrected from "c. 11" to "c. 12". (Similarly, on p. 407: line 1 of the new paragraph should read "*der 12. Abschnitt*" and not "*das 11. Kapitel*".) On p. 406, first new paragraph: the reference should be to *De theologicis complementis* 12 (not to 11); moreover, the title should be corrected from "*De complementis theologicis*" to "*De theologicis complementis*"; and the section referred to should not be called a chapter (*Kapitel*). Similarly, in the first new paragraph on p. 408 and the first new paragraph on p. 409 the references should be corrected from "*De theologicis complementis* 11" to "*De theologicis complementis* 12". Flasch should also make up his mind about the title of this work, which he sometimes writes correctly as "*De theologicis complementis*" (pp. 393, 394n283, 661) and sometimes incorrectly as "*De complementis theologicis*" (pp. 389, 402, 404, 406, 407, 409, 435, 448, 452). On p. 408 it is written both ways—in the very same paragraph. Similarly, we find on p. 166 the title "*De geometricis transmutationibus*,"³⁵² whereas on p. 175 the title is given as *De transmutationibus geometricis*. Likewise, on p. 537 we find the word "*Mathematico-Theologie*"; but on p. 539 it is written not only in that way but also as "*Mathematicotheologie*," even as on p. 536 we have "*Geometricotheologie*".

There are also mistaken quotations, such as on p. 589 in n. 339, where the last line has "*in motum*" instead of "*in motu*". On p. 284: line 3 of the Latin quotation from *De Mente* 9 should read "*sunt omnia*" instead of "*omnia sunt*", even though the meaning will remain unaffected. On p. 487 the Latin quotation in the first new paragraph should be corrected to read: "*Omne autem id, quod videtur . . .*" And line 7 on p. 597 should have "*ante*" and not "*antea*" or else should indicate that "*ante*" has been editorially corrected into "*antea*". On p. 156 the Latin quotation associated with n. 270 should be corrected to read: "*ratiocinantes hactenus sibi*"; and n. 270 should add "p. 54". On p. 83 the Latin quotation associated with n. 100 should read "*haereticus esse posset*" instead of "*haereticus esse potest*"; and in the same note "*concilio catholico ecclesiae*" should be corrected to "*concilio catholicae ecclesiae*". On p. 441, line 7, the quoted Latin text should read "*est non lateralis*" and not "*non est lateralis*".

In addition to the foregoing misreferencings and misquotations, there are also misprints and misspellings.³⁵³ Examples are: "*Analyen*"

(p. 13, line 6 from bottom); “*nterpretierten*” (p. 275, line 16); “*insbesonder*” (p. 292, line 7); “*quaaerendo*” (p. 169n302); “*Dannn*” (p. 532, line 23); “*Kommenar*” (p. 452, line 22); “*immantes*” (p. 458, line 6); “*Gemetrie*” (p. 473, line 3); “*Mysticisme*” (the English word, p. 383n268, line 7 of note); “*Study on*” in place of “*Study of*” (p. 383n268, line 7 of note). On p. 535 Flasch uses the Latin adverb “*praecise*” in lines 8 and 11, but he should there be using an adjective. On p. 101, note 160, the author’s name should be corrected from “Ely” to “Eby”.

Klaus Kremer, in an earlier version of his subsequently published outstanding review [*Theologische Literaturzeitung* (Leipzig) 124 (April 1999), 410-415], noted the following misspellings of names and titles: “Anton Scharpf” (pp. 45, 380, 671) instead of, correctly, “Anton Scharpf”; “Werner Kremer” (p. 660, line 13) instead of, correctly, “Werner Krämer”; “Thomas Itzbicki” (pp. 447n7, 663) instead of “Izbicki”; “Anton Ritter” (p. 411) instead of “Adolf Ritter”; “Vansteenbergh, Nicholas de Cues” (p. 17) instead of, correctly, “Vansteenbergh, Nicolas de Cues”. Here we may add: “R. Klibansky, Nicolas of Cues” (p. 662, last entry) instead of, correctly, “R. Klibansky, Nicholas of Cues”. The volume number of the serial publication containing Klibansky’s article should also be cited (viz., Vol. IV).

Yet, the misspelling, miscitations, misquotations, and mis-titlings are of such a nature that, fortunately, they do not detract from the content of Flasch’s work. Indeed, all of them could be corrected in a second edition.³⁵⁴ We must always bear in mind (1) that any book of considerable length will always have some such imperfections, though, of course, the fewer the better, and (2) that the misquoting of the Latin texts is always cause for concern.

3.3.2. *Outright mistakes.* Vastly more significant are the outright mistakes made by Flasch. Some of these are signaled by Klaus Kremer in his penetrating review in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (column 414):

De staticis experimentis ist bereits im Straßburger Druck von 1488 enthalten, nicht 1543 erstmals gedruckt, Coniectura de ultimis ... erstmalig 1471 und nicht schon 1461 (44); De corr. Calendarii stammt aus dem Jahre 1436, vermutlich im Sommer (Ausg. Stegemann XXXIX u. LXXIV Anm. 69 mit Verweis auf Marx, N. 219), und nicht aus 1434/35 (92). –Die Inkorporierung des NvK ins Basler Konzil erfolgte am 29.02.1432 (AC I, N. 102), nicht

am 22. Febr. (72).

To this list can be added other errors: Flasch falsely claims, on his p. 152, that the word “*intellectualiter*” does not appear in *De Docta Ignorantia*. But quite obviously it does—at I, 4 (11:23), at III, 4 (206:17), at III, 6 (217:14), at III, 12 (258:12), and at III, 12 (259:23).³⁵⁵ On p. 289 Flasch claims that in *De Mente* Nicholas avoids both the theme and the word “*ignorantia*” and that where the word or the theme does come up, as in *DM* 10 (127), Nicholas directs discussion toward another topic. But this claim is not true. Nicholas introduces the theme of ignorance and the verb “*ignorari*” already in *DM* 2; and he does not introduce the theme in order immediately to direct attention away from it. “Just as human reason,” he says, “does not attain unto the quiddity of God’s works, so neither does a name” [*DM* 2 (58:13-15)]. He continues on, indicating a further limitation of our knowledge: viz., that God and His Word are ineffable [*DM* 2 (67-68)] and that there is no precise knowledge except with God [*DM* 3 (69)]. Furthermore, in *DM* 7 (102) Nicholas speaks of the surmising nature of our empirical concepts and of their uncertainty. In Chapter 14 he declares that “concepts that we acquire here in this variable and unstable world and in accordance with the conditions of the variable world are not made permanent” (155:7-9). And in the very last chapter of *De Mente* we are told that our reason can never take the precise measure of (i.e., can never know precisely) our own mind [*DM* 15 (158)]. In *De Mente* Nicholas remains interested in the bounds of knowledge, as he was also interested therein in *De Docta Ignorantia*. And the notion of learned ignorance is present in *De Mente*, even though Nicholas does not use the words “*docta ignorantia*”. After all, as Nicholas tells us at *DI* I, 2 (8:7-10) (and in similar words in *Apologia* 27): “... learned ignorance has its basis in the fact that precise truth is inapprehensible.” And, unquestionably, *De Mente* emphasizes the imprecision of all human knowledge.

Another mistake occurs on Flasch’s p. 378, where he writes:

Bestimmte Einsichten, die der *Idiota* ausgesprochen hatte und die man hier erwarten könnte, kehren in *De pace fide* nicht wieder: Der Intellekt ist *imago*, aber jetzt heißt die *mens* wieder *contracta*, nicht mehr: Bild der *complicatio complicationum*. Nicht-Kontrakt-Sein oder Absolut-Sein erscheint (wieder) als das Privileg Gottes.

Flasch is claiming that in *De Mente* Nicholas regards mind as uncon-

tracted, whereas in *De Pace Fidei* Nicholas reverts to understanding it as contracted. But this contrast between *De Mente* and *De Pace Fidei* is unfounded. For in *De Mente*—as at all times from *De Docta Ignorantia* on—Nicholas maintained that only God is Absolutely Uncontracted. Moreover, in *De Mente* he likewise believed that the human mind is a *contracted* and *finite* image of God. Flasch claims otherwise: “Der Laie sagt nicht etwa: Unendlicher Geist, also Gott, zweitens endlicher Geist, also Menschengeist. *Unendlich* nennt er den Geist in jeder seiner beiden Gestalten. Er sagt auch nicht, der Menschengeist sei gemacht oder geschaffen. Er *identifiziert* ihn andererseits nicht mit dem göttlichen Geist. Aber er sieht die Differenz im Bild-Sein *innerhalb der gemeinsamen Unendlichkeit*” (p. 277, my italics at the end).³⁵⁶ But this view is mistaken. In *De Mente* Nicholas regards the human mind as finite, as contracted. This fact is clear from his claiming that the human mind is originated [*DM* 11 (132-133)],³⁵⁷ that our mind little resembles the Infinite Mind [*DM* 7 (98)], that there is no single mind in all men [*DM* 12 (142)], that human minds think thoughts successively [*DM* 11 (133)], and that human minds can change by forgetting concepts and relearning them, so that in that respect they are imperfect and deformed [*DM* 14 (155)]. In *De Mente* the distinction between Divine Mind and human mind is not a difference that takes place *within a common infinity*. God’s “Being” (symbolically speaking) is Absolutely Uncontracted Being, whereas man’s image of God is always a finite and contracted image of God. Flasch is moved by the fact that in *De Mente* Nicholas does not use the words “*finita*” and “*contracta*” of *mens*. Yet, Flasch should remember his own words apropos of *De Pace Fidei* and should apply them to *De Mente*: “Wir werden auch bald sehen, daß Cusanus seine *intellectus-ratio*-Spekulationen, seine Koinzidenzlehre und seine Neu-Situierung der negativen Theologie keineswegs aufgegeben hat. Er hat sie in *De pace fidei* zurückgehalten, nicht zurückgenommen” (p. 379).

In interpreting *De Mente* Flasch is misled by Nicholas’s statement, at *DM* 9 (125:13-14), that “mind is a living, uncontracted likeness of Infinite Equality.” To be sure, this statement refers to the human mind. But Nicholas does not mean that the human mind is uncontracted so as no longer to be finite. Rather, in this speech the Layman is carrying over the idea that he expressed in his previous speech, viz., that the human mind is not contracted to anything quantitative; it is like a

living pair of drawing-compasses that, as the dialogue's Philosopher adds, extends one of its feet or draws it back in order to take the measure of determinate things and, as the Layman continues, in order to assimilate itself to the different modes of being. That the human mind is "uncontracted" in this sense does not exclude its being finite; nor does it exclude its being contracted in the sense of being finite and of being either *this* mind or *that* mind or some other mind.

Nicholas's terminology is oftentimes misleading.³⁵⁸ In *DI* II, 4 (113-114), for example, he calls the universe a contracted infinity and eternal. Yet, the universe is "eternal" only in that it is perpetual,³⁵⁹ and therefore temporal; thus, it falls infinitely and disproportionately short of absolute and unchanging Eternity. Similarly, even though the universe is called by Nicholas a contracted infinity, he still regards the universe as finite,³⁶⁰ as having a measurement known only to God, and as falling infinitely and disproportionately short of Absolute Infinity. Accordingly, his also speaking of the universe as "privatively infinite" [*DI* II, 1 (97)] is simply his indicating the distinctive way in which it is *finite*. Moreover, although in *DVD* 2 (8) he refers to God's Absolute Sight as the Contractedness of contractions and as incontractible Contractedness, these are but *modi loquendi* not meant to deny that God's "Sight" is free of all contractedness [*DVD* 2 (8:6-7)]. Confusing to superficial readers are also such statements as that God creates Himself.³⁶¹

Throughout his book Flasch makes a host of cognate errors when interpreting Nicholas's doctrines. One of these cognate errors is the following: "Doch kontrahiert sich die absolute Einheit, ohne ihre Absolutheit zu verlieren" (p. 140). However, nowhere—not in *Sermo* XXII, not in *De Docta Ignorantia*, not anywhere—does Nicholas teach that by becoming incarnate, or by any other means, Absolute Oneness, viz., God, contracted Himself. In Christ the divine nature, according to Nicholas, did not contract itself; rather, the divine nature assumed a contracted human nature unto itself hypostatically. The divine nature is absolutely uncontracted and incontractible. Thus, Flasch is also in error when he writes: "Nirgends [in *De pace fidei*] sagt er [d.h. Cusanus], wie in *De docta ignorantia*, das *maximum absolutum* koinzidiere mit dem *maximum contractum*" (p. 360). For in *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas does not state that the Absolute Maximum (viz., God) *coincides* with the contracted maximum. What he says is that

in Christ the maximal human nature is *united to* (not *coincides with*) Absolute Maximality (viz., God). And even in *Sermo XXII* (37:12-13), where he writes “Christus coincidit cum ipsa natura humanitatis, per quam omnes homines sunt homines”, what he means is that Christ’s human nature (not His divine nature) coincides with the human nature through which all men are men. In *DI III*, 12 (262:6-7) Nicholas does say that the *union* of Christ’s two natures, since it is maximal, coincides with the Absolute Union, which is God. But that is a different point from Flasch’s. And, in any event, Nicholas is theologically mistaken in *DI III*, 12 (262:6-7). But he corrects himself in *De Visione Dei*.³⁶²

One must not be misled by Cusa’s saying such things as that “nominamus ipsum [id est, deum], ut est contractum, vel ad aliquam proprietatem particulariter Deo convenientem, ut est aeternum, infinitum, etc.”³⁶³ For Nicholas is not here asserting that God is contracted. Rather, he is indicating that we sometimes conceive, and speak, of Him as contracted to the eternal, to the infinite, to wisdom, to goodness, etc. That is, we speak of Him, positively, as good, wise, infinite, eternal, etc. God Himself is ever uncontracted. Yet, oftentimes we speak of Him as if He had properties. Nicholas expresses this point more clearly in *Sermo XXII* (12:1-2): “Quando autem Deum ad contractum ens consideramus ...”: “When we consider God with respect to contracted being ...” Here there is no appearance of suggesting that God is contracted. Or again, in *Sermo XXIII* (35:11) it is clear that when we speak of God as mighty or as just, etc., we are but *signifying* God in a contracted manner: “Alia nomina Deum significant contracte ...”

However, in a different vein, confusion about contractedness continues when Flasch writes (p. 614) that, according to Cusa’s *De Venatione Sapientiae*, the intellect “findet also in sich selbst die kontrahierte Weisheit und damit auch die nicht-kontrahierte Weisheit.” For Nicholas does not teach that uncontracted wisdom is present in any human being except in Christ, who Himself is Wisdom itself. The fact that the human intellect can form the *concept of uncontracted wisdom does not entail that* uncontracted wisdom is present in the human intellect, for the concept of uncontracted wisdom, though present in an intellect, is a contracted concept. That is, the concept of uncontracted wisdom is not itself uncontracted. [Cf. *DI II*, 9 (150:20-25).]

Engendered by a misinterpretation is another of Flasch's false claims:

für Cusanus ist Gott ein anderer Modus der Schöpfung; er ist ihre *invisibilitas*, so wie die Welt ein anderer Modus Gottes ist, nämlich seine Sichtbarkeit. Ich erinnere an die These von *De principio* n. 33, 1-3 p. 45: Wir haben es allemal mit dem Unendlichen zu tun, einmal als begrenzend, *finiens*, einmal als begrenztbar,³⁶⁴ *finibilis*. Diese Einsicht hatte Folgen; eine davon ist der Name *Possest*. Eine andere ist eine neue Theorie der *theologia negativa*.³⁶⁵

Almost everything about this passage is erroneous. First of all, according to Nicholas, it is not the case that God is a mode of creation; nor is it the case that the universe is a mode of God. Flasch has misconstrued the meaning of Nicholas's words in *De Possest* 72: "What, then, is the world except the manifestation of the invisible God? What is God except the invisibility of visible things—as the Apostle says in the verse set forth at the beginning of our discussion."³⁶⁶ That verse is Romans 1:20, which Nicholas understands as stating that "the invisible things of Him, including His eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, by means of understanding created things."³⁶⁷ Nicholas is agreeing with the Apostle Paul that the creation manifests the Creator, that the Creator is seen in and through His creation.³⁶⁸ Neither the Apostle Paul nor Nicholas is teaching that the creation is a *mode of God* or that God is a *mode of His creation*.³⁶⁹ Rather, the Apostle is echoing the Psalmist, who spoke (1) of the heavens as declaring the glory of God and (2) of the firmament as showing His handiwork.³⁷⁰ And Nicholas is echoing both the Apostle and medieval natural theology. This is why in *De Possest* he immediately adds: "Hence, the world reveals its Creator, so that He is known. Or better: the unknowable God reveals Himself knowably to the world in imagery and symbolism"³⁷¹

Secondly, *De Principio* 33 does not teach that there is a single Infinity that is both delimiting and delimitable.³⁷² Instead, it teaches that there are two infinities: Delimiting Infinity, which is God, and delimitable infinity, which is 'nothing,' and which is *ontologically subsequent* to God. If we like, says Nicholas, we may conceive of 'nothing' as if it were a material used by God, the Omnipotent Form, in order to create finite beings; for when the First Infinity (viz., God) delimits the second infinity (viz. 'nothing'), finite beings arise from the First Infinity, not from the second infinity. Nicholas calls 'nothing'

an infinity because he is conceiving of it as boundless and lacking all determinateness but as able to be given determinateness. He is not conceiving of it dualistically along side of God, for it is ontologically subordinate to God, is dependent upon God. God and ‘nothing’ are different infinities and are infinities in different senses. God is Absolute Infinity. (In *DI* II, 1 (97) Nicholas calls Him negatively infinite). But ‘nothing’ is an absolutely privative infinity, *absoluta carentia*. The background for *De Principio* 33 is *DI* II, 2 (100)—in particular, 100:6, where Nicholas quotes Pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus: “God is the opposition to nothing by the intermediacy of being.”³⁷³ And, of course, Nicholas is painting a new metaphorical picture of God’s having created the universe *ex nihilo*. Nicholas is not reifying *nihil*. Rather, just as he does in *DVD* 10 (42), so also here he is envisioning *nihil* as if it were a material, and he is speaking accordingly. And in this way he speaks of two infinities, not of one. For God Himself is only Determining and Delimiting, never in Himself determinable or delimitable.

Thirdly, there is no new theory of negative theology in *De Possesst*, as Flasch has alleged that there is and as he goes on to recapitulate:

Das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung ist: Wir müssen negieren. Wir müssen vom Begrenzten die Begrenztheit negieren, um das Absolute zu erreichen. Ich muß das Nicht-Sein in jedem Gegebenen sehen und abstreifen. Dies, und nicht der Gegensatz zur Affirmation, ist jetzt für Cusanus das Entscheidende an der negativen Theologie. *Oportet de contracto contractionem negare, ut absolutum pertingamus* [*DP* 69]. Die negative Theologie negiert die Negation. Das ist ihre wahre Funktion, wie sie in dieser Schärfe erst jetzt, in *De Possesst*, austritt.³⁷⁴

But Flasch has here changed his claim. At first he claimed that in *De Possesst* there is “eine neue Theorie der *theologia negativa*: (p. 529); but now (p. 533) he is claiming only that *De Possesst* sets out the doctrine of negation-of-negation for the first time “in dieser Schärfe,” i.e., with this degree of sharpness and emphasis. But whereas we may agree with this subsequently modified and reduced claim, we dare not agree with the former claim that in *De Possesst* Nicholas presents us with a new theory of negative theology. For already at the end of *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 17 Nicholas had written:

We have now seen clearly how we can arrive at God through removing the participation of beings. For all beings participate in Being. Therefore, if

from all beings participation is removed, there remains most simple Being itself, which is the Essence (*essentia*) of all things. And we see such Being only in most learned ignorance; for when I remove from my mind all the things which participate in Being, it seems that nothing remains. Hence, the great Dionysius says that our understanding of God draws near to nothing rather than to something.

Here Nicholas is mentally removing predicates from beings, is mentally removing their contractedness, just as in *De Possess*—except that *De Possess* adds a few different details, as does also, later, *De Li Non Aliud* 10 (38-39).

Let it also be noted that *De Possess* insists on the theme of *docta ignorantia* just as surely (though not as extensively) as does the treatise *De Docta Ignorantia*. Even though in *De Possess* the phrase “*docta ignorantia*” is missing, the phrase “*doctrina ignorantiae*,” i.e., “instruction in ignorance,” is present (*DP* 54:1). And *De Possess* 53-54 addresses the theme of learned ignorance, even as does also *De Possess* 74-75. Moreover, *De Possess* 41:14 states explicitly (with respect to our knowledge of what God is) that “the one who knows that he is unable to know is the more learned.”

We must clarify what Nicholas means by “*theologia negativa*”. And when we do so, we will better understand the sense in which he never abandoned either the doctrine itself or its primacy over affirmative theology. In *De Docta Ignorantia* I Nicholas entitles Chapter 26 “*De Theologia Negativa*”; and in that chapter he explains that “according to the theology of negation, there is not found in God anything other than infinity. [Cf. *De Theologicis Complementis* 12.] Therefore, according to this theology [God] is not knowable either in this world or in the world to come ... but is known only to Himself.” Thus, God is not known to be Father or Son or Holy Spirit—is not known to be trine, is not known to be one—in any sense in which any finite mind can understand the meanings of these words. Now what Nicholas states in *DI* I, 26 coheres with what he had previously asserted in *DI* I, 4 (12:4-7), viz., that the absolutely Maximum (i.e., God) “is beyond both all affirmation and all negation.”³⁷⁵ From negative theology, thus understood, it follows that the *via negativa* is superior to the *via affirmativa* because the *via negativa* agrees with negative theology that God is neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Spirit, nor wise, nor good, nor one, nor being, etc., in any sense in which these can be conceived or understood by finite minds. Accordingly, that which is expounded

regarding *theologia negativa* will also oftentimes have application to the *via negativa* as well. But *theologia negativa* surpasses the *via negativa* by virtue of its teaching that God transcends ineffably all negation to which any affirmation is opposed. That is, God transcends all oppositions such as “good/not-good,” “wise/not-wise,” “one/not-one,” “being/not-being”. Accordingly, He is altogether unknowable by us as He is in and of Himself. *This Cusan doctrine never changes*. Sometimes, however, Nicholas equates negative theology with the *via negativa*, just as he regards Dionysius as doing. Thus, in his letter of September 14, 1453 to the Abbot and the monks at Tegernsee,³⁷⁶ in which he distinguishes negative theology from mystical theology, he wrote:

Since negative [theology] removes without positing anything, God will not be seen in an unveiled way by means of it; for God will not be found *to be* but rather [will be found] *not to be*. And if He is sought by way of affirmation, He will be found only through images and in a veiled way but not at all in an unveiled way. However, in most places Dionysius taught theology by means of this disjunction: viz., that we approach God either affirmatively or negatively. But in the book where he wants to display mystical and secret theology in a way possible, he leaps beyond this disjunction unto a uniting and a coincidence, or a most simple union. This [union] is not a side-by-side conjunction but is vertically beyond all removing and positing—where removing coincides with positing, and negation with affirmation.

Likewise, even earlier, in *De Sapientia* II (32), he identifies *theologia negativa* with the *via negativa* (which he then moves beyond). So in some of his works Nicholas emphasizes negative theology insofar as it is identical with the *via negativa*; in other of his works he emphasizes negative theology insofar as it surpasses the *via negativa*.

Just as leaping beyond the *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa* is the same thing as discovering their coincidence, so also God’s being said by Nicholas to be beyond the coincidence of opposites [*DVD* 9 (39:10-11) and 13 (54:14-15)] is the same thing as his being Him-in-whom-opposites-coincide [*DVD* 10 (41:1-6) and 13 (55:10-11)]. These are different metaphors for the same doctrine; they do not indicate a difference of doctrine. Thus, although Flasch is right when he points out that in *De Coniecturis* Nicholas extends the notion of coincidence so that it applies not only to God but also to intellects and to reason [*DC* II, 1 (78:13-15)],³⁷⁷ he is wrong when he writes that in *De Coniecturis* “die absolute Einheit ist, wenn ich so sagen darf, gewisser-

maßen noch transzendenten geworden, steht sie jetzt vor jeder Art der Verknüpfung der Widersprüche und Gegensätze, wie der Intellekt sie vermag. Sie steht jenseits der Koinzidenz” (p. 160, my underlining). He is wrong because even in *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas conceived of God, in whom all things coincide, as beyond the coincidence of opposites, because for things to coincide *in* God just is for God to be *beyond* these things and their coincidence. That is why Nicholas could write already in *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 4 that the absolutely Maximum is beyond all affirmation and negation.³⁷⁸ When in *De Coniecturis* I, 6 (24) Nicholas explains his intent “in a *divine* [vs. *intellectual*] way,” he is clarifying his intent not only in *De Coniecturis* but also in *De Docta Ignorantia*. For although in *De Docta Ignorantia* he had often spoken of God in an intellectual way, as being Him in whom contradictories are conjoined,³⁷⁹ he did also speak of Him as beyond the contradictories of positing and removing³⁸⁰—without clarifying the difference between the two modes of expression, as he does clarify it in *De Coniecturis*. We must talk here of Nicholas’s *clarifying* his view, not of his *transforming* his view. For even in *De Coniecturis* he continues to speak of God as Him *in* whom opposites coincide [*DC* I, 6 (23:10-11) and II, 1 (78:13-14)].³⁸¹

Finally, with regard to negative theology, let us briefly examine another inaccurate but minor claim made by Flasch: viz., that in those of Nicholas’s sermons prior to *De Docta Ignorantia* the function of negative theology is left unexplained: “Die Funktion der negativen Theologie bleibt ungeklärt: Ist sie Vorbereitung der positiven Theologie oder behält sie dieser gegenüber das letzte Wort?” (p. 72). Contrary to Flasch’s opinion, it *is* clear from those early sermons that Nicholas regards negative theology as superior to affirmative theology and that it is not preparation for affirmative theology. This verdict is obvious from a consideration of *Sermo VIII* (19:1-18) and of *Sermo XX* (6:1 - 8:13). And this verdict remains constant throughout Nicholas’s career. (Cf. *Sermones*, p, Vol. II, f. 156^r, lines 12-10 from bottom. This is *Sermo CCLVIII*.)

A further deviation in Flasch’s interpretation occurs in connection with *De Beryllo*: “Neu ist in *De beryllo* die Kritik an den dualistischen Tendenzen des Idee-Stoff-Schemas; Cusanus zeichnet jetzt Grundlinien einer nicht mehr hylemorphistischen Physik In *De beryllo* geht es ... um eine neue Physik” (p. 457). Flasch sees Nicholas as inter-

ested in “die Reform der Physik” (p. 474, line 5), as formulating “die Grundzüge einer neuen Naturphilosophie” (p. 473, lines 14-15), as developing “das Progammm einer koinzidentalenen Physik” (p. 475, line 19). Yet, in truth, Nicholas, in *De Beryllo*, is not aiming radically to reform Aristotle’s physics; nor is he rejecting hylomorphism (although in certain respects he is modifying Aristotle’s version of it). Matter, he says endorsingly, is formless until form actualizes it;³⁸² form and matter are united in corporeal substances;³⁸³ corruption, mutability, and division are from matter, not from form;³⁸⁴ substances have essential, or substantial, being³⁸⁵ and are divisible only accidentally.³⁸⁶ Moreover, Nicholas endorses the Aristotelian views that “our intellect derives all [its contents] through the senses”³⁸⁷ and that concepts are formed by abstracting them from sensory images.³⁸⁸ But he adds to Aristotle (1) that the Divine Intellect shines forth in every specific form, (2) that, so to speak, there are exemplars in the mind of God, (3) that privation is a coincidence of contraries, the beginning of the one contrary being present in the other, so that transformations are circular,³⁸⁹ and (4) that a form which is deeply immersed in matter becomes very material (“*fit multum materialis*”).³⁹⁰ Nicholas’s critique of Aristotle is primarily a critique of his notion of privation, for Nicholas wants to conceive of a privation as a lack of both contraries (the one contrary being contained in the other), whereas Aristotle, he says, conceived of it as the lack of only one of two contraries.³⁹¹ “But if Aristotle had understood the beginning which he calls *privation*—understood it in such a way that privation is a beginning that posits a coincidence of contraries and that, therefore, (being ‘deprived,’ as it were, of every contrariety), precedes duality, which is necessary in the case of contraries—then he would have seen correctly.”³⁹² Nicholas is here making a metaphysical point, not a point about physics. That is why he uses the language of “as if” (“*sicut si ... videremus*”) in *De Beryllo* 41: the situation is “as if we were to see the smallest of contraries coincide (e.g., minimal heat and minimal cold; minimal slowness and minimal fastness; etc.), so that they are one beginning prior to the duality of both contraries” But our seeing this coincidence is a “seeing” that belongs to metaphysics, not to physics.

So nowhere in *De Beryllo* does Nicholas call hylomorphism into question, although he does—somewhat dubiously at that—call one as-

pect of it centrally into question: viz., Aristotle's conception of privation. But this critique of Aristotle's conception does not at all warrant Flasch's panegyric: "Die Discussion des Cusanus mit Aristoteles in *De beryllo* ist eines der bedeutendsten und differenziertesten Textstücke der älteren philosophischen Literatur" (p. 468).

Another objectionable Flaschian interpretation has to do with *De Coniecturis* I, 4 (12-14):

In einem überaus wichtigen Text, I, 4 n. 12-14 ... redet Cusanus von der *mens ipsa* und sagt von ihr, sie enthalte alle Realität; sie wisse das auch und könne daher auch niemals zugestehen, daß es irgend etwas gebe, was außerhalb ihrer existierte. Was zunächst als vierfach abgestufte Welt erschien, das ist, nach Cusanus, die *mens ipsa*, die sich anschaut und die sich einmal betrachtet als absolute Einheit oder als Gott, die sich zweitens sieht als die Wurzel des Verstandes, folglich als Intellekt, und die von sich weiß, daß sie das Ordnungsprinzip der Wahrnehmungswelt, daß sie also Verstand ist. Zuletzt weiß sie, daß sie auch die Explikation des Verstandes, also die sinnliche Welt ist. (p. 153)

Flasch continues onward: "Diese Theorie ist eigentümlich und neu; nichts erlaubt es uns, sie zu übergehen oder sie abzuschwächen. Sie ist, wie gesagt, zu unterscheiden von der Analyse des *intellectus* als einer der vier Regionen. Sie sagt, daß es die *mens ipsa* oder der Geist ist, der Gott und die gesamte Folgeordnung des Universums konstituiert" (p. 154). Flasch laments that Cusa does not further develop this view either in *De Coniecturis* or in any later work—that, indeed, he never anywhere again ever mentions it. Flasch's interpretation culminates with the words: "Ich ... mache nur noch darauf aufmerksam, daß das Universum hier als Meditation oder als Theorie gedacht ist, als ein Sich-Sehen des Geistes an sich, der sich anschaut als Gott, als Vernunft, als Verstand und auch als groben Stoff. Auch die Körper sind mentale Einheiten" (p. 154).

On the foregoing interpretation it is no wonder that Flasch considers Nicholas's theory to be "*eigentümlich und neu.*" The only question is, Is all of this really what Nicholas means in *De Coniecturis* I, 4 (12-14)? Flasch should already have been suspicious about Nicholas's alleged meaning simply because Nicholas nowhere ever repeats the theory that is here ascribed to him. For Nicholas is wont to re-introduce his fundamental ontological theses in various of his works, as Flasch himself well knows. Moreover, Flasch should have been made even more wary by the fact that his understanding of I, 4 (12-

14) requires him to maintain that *mens ipsa* imposes the *human* names “God,” “intelligence,” “soul,” and “body”³⁹³ and that *mens ipsa surmises*—two theses that are incredible. Moreover, Flasch’s interpretation must also maintain the even more incredible thesis that *mens ipsa* (which Flasch translates both as “*Geist*” and as “*Geist überhaupt*”) “is constitutive of God and the entire resultant ordering of the universe.”³⁹⁴ In other words, according to this interpretation, “we can speak neither of wood nor of intellect nor of God if they are not all manifestations of ‘*Geist überhaupt*,’” of mind as such.³⁹⁵ In this way, then, *Geist überhaupt* is ontologically prior to God—a bizarre view that Nicholas cannot be expected to have proposed.

Nicholas frequently uses “*mens*,” in the singular, to refer to the human mind—that is, to refer to human minds, in the plural. We see this usage throughout *De Mente*—e.g., in *DM* 15, where Nicholas writes, in the voice of the Layman: “... I do not at all doubt that those who have a taste for wisdom cannot deny the mind’s immortality.... Thus, if someone takes note of the fact (1) that the mind’s viewing attains unto what is invariable and (2) that forms are freed from variability by the mind and are repositied in the invariable domain of necessary connection, he cannot doubt that the mind’s nature is free from all variability. For mind draws unto itself that which it frees from variability.”³⁹⁶ There can be no doubt that by “*mens*” Nicholas is here referring to the human mind, as the title of Chapter 15 indicates. Similarly, Nicholas sometimes uses “*mens ipsa*” or “*ipsa mens*” to refer simply to the human mind itself. Thus, at *DM* 1 (52:11-13) he writes: “... at Delphi knowledge was commanded, to the end that the mind [*ipsa mens*] might know itself and might recognize itself to be united with the Divine Mind.”³⁹⁷ Other such passages occur at *DM* 7 (98:14-15) and *DM* 11 (140:21-23). Sometimes, to be sure, Nicholas does also use “*mens ipsa*” in a more general sense, as at *DM* 4 (76:2-7); and sometimes in this more general sense he uses “*mens*” alone, as at *DM* 1 (57:9-11) and *DM* 6 (92:25). So the mere fact that at *DC* I, 4 (12:3 and 13:11) Nicholas writes “*mens ipsa*” is by itself not determinative of his meaning. Whenever Nicholas speaks of mind (*mens*), we must determine from the context whether he is speaking of the Divine Mind, of celestial minds (i.e., angelic minds), of the human mind, or of mind in general. Non-human animals have no minds,³⁹⁸ he states, although they themselves, along with plant-life, partake of reason and of ratio-

nal ordering.³⁹⁹ If we determine that Nicholas is speaking of the human mind, we must further determine whether he is speaking generally (as when we say “Man seeks happiness”) or singularly (as when we say “Socrates seeks happiness”). Of course, our speaking generally does not entail that each and every human being does in fact always seek happiness. For as Dostoevsky was aware, sometimes men pursue (howbeit perversely) “self-laceration” and even self-destruction.

Nicholas’s meaning in *DC I*, 4 (12-14) is best elucidated by what he says in *DC II*, 14 (141). The sense of *sight*, he tells us, is able to proceed to more distant objects than is the sense of *hearing*, which itself attains distant objects that are unattainable by the sense of *smell*. *Imagination* proceeds farther than does the sense of sight and can even envision things that are absent. *Reason*, in turn, surpasses imagination, “so that it sees that people on the end of the earth opposite to us cannot fall off.” But “the *intellect* is to reason as the power of oneness is to finite number, so that nothing at all can escape intellect’s power.” In these instances we have an example of how the human mind reaches out to all things, so that in this way all things, insofar as they are conceivable, may be said to be in the mind.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, intelligences, according to Nicholas, “ought to be conceived of as universal powers” [*DC II*, 13 (136:1-2)]. And the human soul by virtue of its possessing a human mind, partakes of the order of the intelligences,⁴⁰¹ so that it also partakes of a universal power—a universal capability—to know all things that are humanly knowable. Moreover, it partakes of Divinity.⁴⁰² In this lifetime, however, no human mind succeeds in fully actualizing this power; and some minds are quicker than are others. Nonetheless, such a power is inherent in the human mind, i.e., in human minds, according to Nicholas. Hence, “since [man] surmises that all things are attained by the senses or by reason or by intellect, and since he sees that these powers of his are enfolded within his oneness, he supposes that he can proceed unto all things in a human way.... Within the power of humanity all things exist in their own way.”⁴⁰³ So the human mind proceeds toward all things, says Nicholas; and insofar as it attains unto any thing, that thing is present in it representationally, and it views itself as present in and to that thing, encompassing it in order to know (of) it.⁴⁰⁴

When in *DC I*, 4 (12-14) Nicholas speaks of mind, he is speaking of the human mind, which “investigates oneness as being fourfold,”⁴⁰⁵

which “contemplates its own universal being”⁴⁰⁶ and universal power. In this section the expression “*mens ipsa*,” occurring twice, is best translated simply as “mind” or as “the mind”: it here refers to the human mind, to man’s mind. And it is man’s mind that investigates and contemplates itself as a oneness, in the image of Divine Oneness, and that investigates and contemplates the other two regions of oneness (viz., intelligences, material objects). It is man’s mind that “represents these [four] mental onenesses [i.e., these four concepts] by means of vocal signs,”⁴⁰⁷ calling what is represented *God, intelligence, soul, and body*. *De Coniecturis* begins by talking (in the Prologue) about human apprehension, human surmising, human affirmation, and about the created intellect. And it continues in Chapter One by talking about *nostra mens* (i.e., about *nostrae mentes*). When Nicholas states that “only in Infinite Reason will the mind behold itself as it is,”⁴⁰⁸ he is alluding to the human mind in relation to the Divine Mind. This train of thought continues on within Chapter Two: “inferring symbolically and surmisingly from the rational numbers of our mind to the real, ineffable numbers of the Divine Mind, I say that in the Mind of the Creator number is the first exemplar of things, just as number that arises from our reason is the first exemplar of our corresponding [mental] world.”⁴⁰⁹ Chapter Three is an excursus on number-theory. And Chapter Four takes up again the theme of the human mind and its pursuit both of God, who is conceptualized as First Oneness, and of itself, conceptualized as a rational oneness. Here Nicholas also completes the hierarchy of onenesses about which he will be surmising. He completes it by enumerating, in sum, four onenesses that will be contemplated by mind—by his mind and by his readers’ minds.

We are now beginning to see what goes wrong with *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung*: viz., that its author, being far too intent upon portraying the newness of Cusan thought, eagerly pounces upon unusual-sounding passages that he finds in Cusa’s works. These passages are then given unusual interpretations that make the passages into novel expressions of unprecedented thought—thereby signaling an alleged Cusan tendency toward a new physics, an alleged new Cusan conception of *Geist überhaupt*, alleged new metamorphoses of the doctrines of coincidence-of-opposites and of negative theology, and so on. At the same time, the author skips over mentioning such features as just how contrived are Nicholas’s numerologies in both *De*

Coniecturis and *De Ludo Globi*. Our author takes little interest in the orthodox theology of *De Docta Ignorantia* III or in the theology inherent in the *Sermones*. There is no discussion at all of the absolutely crucial role played in *Cribratio Alkorani* by the motif of *pia interpretatio*—a motif apart from which that work cannot be understood without distortion.

As concerns *De Visione Dei* other exegetical and bibliographical problems arise for Flasch. On his p. 661, which is organized chronologically, “*De Visione Dei*” should be listed before (not after) “*De Beryllo*,” and its date of composition (1453) should be included. When on p. 425 there is mention that in *De Visione Dei* the Deity is neither *numerically* three nor *numerically* one, there should also be a reminder that this tenet was present already in *De Docta Ignorantia*.⁴¹⁰ Moreover, the following erroneous statement needs correcting: “Gottes unendlicher Blick wird von meinem Sehen bestimmt, ohne dadurch kontrahiert zu werden” (p. 435, lines 18-20). For according to Nicholas no one’s look determines God’s look; rather, to one who gazes upon God’s “Face,” symbolically speaking, it only *seems* that his own gaze determines the Divine Gaze.⁴¹¹ However, God’s eye sees always in every direction, for the angle of His eye is infinite.⁴¹² His gaze is a “maximal goodness which cannot fail to impart itself to whatever is capable of receiving it.”⁴¹³ Creatures exist because God looks upon them.⁴¹⁴ His seeing is loving.⁴¹⁵ Moreover, as Nicholas intones, “You never close Your eyes; You never turn [them] away. And although I turn away from You when I completely turn to something else, You do not on this account change Your eyes or Your gaze.”⁴¹⁶ Yet, God’s Face sometimes *seems* to be changed because I look unto Him through a mental eye “cloaked with contraction and passion.”⁴¹⁷ If I look unto Him with joy, His Face seems to be joyous; if I look in anger, His Face seems to display anger. Yet, this is but the appearance of change. For, as with the omnivoyant icon, the Divine Face itself never changes. “Thus, O God, on account of Your infinite goodness You seem to be mutable because You do not desert mutable creatures; but because You are Absolute Goodness, You are not mutable, since You do not follow mutability.”⁴¹⁸

The major problem with Flasch’s interpretation of *De Visione Dei* comes with his viewing *De Visione Dei* as a decisive departure from the doctrines in *De Docta Ignorantia*. In *De Visione Dei*, stresses

Flasch, “Gott wird gesehen, *invisibiliter videtur*. Das ist die These des Buches des Cusanus, und sie ist nicht vereinbar mit der These [aus *DI I*], er sei als Unendlicher prinzipiell unsichtbar” (p. 437). Or again, as Flasch puts the point: “Gott auf nicht-sehende Weise sehen, das ist eine andere Philosophie als diejenige, die einseitig auf der Unsichtbarkeit besteht” (p. 439). But here, once again, Flasch is simply mistaken. Seeing God unseeably is the common theme of *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Visione Dei*. In *DI I*, 5 (13:3-5) Nicholas states that “the absolutely Maximum is both incomprehensibly understandable and unnameably nameable.” And in *DI I*, 4 (12:23-25) he maintains that “we see incomprehensibly, beyond all rational inference, that Absolute Maximality ... is infinite.”⁴¹⁹ Now, understanding God incomprehensibly—seeing Him incomprehensibly—is exactly what is meant by *De Visione Dei*’s “seeing Him unseeably.” *De Visione Dei* does not mark off a radically new period-of-thought for Cusa. Rather, it expands upon the theme that is already present in *De Docta Ignorantia I* and that is enlarged upon in Cusa’s *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*.⁴²⁰ So *De Visione Dei* does not advance beyond the claim that God is seen incomprehensibly. Indeed, this very theme becomes all the more accentuated in *De Visione Dei*.

Throughout *De Visione Dei* 5, as well as in chapters 6 through 9, Nicholas is heuristically puzzling over the question of how God can be seen, how He can be known. For Nicholas cannot turn to God if he is altogether ignorant of Him [*DVD* 5 (17:9-10); cf. *Ap.* 13:18-19 and *De Sapientia I* (15:10-11)]. Yet, God is *absconditus* (15:3), so that whoever sets out to see His Face is far removed from it as long as he conceives of *anything* at all [*DVD* 6 (21:10-11)]. There is neither any knowledge nor any non-metaphorical concept of God’s Face [*DVD* 6 (22)]. The believer-seeker sees that God’s Face cannot be seen, cannot be known, cannot be conceived (except in the metaphorical sense that God’s Face is seen as angry by those who look unto it with anger, etc.). His Face can truly be approached only in ignorance [*DVD* 6 (22)]. For it is beyond all rational capacity and is unknown to every intellect [*DVD* 9 (38)]. But in seeing the impossibility of seeing God’s Face [cf. *DVD* 9 (39) with *Apologia* 13], the believer-seeker does see God’s Face—in the only way that he can see it, viz., invisibly, or unknowably. Indeed, he sees that God is seeable by all creatures insofar as they realize that, as finite, they could not exist apart from the ex-

istence of Infinite Power [DVD 10 (41 & 42)].

Nicholas's thought advances dialectically within these chapters, so that in coming to Chapter 12, he can speak of *aliquando* and *deinde*. Earlier on, Nicholas expresses the thought that God is to some extent seen, since otherwise He could not be sought. We see *that* God's Face (whose gaze encompasses everyone) exists beyond the obscuring mist; but we do not see God's Face itself. Later, Nicholas expresses the thought that we see God's Face to be *there* where seeing coincides with being-seen [DVD 10 (41)]. But even later, in DVD 12 (51) and 13 (52), Nicholas is still saying (1) that God is Absolute Infinity, which is ineffable and inconceivable and (2) that we do not know *what* God is. In DVD 13 (58:11-12) we are reminded that "Infinite goodness is not goodness but is Infinity. Infinite quantity is not quantity but is Infinity. And so on." And DVD 23 (100:7) endorses *DI*'s fundamental theme that "there is no comparative relation of the finite to the Infinite." Accordingly, whatever "knowledge" we possess of *what* God is is symbolical. Nicholas's dialectic in *De Visione Dei* continually turns back upon itself. Hence, although in DVD 13 he states that Infinite goodness is not goodness, nonetheless at DVD 25 (113:10), he again refers to God as "infinite good." And at DVD 25 (111:17-18) he still talks of Him as "known in the best way possible." And although in DVD 6 he maintains that God's Face is seen in a veiled and symbolic manner (22:1), he also there maintains that God's Face is seen beyond all knowledge and all conception—seen as present but not seen with respect to what it is non-symbolically (22:2-22). Nicholas's dialectical approach also explains why after he has spoken, in DVD 5 of seeing God, he can write in DVD 10 (41:2): "I begin to see You, O Lord." For he begins to see that the only way in which God can be seen is by means of our seeing that He cannot be seen with respect to what He is in and of Himself, i.e., non-symbolically. This seeing that is also a not-seeing is the essence of learned ignorance. All of the "earlier" and "later" movement of thought referred to at the outset of DVD 12 occurs within DVD itself.

Another outright mistake made by Flasch is found on his p. 378, where apropos of *De Pace Fidei*, he comments: "Das seit den vierziger Jahren entwickelte und in der Laienphilosophie so wichtige Motiv der *Leichtigkeit* der Einsicht klingt nur einmal zaghaft an; insgesamt gibt der Autor seinen Lesern nicht das Gefühl, die Verständigung über

die von allen implizierte *eine* Religion werde leichtfallen.” The singular passage alluded to by Flasch is *De Pace* 1 (1: line 3 on p. 4), where Nicholas uses the expression “*facilis concordantia*” in the accusative case. But Flasch fails to mention the adverb “*facile*” in *De Pace* 6 (18: last line). And he ignores the clause “*non erit difficile*” at 7 (20: line 12 on p. 19). Nor is there any mention, on Flasch’s part, of the fact that when the Indian goes on to speak of the doctrine of the Trinity as “very difficult” (“*difficilium erit*”), Nicholas concludes by having the Chaldean state: “I think that no one can disagree with this interpretation [of the doctrine of the Trinity]”⁴²¹ And here “no one” includes even the common folk, who are mentioned in *De Pace* 8 (22: first speech).

Let us take a penultimate look at how Flasch’s desire to highlight the newness in each Cusan work leads him into interpretive error. Fastening onto Nicholas’s example of the rose in *De Possest* 47-48 and onto a single passage in *De Possest*,⁴²² Flasch begins talking about Nicholas’s *Philosophie des Lebendigen als die Philosophie der Trinität*.⁴²³

Im Laufe der Abhandlung verschiebt sich der Akzent: Das Lebendige wird zum Gleichnis; statt des Dreiecks die Rose. Die Rose als Bild des Possest führt zu weiteren Einsichten. Die Korrelativenlehre—ein weiteres Kontinuitätsmoment seit den ersten *Sermones*—tritt in den Dienst einer Philosophie des Lebendigen. Und zweimal stellt Cusanus schroff den *Gegensatz* von Mathematik und Lebendigem heraus: Weder die Einheit ist mathematisch, sondern sie ist Leben, noch die Trinität ist mathematisch, sondern sie ist Leben in seinem Selbstbezug, den die Formel *Possest* ausdrückt. Es ist die unendliche Vollkommenheit des Lebens selbst, welche die Dreieinheit ausdrückt; hier ist keine Geometrie mehr, sondern Liebe und unendliche Freude. Cusanus nimmt mit Hilfe des *Possest* die Freude-Motive aus *De sapientia* wieder auf, aber er vertieft sie durch eine Distanzierung von der Mathematico-Theologie, indem er das Wesen des Lebens im Licht des *Possest* neu bedenkt. (pp. 538-539)

But Flasch here neglects a very important point, viz., that already in *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas used the very same example of a rose, as we shall see in a moment. Secondly, Flasch once again neglects to mention that in *De Docta Ignorantia* Nicholas also repudiated the idea that the Trinity is mathematical. Finally, Flasch erroneously maintains that within *De Possest* itself Nicholas distances himself from his own invocation of mathematical illustrations—that he does so in connection with his example of the rose. Let us look briefly only at the first

point, by turning to *DI* II, 7 and especially to margin number 131. In *DI* II, 7 Nicholas is discussing the trinity of the universe. He seeks to show that created beings reflect in their own trinitarian natures the Divine Trinity. Just as the Divine Trinity can be called *Oneness* (or *Possibility*), *Equality of Oneness* (or *Necessity* or *Form*), and the *Union* of both, so the oneness of the universe consists of three modes of being: viz., possibility, actuality, and their union. Then Nicholas observes: “a rose which in a rose-garden is in potency in winter and in actuality in the summer has passed from a mode of possible being to something actually determined. Hence, we see that the mode of being of possibility, the mode of being of necessity, and the mode of being of actual determination are distinct. From them there is one universal mode of being, since without them there is nothing; nor does the one mode actually exist without the other.” Thus, the trine and one nature of the rose serves to illustrate the Absolute Triunity.

In *DI* II, 7 Nicholas points to God’s being a *living* Trinity just as much as he does in *DP* 47-50. For he speaks of God as a *Begetting* Oneness, an expression which implies that God is a *Living* Oneness. Moreover, in *DI* II, 9 (150:13-16) he alludes to God as “World-Soul” and “World-Mind,” terms indicative of life. And what could be more indicative of life than are the names “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit,” used in *DI* I, 24 (80-81)? These expressions, together with Nicholas’s example of the rose, do not detract, in *DI*, from the mathematical illustrations of the Trinity. Likewise, in *DP*, neither the example of the rose nor the allusions to life detract from the mathematical illustration that in *De Possess* 44-45 points to the Trinity; nor does Nicholas there distance himself from the role played by mathematics (cf. *DP* 59-61) in directing us to the non-numerical Trinity. And, in general, he there praises mathematics as a symbolical tool that is of use to theology (*DP* 61:9-10 and 44:1-2). Nonetheless, Nicholas can be said to have maintained *eine Philosophie des Lebendigen* all throughout his career and not first in *De Possess*. This fact is clear from the example, in *DVD* 7, of the nut tree and from the references, in *Cribratio Alkorani* II, 5, to God as Fecundity, Offspring, and Love. It is equally clear from *De Mente* 11, where all created things—living and non-living—are said to bear a trinitarian image of God (132:13-16) and where, as in *DI*’s example of the rose, that trinitarian image in creatures is spoken of as matter and form, and their union

(137:1-4). We must also not forget that in *De Mente* Nicholas refers to the human mind as a *living* divine number and as a *living* measure [*DM* 7 (98) and 9 (123)].

On p. 614 Flasch writes: “[Der Intellekt] weiß sich als ein *lebendiger Spiegel*. Diese Metapher war Cusanus seit *De mente* c. 7 n. 87 besonders lieb.” But Flasch should say: “... seit *De filiatione Dei* 3 (65-68).” And in any case his reference is wrong and should have been “*De mente* c. 5 n. 87”.

3.3.3. *Misleading statements*. Many of Flasch’s statements are misleading. A prime instance hereof occurs on his p. 110 amid the following passage that expounds *DI* I, 6 (16:1-7):⁴²⁴ “Wenn wir von ihm [viz., dem Maximum] sagen, es sei das *Sein*, dann schränken wir es schon ein. Wenn wir ihm Existenz zuschreiben, engen wir es ein; wir benennen damit seine *contractio*.” But the clause “wir benennen damit seine *contractio*” is seriously misleading, because the Maximum is in no respect contracted but is altogether Absolute.⁴²⁵ What is true is that we may consider the Maximum *as if* it were contracted to being, i.e., as if it were Being. But this consideration is only symbolical, so that Nicholas goes on almost immediately to say, in *DI* I, 6 (17), that the Maximum is above all nameable being—i.e., is beyond any concept of being that a finite mind could have. As he later says in *DI* I, 26 (86:3-5), such affirmations befit God (who is the Maximum) for purposes of worship.

Misleading is also Flasch’s observation on p. 382 regarding *De Pace Fidei*: “Es ist ferner zu fragen, ob dogmenorientierte fromme Christen damit einverstanden sein können, daß sie vom göttlichen Wort ermahnt werden, nicht mehr von ‘dreien’ und nicht mehr von ‘Personen’ zu sprechen und die Vorstellungen der Abzählbarkeit von *supposita* abzustreifen.” But, on the contrary, neither in *De Pace* nor anywhere else does Nicholas demand that Christians abandon their discourse about God as three persons. He asks them—as does also Augustine—to understand these three persons as three relations and to understand these relations non-numerically. Thus, in *De Pace Fidei* Nicholas can draw the conclusion that “those who believe that God is one, will not deny that He is trine, when they understand that that trinity is not [essentially] distinct from the most simple oneness but is most simple oneness in such way that unless the trinity were present in the oneness the Omnipotent Beginning would not exist in order

to create the universe and each thing [in it].”⁴²⁶

On p. 615 we read: “Aber wie verhält es sich mit den Wesenheiten der Dinge, gar mit ihren Urbildern, die nach *De ludo globi* II fol. 166 r 1-10 doch in der Geistseele sind?”⁴²⁷ However, this passage in *De Ludo Globi* does *not* teach that the essences of things or the exemplars of things are in the rational spirit. It teaches that within the rational spirit there is present a *knowledge* of its Cause,⁴²⁸ which is also the Cause of all other things.

Equally misleading is the statement on p. 613 that, according to *De Beryllo*, “die Dinge sind so, wie sie sind, weil wir so sind, wie wir sind.” For what should have been said is that die Dinge erscheinen, wie sie erscheinen, weil wir so sind, wie wir sind. Closely related to Flasch’s statement on p. 613 is his statement on p. 462: “Cusanus [in *De beryllo*] skizziert die außerordentlich weitreichende Idee einer *Rekonstruktion* der Realwelt aus den Bedingungen menschlicher Erkenntnis” (my emphasis). Yet, the word “*Rekonstruktion*” is too strong. Equally misleading is the statement (p. 297) that, according to *De Mente*, material objects are Außendinge “allein für die Sinne, nicht für den Intellekt.” It is misleading because, according to Nicholas, there is no coherent human perception apart from the contribution made by reason’s and intellect’s operating together with the senses, so that *ratio* and *intellectus* judge the perceived material-objects to belong to the external world. Other readers will be misled by Flasch’s claim, on p. 460, that according to *De Visione Dei* 15 “nur indem wir das Maß Gottes sind, lernen wir uns als sein Bild kennen.” For, in truth, we are never the measure of God; God is only the Measure of us. So Flasch should say, in a manner truer to the Cusan view, “nur indem wir das Maß Gottes, zu sein scheinen” But even this claim would not be exact, because the word “*nur*” is too restrictive.

Misleading, also, are the statements on p. 300: “Die *mens* hält in sich das *Jetzt* eingefaltet. Sie faltet es aus zum Zeitfluß, den Cusanus unter das Joch der Identität beugt, indem er ihn als *Bewegung von Jetztpunkten* interpretiert. Daraus ergibt sich das Gewünschte: Die *mens* steht als solche außerhalb oder oberhalb der Zeit. Eine ursprüngliche Zeitigung finden wir an ihr nicht; sie ist der nicht-zeitliche Ursprung aller Zeitentwicklungen. Daher ist sie unsterblich.” It is oftentimes difficult to know, as it is here, to what passages in the Cusan texts Flasch is alluding. One would expect him at least to cross-ref-

erence passages in *De Ludo Globi*; but he does not. He seems to be alluding to *DM* 9 and 15—and, in particular, to *DM* 9 (121:7-8). But no matter. Flasch's passage is misleading because it apparently suggests that the human mind is primordially beyond temporality, inasmuch as it is the non-temporal origin of modalities of time. If so, then this interpretation would be incorrect, since according to Nicholas the human mind is timeless only in the sense that it will not end in time but will continue in existence forever. Inasmuch as by nature the human mind thinks thoughts successively, it is primordially temporal and primordially changing in an accidental, i.e., incidental, way. That is why it can mark off, temporally, changes in things other than itself. In *DM* 9 (121:7-8) Nicholas does not say that *mind* enfolds within itself *the now*, which it then unfolds. Rather, he says: "Sic nunc explicatur per tempus, quia nihil reperitur in tempore nisi nunc": "Similarly, *the now* is unfolded by way of time, because in time there is found nothing but *the now*."

Also misleading is Flasch's judgment on pp. 293-294 regarding *De Mente*:

Wenn ich nicht irre, hat Cusanus in unserer Schrift zwar gesagt, unsere *mens* sei erschaffen, aber er hat kein einziges Mal geschrieben, der ewige Geist habe den menschlichen Geist *gemacht* oder *verursacht*. Er spricht, als wolle er effiziente Ursächlichkeit von unserer *mens* fernhalten, wie dies Averroes und Dietrich von Freiburg getan haben. Cusanus spricht das nicht aus; aber sein Vermeiden des Terminus *causa* legt nahe, auch bei ihm eine derartige Theorie der nicht effizient-kausalen Weltbegründung zu vermuten.

However, contrary to Flasch's judgment about *De Mente*, Nicholas's not there referring to the human mind as caused does not result from his repudiating the idea that the human mind, in being *created* by God, was (*ipso facto*) efficiently *caused* by God. Indeed, we may readily infer that in *De Mente* Nicholas does consider God to have efficiently caused the human mind—even as he earlier held this view in *De Docta Ignorantia* [e.g., *DI* II, 9 (150:5-7) and I, 21 (64)] and later held it in *De Venatione Sapientiae* [e.g., *VS* 7 (18:18-19)] and *De Ludo Globi* [e.g., I (48:9-10)]. We may readily infer this characterization of *De Mente* (1) from the fact that Nicholas there refers to the human mind as originated [inferable from *DM* 11 (132-133); see also *DM* 2 (61:8-9)] and (2) from the fact that whatever was originated was originated because of *posse facere*, a name that Nicholas gives to God the

Son [DM 11 (131)], in whom and by whom all things were created (Colossians 1:16. John 1:3). God’s creative act, His *creare*, just is an act of *facere*. In other words, His *conceptio* is His *rerum productio* [DM 3 (72:7-8)]; in still other words, His *conceptio* is His *entium creatio* [DM 3 (72:9-10)]. So in DM 3 (72) “*rerum productio*” and “*entium creatio*” are used as interchangeable expressions. Accordingly, Nicholas can liken God’s creating (*creare*) of a human being, or a human mind, to a painter’s making (*facere*) of a self-portrait [DM 13 (especially 148:10-11 and 149:6-7)]. For to create is to make, in the sense of “to produce”; similarly, one kind of producing is creating. Thus, in *De Mente* Nicholas does not hesitate to use the verb “*efficere*” of God’s creative activity: “... vis artis creativae, quae est ars absoluta et infinita seu deus benedictus, omnia *efficit* in spiritu seu voluntate” [DM 13 (147:14-16), my italics]. And one of the entities that is *effectum* or *creatum*, is *mens*. After all, as Nicholas was well aware even at the time of writing *De Mente*, God is depicted in Genesis 1:26 as saying, “*Faciamus* hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram” [cf. CA II, 3 (96:3-4), my italics]. And the reference to Christ in Colossians 1: 16 (“omnia per ipsum et in ipso creata sunt”) is equivalent to “per quem omnia *facit* <pater>” [CA II, 3 (95:4), my italics]. At the time of writing *De Mente* Nicholas would also have been mindful of John 1:3 (“Omnia per ipsum facta sunt.”), which he later alludes to at *De Aequalitate* 22:12-13. Augustine, too, interchanges “*creata*” and “*facta*”: “Non enim haec quae creata sunt, ideo sciuntur a Deo, quia facta sunt, sed potius facta sunt quia a Deo sciuntur [interpretive emendation of DT VI.10.11 (PL 42:931-932)].

Finally—in order not to continue on indefinitely—there are misleading statements about Cusa’s conception of hierarchy in *De Coniecturis*: Cusanus

betrachtete die vier Instanzen—unendliche Einheit, *intellectus*, *ratio*, *sensus*—nicht als ‘Schichten’, nicht als Stufen. Er faßte sie als Knotenpunkte einer Bewegung ohne eindeutigen Richtungssinn. Wer nach ‘oben’ blickt, wenn von unendlicher Einheit oder vom Intellekt die Rede ist, wer die Sinnenwelt ‘unten’ vermutet, hat hier nichts begriffen. Die vier Modi sind Weisen der Selbstbetrachtung der *mens ipsa*; sie durchdringen einander; sie steigen auf; sie steigen ab; nur der Verstand will hier Ordnung schaffen; er unterscheidet oben und unten.⁴²⁹

This passage is highly misleading, not only because of Flasch’s construal of “*mens ipsa*,” which we have already examined, but also be-

cause it undermines Cusa's own view (in *De Coniecturis*) that the four onenesses do constitute an ontological hierarchy with God "above" (metaphorically speaking) and the material world "below". This hierarchy is real and is objective, as far as Nicholas is concerned. It is not a hierarchy that exists merely from the viewpoint of reason (=der *Verstand*). God Himself knows Himself to be ontologically superior to angels; and He knows that angels are ontologically more perfect than are rational minds and that rational minds are more perfect than are non-rational beings. In *DC I*, 9 the correct arrangement of Diagram P is vertically, not horizontally. Moreover, the descent of oneness unto otherness and the return of otherness unto oneness does go through a middle stage. That is the significance of the labels on the Diagram: "*supremus mundus*," "*medius mundus*," and "*infimus mundus*." That is also the significance of Nicholas's speaking of "intervals that belong to the *orders* and to the *choirs*" [*DC I*, 9 (42:8-9)]. Similarly, the diagram of the worlds in *DC I*, 13 is hierarchized (even as the number series is hierarchized), so that Nicholas speaks of "nine graded onenesses that derive from the first, most simple oneness" [*DC I*, 13 (65:3-4)]. All of this leads Flasch to comment: "Cusanus spricht zwar selbst von Stufen und von Regionen, aber er erklärt sie auf die besprochene Weise, als Phasen der Universalbewegung Hinab und Hinauf" (p. 162).

3.3.4. *Half-truths presented as whole truths.* We are told on p. 43: "Die Schriften des Cusanus vor 1445 erfordern harte Arbeit. Für die spätere Zeit kann ich Erleichterungen in Aussicht stellen. Nach 1450 schrieb Cusanus für ein breiteres Publikum; er wurde anschaulicher." This is a half-truth because a number of Cusan works written after 1450 are works equal in difficulty to the earlier works. We need think only of *De Theologicis Complementis*, *De Beryllo*, *De Aequalitate*, *De Possesse*, *De Li Non Aliud*, and even, in its own way, *De Venatione Sapientiae*.

With regard to Nicholas's *De Visione Dei* Flasch tells us on his p. 413 that Nicholas therein presupposes Anselm's description of God as That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Flasch seems not to draw this point from *De Visione Dei* itself, and he offers no documentation for it within *De Visione Dei*. Yet, his point is correct—but only as a half-truth. For as we can reliably infer from *De Visione Dei* 13, Nicholas is also presupposing Anselm's formula in *Proslogion* 15

to the effect that God is Something greater than can be conceived.⁴³⁰

Or again, on p. 412 Flasch maintains that in *De Visione Dei* “mystical theology” means for Nicholas only the doctrine of coincidence-of-opposites: “Die ‘mystische Theologie’ ist für Cusanus nicht wie für Albert die *remotio*, die Negation aller Prädikate. Sie ist ihm *nicht* identisch mit der negativen Theologie, sondern sie ist ein anderes Wort für die Koinzidenztheorie.” Flasch himself realizes: “dies ist nicht alles, was zu sagen wäre.” Apropos of *Cribratio Alkorani*, however, Flasch sees a change in Cusa’s thinking about mystical theology: “Diese Argumentation klärt, was hier ‘mystische Theologie’ heißt. Es ist die negative Theologie in ihrer ganzen Strenge. ‘Mystische Theologie’ heißt hier—anders als in anderen Schriften des Cusanus, aber wie bei Albert—‘negative Theologie’, und sonst nichts. Es ist nicht die Koinzidenzlehre ...” (p. 550). We may pass over some of these issues. For whether one says that in *De Visione Dei* “mystical theology” indicates only the *Koinzidenzlehre* or only negative theology or both of these together, we still have only the half-truth that Flasch likes to keep stressing: viz., that for Nicholas mystical theology is a *philosophical* position (p. 403). But surely it is also a theological position that relates to mystical experience, to mystical encounter, with God. For otherwise Nicholas would never have included the passage at the end of *DVD 17* which confides: “I endeavored to become the subject of a rapture, in order to see You who are invisible and who are the revealed but unrevealable vision. But You, not I, know how far I got. And Your grace is sufficient for me.”

A further half-truth occurs on Flasch’s p. 372, where Flasch tells us that in *De Pace Fidei* Nicholas puts into the Apostle Paul’s mouth the view that belief in the doctrine of eucharistic transubstantiation is necessary for salvation. But Flasch should go on to mention that a few passages later, in *De Pace* 18 (66), Paul speaks the words: “This sacrament, insofar as it pertains to the perceptible signs (provided faith itself be maintained) is not of such necessity that there is no salvation without it. For believing—and thereby eating of the food of Life—suffices for salvation.”⁴³¹

Another half-truth arises in the discussion of *De Beryllo*: “*De beryllo* ist für die Selbstorientierung der Cusanischen Philosophie ein entscheidendes Dokument. Hier sagt Cusanus zum ersten Mal ohne Versteckspiel, wie er seine Philosophie interpretiert sehen will” (pp.

467-468). But, of course, Nicholas had already in the *Apologia* also indicated how he wanted his philosophy interpreted.

We may look at still another half-truth, occurring on Flasch's pp. 259 and 529. On the former page Flasch writes: In *De Sapientia* 34 there occurs for the first time in the history of philosophy the expression "*absolutus conceptus*" as a name for God, i.e., as a name for the Son of God, or Word of God.

Augustin, Eriugena und Meister Eckhart haben ihm [d.h. diesem Sprachgebrauch] zwar durch die Fortführung der antiken Logos-Metaphysik generell den Weg gewiesen, aber nicht terminologisch vorgearbeitet. Doch handelt es sich um eine originale Theorie des Cusanus

This is a half-truth because someone earlier than Nicholas of Cusa (someone with whose writings Nicholas was familiar) referred to God the Son as *Conceptus*—indeed, as "*unicus conceptus perfectissimus*" and as "*conceptus intellectus divini*", thereby proleptically implying that God the Son is *conceptus absolutus* in Cusa's sense. [This predecessor was Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1270-1349); the ascription by him is found in his *Postilla super Quatuor Evangelistas* (Marienthal, 1474) re John 1:1. (This incunabulum is without pagination.)] For by "*conceptus absolutus*" Cusa means to indicate, as does also Nicholas of Lyra, (1) that God the Son is a Concept so perfect and so precise that He cannot be a more perfect or a more precise Concept of God the Father and (2) that no other concept of anything can be more perfect or more precise than is this one. Cusa does not mean "*absolutus*" in a sense that excludes all relationality. For since every concept is the concept of something, "concept" is a relational term, just as is also "son". That is why the Son of God can appropriately be called *Conceptus*, even as Anselm calls Him "*scientia et cognitio sive notitia*". And Anselm adds: "Veritas quoque patris aptissime dici potest filius, non solum eo sensu quia est eadem filii veritas quae est et patris, sicut iam perspectum est, sed etiam hoc sensu ut in eo intelligatur non imperfecta quaedam imitatio sed integra veritas paternae substantiae, quia non est aliud quam quod est pater" (*Monologion* 46, Hopkins' edition).

As Nicholas of Lyra refers to the Son as "*conceptus intellectus divini*", so too Nicholas of Cusa refers to Him as "*Conceptus intellectus Dei Patris*" [*Sermo* XXIV (48:20-21)]. Similarly, like Nicholas of Lyra, Cusanus speaks, sometimes, of the Son of God simply as "*con-*

ceptus”, rather than as “*conceptus absolutus*” or “*conceptus idealis*” or “*conceptus conceptionum*”. (See, for example, *Sermo* I (8:9), as well as *Sermones*, p, Vol. II, f. 155^v, line 20.) There is little doubt that Cusa, who in several places mentions Nicholas of Lyra by name [e.g., in *Sermo* I (7:24)], was familiar with his Commentary on the Gospel of John. Flasch should be signaling that Cusa alludes to God the Son not only as *Conceptus* but as *Praeconceptus* [*Sermo* XIX (15)]. Also noteworthy is Cusa’s naming the Son of God “*absoluta novitas*” (*Sermones*, p, Vol. II, f. 155^r, line 26) and his naming the Holy Spirit “*novitas novitatis aeternae*” (*ibid.*, line 4 from bottom). In addition, Flasch might well have called attention to Cusa’s reference to God the Son as “*mens aeterna*” [*Sermo* XXX (8:6)], as “*ars infinita*” [*ibid.*, (8:4)], as “*Nomen*” [*Sermo* XXIV (11:23-24)], as “*sermonum Sermo*” [*ibid.*, (48:21)], as “*elocutionum Elocutio*” [*ibid.*, (48:22)]. In short, as Klaus Kremer hints in his review, Flasch has not paid enough attention to the Sermons, so that he misses much of what is most vivid and most striking in Cusa’s writings.

3.3.5. *Subjective claims.* Many of the claims made in *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* seem highly subjective. On p. 145 we are told that “*De coniecturis* [hat] durchgängig die Form eines langen Briefes.” Already on p. 151 Flasch seems to have scruples about this claim and refers to *De Coniecturis*, now qualifiedly, as a “*Quasi-Brief*” (line 11). Most people, however, will not consider *De Coniecturis* to resemble a letter, or even a quasi-letter, except insofar as it is addressed to Cardinal Julian. It does not read like a letter any more than the “sermon” *De Aequalitate* reads like a sermon. After all, *De Docta Ignorantia* was also addressed to Cardinal Julian, and Flasch does not think of it as a letter or as a quasi-letter. One may question also the judgment, on pp. 539-540, that the absence of mathematical illustrations of the Trinity subsequently to *De Possess* is, in part, attributable to the attack on Nicholas levelled by Gregor von Heimburg in his *Invectiva in Nicolaum de Cusa*. (Moreover, Flasch overlooks the mathematical illustration of the Trinity in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 26.) Equally subjective is the judgment on p. 157: “Trist ist der Leser am Ende des ersten Buches [von *De docta ignorantia*].”⁴³² For there is little reason to suspect that negative theology is accompanied by sadness, either on most readers’ part or on Nicholas’s. In *De Docta Ignorantia* I Nicholas may well have held, for all we know, the same

view that he expresses in *De Visione Dei* 16: viz., that through sacred ignorance believers are all the more content and joyous because they know that the Treasure that they have found is so great as to be uncountable.

To take two final examples of subjectivism, we may turn first to p. 448:

Insofern ist es [viz., *De beryllo*] die geeignetste Einführung in die Cusanische Philosophie in ihrem reifen Stadium. Wer in die Denkwelt des Cusanus eintreten will, sollte, meine ich, beginnen mit *De beryllo*, dann zurückgehen zu *De coniecturis* und sich für die harte Arbeit belohnen mit der Lektüre von *De visione Dei*, aber nur zusammen mit *De complementis theologicis*.⁴³³ Cusanus hat *De beryllo* geschrieben für Leser von *De docta ignorantia* und *De visione Dei*, die mit diesen Büchern nicht zurecht kamen. Wir sollten diese Gelegenheit nutzen.

There is certainly nothing wrong with Flasch's expressing his opinion on this matter. But we need to recognize that nowhere in *De Beryllo* does Nicholas say that the work is intended for readers who had difficulties understanding *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Visione Dei*. Flasch is again simply speculating. And in the further course of doing so, he offers pedagogical advice on how best to approach the Cusan corpus of works—advice that not many Cusan scholars can be expected to agree with. He is, likewise, speculating when he writes (p. 255): “Der Laie ist eine literarische Figur des Cusanus, die es ihm ermöglicht, das spätmittelalterliche Denken als unglückliches Bewußtsein zu charakterisieren.” It would be interesting to know where in the world Nicholas makes such a characterization.

3.3.6. *Arguable claims.* A number of Flasch's claims are indeed arguable, inasmuch as they are questionable but are not clearly wrong or clearly misleading. Although this is not the place actually to argue them, examples of such claims should be pointed out, in order to help round out the character of *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*. Referring to *De Ludo Globi* I, Flasch at one point surmises: “Mit einer deistischen Wendung fährt Cusanus fort:⁴³⁴ Lläuft die Welt-Kugel einmal, dann wird sie so wenig von Gott bewegt wie deine Holz-Kugel, wenn du ihr einmal den Impuls gegeben hast.”⁴³⁵ Flasch goes on to note: “Das historisch Besondere an dem Text ist, daß er eine deistische Position ausspricht, ohne diese Theorie konsequent zu verfolgen.” Flasch is careful not to call Nicholas a deist. But the question is: should he call the particular passage in *De Ludo Globi* deistic? After all, Nicholas

does not exclude God's working miracles; nor does he exclude God's providence. Moreover, Nicholas's further remarks show that the context of his thought in *LG I* (22) is not deistic:

John: Something similar, perhaps, could be said also about the soul, by means of which, while it is present in the body, a man is moved. *Cardinal:* There is perhaps, no better example for understanding the creation of the soul. (From the soul there results movement in a man.) For it is not the case that God is the soul or that the Spirit of God moves a man. Rather, according to the Platonists, there is created in you a self-moving motion: viz., the rational soul, which moves itself and all that constitutes you.

God's not directly causing the movement of the heavenly sphere, once having concreated the outermost sphere and its motion, is no more deistic than is His not directly moving the human soul. Once again, Flasch is on the bound to spot something new in Cusa's intellectual development. This over-eagerness occasions his "finding" a deistic moment in *De Ludo Globi* when he should be finding only an impetus-theory.

Another arguable claim has to do with Nicholas's having asserted in *De Beryllo* 24:7-8: "Cognitio enim sensitiva animae ostendit se similitudinem intellectus esse," which Flasch translates as: "Unsere Sinneserkenntnis ist eine Abbildung des Intellekts" (p. 462). One can argue that this is the correct translation of the passage, since "*cognitio sensitiva*" is the grammatical subject, etc. However, Nicholas's Latin is often less than perfect, so that in this sentence he is regarding "*animae*" as the logical subject: "For the soul's perceptual cognition shows that the soul is a likeness of the intellect." Indeed, this is what he repeats just two sentences later—and twice more in *De Beryllo* 26.

Also arguable is Flasch's translation of *DB* 25:7-8: "Omnia sunt formaliter in ipso, qui omnia format, ut formata in tantum sint, in quantum sunt suo conceptui conformia": "alles, was gestaltet ist, also eine *Forma* aufweist, insoweit existiert, als es dem Begriff konform ist" (p. 463). Yet, in this passage Nicholas is speaking only of the relationship between the human intellect and the human body: "All [the bodily members] are *formally* present in the intellect, which is the form of them all, so that they are formed to the extent that they are in conformity with the intellect's concept." Here Nicholas is reminding us of how it is that the rational soul is the form of the body⁴³⁶—a point that Flasch's translation obscures.

3.3.7. *Organizational problems.* There are a number of organizational problems that need to be addressed regarding Flasch's book. Agreeing with Klaus Kremer, we may reiterate that the footnotes, and not just the body of the main text, should be indexed. Moreover, more account needs to be taken of the secondary literature. For example, Karsten Harries' article "The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of a Metaphor" should be mentioned, as should also be Hermann Schnarr's book *Modi essendi. Interpretationen zu den Schriften De docta ignorantia, De coniecturis und De venatione sapientiae von Nikolaus von Kues*. And crucial to any attempt at a genetic analysis will be a critique of Maarten Hoenen's "'Ista prius inaudita'. Eine neuentdeckte Vorlage der *Docta ignorantia* und ihre Bedeutung für die frühe Philosophie des Nikolaus von Kues"—a critique that is conspicuously absent from Flasch's book. (Flasch mentions Hoenen's article [p. 47n49] but declines to deal with it within his book.) Similarly, there should be criticism of Josef Koch's analysis of the relationship between *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Coniecturis*. But instead of giving a critique, Flasch simply takes over virtually all that Koch writes, about this relationship, in his *Die ars coniecturalis des Nikolaus von Kues*. (See Flasch's p. 13, for example.) One may wonder, too, what justifies locating the discussion of Cusa's *Cribratio Alkorani* within a chapter entitled "Das Nicht-Andere." The treatment of *De Filiatione Dei* and of *De Dato Patris Luminum* is too brief.

The chronological index of Cusa's works, on Flasch's pp. 665-666, should index all of Cusa's works, including the minor ones, that are mentioned within Flasch's text. Missing from this index are *De maiori auctoritate sacrorum conciliorum* (1433), referred to by Flasch on his p. 72, and *De auctoritate praesidendi in concilio generali* (1434), referred to on p. 75. The entry for "*De usu communionis*" should add p. "542". Furthermore, the Index of topics, on pp. 673-679, should include an entry for "*contractio*".

In the chronological bibliography (pp. 559-663) of Cusa's works "*De Aequalitate*," dated 1459, should be listed subsequently to "*De beryllo*".

3.3.8. *Other problems.* At times, a certain unevenhandedness afflicts Flasch's work. For example, he emphasizes Cusa's dehierarchizing both the world and the order of reality. (See the references, on p. 675, under "*Hierarchie, Enthierarchisierung*".) Yet, he should

call emphatic attention to the fact that throughout Cusa's works—including *De Coniecturis*—there is ever a hierarchical order of perfection: God, intelligences (angels), rational beings, material objects. In *De Coniecturis* reason's descent is correlated with the senses' ascent; but it is not true that “der Abstieg ist Aufstieg” (p. 159). Nor is it true that, in *De Coniecturis*, “nur der Verstand ... unterscheidet oben und unten” (p. 159). On the contrary, not just reason but also intellect and God distinguish *above* and *below*. God is (and knows that He is) ontologically above intellect; intellect is (and knows that it is) ontologically below God but ontologically above reason. And reason, too, is aware of the ontological hierarchy that places it below intellect but above material objects. This conception of hierarchy is not compromised by Cusa's teachings in *De Coniecturis*, any more than it was compromised (1) by anything that he wrote in *De Docta Ignorantia* or (2) by the fact that in *De Docta Ignorantia* the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio* is not made in a uniform way.⁴³⁷ In the end, Flasch himself must concede that “von Beseitigung der Hierarchien sollte man bei Cusanus nicht reden ...” (pp. 159-160). For a conception of hierarchy is preserved throughout his writings. Even in *De Docta Ignorantia*, where his cosmological speculation militates against viewing earth as central and Mars as more peripheral, there remains the notion that perfections are hierarchical, so that a human being is ontologically higher than is a stone and so that intellect is ontologically higher than is reason. In a more general way, Nicholas can write, in *DI* II, 12 (172): “... the one universal world is contracted—in a threefold way and in terms of its own fourfold *descending progression* ...” (my italics). It is misleading to speak of Nicholas as (in any of his works) dehierarchizing the world—misleading unless Flasch's qualification about *keine Beseitigung der Hierarchien* is added immediately afterwards, something that is not routinely done by Flasch, thus creating a misimpression.

Likewise, such Flaschian statements as the following are objectionable: “Ich widerspreche hiermit jener Charakteristik von *De docta ignorantia*, nach der das Wesentliche in ihr die Erfahrung des Abstandes von menschlichem Denken und göttlicher Wirklichkeit ist. Die Weisheit Gottes übersteigt unsere Weisheit, aber der entscheidende Punkt hier ist, daß in dieser Erkenntnis eine Erweiterung unserer Selbsterkenntnis liegt” (p. 98). This passage poses a false contrast: Abstand

vs. Selbsterkenntnis. In fact, the two are connected in an essential way. The kind of self-knowledge that Nicholas has in mind is the knower's knowledge that he cannot know what God is in and of Himself. This knowledge is essentially connected to the knowledge of the distance between human thought and Divine Reality. Thus, one of these themes cannot be central to Cusa's work *De Docta Ignorantia* without the other theme's being central thereto. Moreover, Nicholas has little to say in *De Docta Ignorantia* about other forms of self-knowledge; yet Flasch's statement leads one to believe that he has much to say.

Sometimes Flasch is misled by a mistranslation. Thus, on his p. 151 he invokes the following interpretation of Cusa's doctrine in *De Coniecturis*: "Wir müssen das Wahre 'intellectualiter' auffassen, und das heißt: Wir müssen sehen, daß es *im gleichen Maße* erfaßbar wie unerfaßbar ist ..." (my italics). In support of this interpretation he cites *DC II, 6 (98:4)* [which is really 98:4-5]: "Nam unitatem imparticipabilem pariter et participabilem intelligito et dictorum capacitatem subintrabis." However, "*pariter*," as used here, is not best rendered by "*im gleichen Maße*" but simply by "*zugleich*" (i.e., "both" or "together"): oneness both is *not* able to be partaken of and *is* able to be partaken of. For otherwise someone might misconstrue "*im gleichen Maße*" and suppose that Nicholas is making a claim about the degrees of participation and non-participation being equal in measure—a claim of questionable intelligibility.

Or again, on p. 473 Flash writes, apropos of *De Beryllo*: "Der Beryll bewirkt, daß wir die Gegensätze im Verbindungsprinzip, *in principio conexivo*, sehen, wie sie vor ihrer Zweiheit existieren, zum Beispiel bei den Minima konträrer Eigenschaften wie warm und kalt, und so sei es in *allen* Dingen, *et ita de omnibus*." But in this context "*et ita de omnibus*" does not mean "und so sei es in *allen* Dingen"; rather, it means "und so sei es mit *allen* contraria."

Since Flasch emphasizes Cusa qua philosopher who in *De Pace Fidei* and elsewhere aims to advance reasons and proofs in support of Christianity and its doctrine of the Trinity, he should analyze what Cusa understands by "supporting reasons" and by "proof". For Nicholas's construal of these terms' meanings is quite tenuous, as we can detect from his claim in *De Li Non Aliud 1 (2:7-9)*: "I shall speak and converse with you Ferdinand, [but only] on the following condition: viz., that unless you are compelled by reason, you will reject as

unimportant everything you will hear from me.” Nicholas’s understanding of “compelled by reason” is so broad—in *De Li Non Aliud* and elsewhere, including in *De Pace*—that it scarcely qualifies as compelling. Indeed, Nicholas’s philosophizing is often guided by his theologizing, so that what seems to him compelling seems so because of his theological presuppositions. Thus, Flasch is overly critical of Rudolf Haubst, who has emphasized (Flasch would say overemphasized) Nicholas’s theological orientation and interests. Yet, if one veers too far from Haubst and attempts to make Nicholas into too much of a philosopher, he will become beset by a distorted view of Nicholas’s notions of *probare* and *ratiocinari*.

Just as Flash is overly critical of Rudolf Haubst (while being underly critical of Maarten Hoenen and Josef Koch), so (on his pp. 40 and 122) he is overly critical of Wilhelm Dupré. In translating *De Apice Theoriae* Dupré alters Nicholas’s Latin text at *De Apice* 4:3 by reducing Nicholas’s phrase “*non attendi*” to “*attendi*” and by rationalizing the deletion by stating in his footnote: “Das non ist an dieser Stelle sinnlos, da das Nachfolgende von Cusanus von Anfang an immer wieder gesagt worden ist.” Let us examine the matter more closely. In the wider pericope Nicholas writes:

Cum igitur iam annis multis viderim ipsam [i.e., quiditas] ultra omnem potentiam cognitivam ante omnem varietatem et oppositionem quaeri oportere, non attendi quiditatem in se subsistentem esse omnium substantiarum invariabilem subsistentiam; ideo nec multiplicabilem nec plurificabilem, et hinc non aliam et aliam aliorum entium quiditatem, sed eandem omnium hypostasim. Deinde vidi necessario fateri ipsam rerum hypostasim seu subsistentiam posse esse.⁴³⁸

Hans G. Senger translates this passage as:

Wenngleich ich also schon vor vielen Jahren erkannte, daß man sie jenseits aller Erkenntniskraft vor jeder Verschiedenheit und Gegensätzlichkeit suchen müsse, habe ich nicht beachtet, daß die Washeit, die ihren Bestand in sich selbst hat, der unveränderliche Grundbestand aller Substanzen ist, daß sie deshalb weder vermehrt noch vervielfältigt werden kann und daß es deswegen für die anderen existierenden Dinge eine je eigene Washeit nicht geben kann, sondern für alle nur ein und denselben Grundbestand. Ich erkannte darauf, man müsse notwendigerweise einräumen, daß eben dieser Grundbestand (diese Hypostasis oder auch Subsistenz) der Dinge sein kann.⁴³⁹

Dupré, having modified “*non attendi*” into “*attendi*” translates the modified passage as:

Da ich indes schon während vieler Jahre erkannt habe, daß man sie jenseits jedes Erkenntnisvermögens vor aller Verschiedenheit und Gegensätzlichkeit suchen müsse, richtete sich mein Augenmerk darauf, daß die in sich bestehende Washeit das unveränderliche Grundbestehen allen Grundbestandes ist und darum weder vervielfältigt noch vermehrt werden kann und daß es folglich nicht immer wieder eine andere Washeit der je anderen Seienden gibt, sondern nur ein und dieselbe Hypostase von allem. Sodann sah ich, daß man notwendigerweise zugeben muß, daß diese Hypostase oder dieses Grundbestehen sein könne.⁴⁴⁰

Flasch criticizes Dupré not only for text-critical reasons but also on the grounds that Dupré's rendition of the text deflects from Cusa's own self-declaration of a change-of-direction in his thinking. Thus Dupré, by modifying this self-declaration, is ignoring Nicholas's self-professed movement-of-thought, believes Flasch. Accordingly, Dupré's handling of the text runs counter to a handling in terms of genetic analysis, Flasch is convinced.

Now, although Dupré's modifying of the Latin text has no justification in the manuscripts and therefore cannot be accepted, we must pay Dupré the respect of acknowledging his insight: he sees that something about the *prima facie* impression created by the Latin passage in question is not right, for he sees that very early-on Nicholas recognized that Quiddity which exists in and of itself is the invariable Subsistent-being of all substances, a recognition that seems incompatible with the words "*non attendi*". However, rather than deleting "*non*". Dupré would be on safer ground expansively to contextualize the meaning of "*non attendi*," so that it is construed as "I failed to grasp the significance of the fact that," so that an acceptable translation would (in English) be something like:

Therefore, although for many years now I have realized that quiddity must be sought beyond all cognitive power and before all variation and opposition, I failed to grasp the implied significance of the fact that Quiddity which exists in and of itself is the invariable Subsistent-being of all substances and, thus, is neither replicable nor repeatable and, hence, that there are not different Quiddities of different beings but that there is one and the same [ultimate] Basis of all things. Subsequently, I saw that I must acknowledge that the [ultimate] Basis of things, or [ultimate] Subsistent-being of things, is *possible* to be.⁴⁴¹

This translation makes it clearer that what Nicholas had previously failed to see is the philosophical and the theological use to which he could put the fact that God is Absolute Possibility; he did not fail to

see that there is but a single Subsistent-being, which is the Quiddity of all quiddities. So rather than denouncing Dupré for discarding the word “*non*,” Flasch should show respect for Dupré’s correct intuition⁴⁴² that “*non attendi*”, when read superficially, is puzzling at *De Apice* 4. It is puzzling because already in *DI* II, 7 (130:14-15) Nicholas speaks of God as the Form of forms, as the Being of beings, and as the Quiddity of things. And in *DI* II, 4 (115:6-7) he refers to God as Absolute Quiddity. And in *Sermo XXII* (at 15:12-13) he states that “*Deus est ubique per essentiam, etiam quia eius esse est essentia . . .*” Yet, in spite of Nicholas’s being aware, as early and *DI* I, 5 (14:11-12), that God is the Actuality of all possibility, he failed to envision at that early time the apologetical implications of God’s being Possibility itself. [Cf. *DI* II, 8 (136-140).] Nicholas’s recognition of this latter doctrine occurs in one way in his *De Possess* but becomes taken up in another way in his *De Apice*. This thematization of *possibilitas ipsa* is the advance to which Nicholas is alluding in *De Apice* 4. As Dupré rightly sees, Nicholas is not in *De Apice* 4 alluding to some transition between pre-1440 and 1440, the time of composition of *De Docta Ignorantia* and of *Sermo XXII*. We have no independent reason to believe that prior to the writing of *De Docta Ignorantia* and *Sermo XXII* Nicholas did *not* conceive of God as Quiddity and did *not* regard Him as the Being of beings, the Essence of essences. Indeed, a passage such as *Sermo XIX* (13:12-26) implies that he did conceive of God as uniquely present to all things, sustaining them in their existence and their essence. Later passages such as *Sermo XXIV* (8:2-5) are not, therefore, new thoughts but are continuations of earlier thinking.

3.4. Flasch set out to expound Nicholas’s ideas by means of furnishing us with a close reading of Nicholas’s texts one by one. Yet, in the end, much of what Flasch writes about Nicholas is highly impressionistic as well as unscholarly.⁴⁴³ He does not give us a close reading of the texts but records for us the ways in which Nicholas’s writings have struck him in his quest to ferret out their newness. These impressions have oftentimes created exaggeration, false emphasis, misleading statements, outright mistakes. Flasch calls his *opus* “*ein Erzählbuch*”⁴⁴⁴—a story-book, a narrative account—that does not admit of direct refutation but, rather, admits only of incompatibility with a different way of telling the story. Unfortunately, there are too

many places where what we find is not an *Erzählbuch* but rather a *Märchenbuch*—one that talks about Cusa’s allegedly new physics (*De Beryllo*), about *mens ipsa*’s seeing itself as God, as intellect, as reason, and as the perceptible world (*De Coniecturis*), about creation as a mode of God (*De Possess*), about Absolute Oneness’s contracting itself (*De Docta Ignorantia*), and so on.

Thus, the importance of Flasch’s book does not reside in the accuracy of his interpretations of Cusa’s thinking, since many of the interpretations can be shown *bei frontaler Bestreitung* to be wrong. Rather, the importance of this monumental effort lies in its exhibiting the exegetical need to view the twists and turns of Nicholas’s thought against the historical backdrop of the Hussite wars (1412-1436), the papal prevailing over the Council of Basel, the fall of Constantinople, the end of the French-English wars, and the likes. Flasch’s depiction of Nicholas of Cusa is that of a philosopher whose thought is vigorous, creative, novel, penetrating, and intellectually respectable. One comes away from reading *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung* with a new zest for studying Nicholas’s works and with an appreciation for Flasch’s having portrayed Nicholas as such an important intellectual. Moreover, one can but admire Flasch for the lucidity of his written style, though the weightiness and the density of his expositions seem to militate against our agreeing with him that the style is that which characterizes university lectures (p. 16). Yet, if this form really is the (more or less) unrevised form of Flasch’s university lectures—as the many direct addressings of the reader as “Sie” and as “Du” seem to suggest,⁴⁴⁵ when taken together with the explicit sub-title “*Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*” on the title-page—then Flasch’s university classes are certainly challenging and representative of *ein hohes Niveau*.

In last analysis, Flasch’s book reminds us of the words of the poet Robert Browning:

Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what’s a heaven for?⁴⁴⁶

It is Flasch’s *reach*, rather than his *grasp*, that is so very amazing, so very bold and exciting, and, at times, so very startling.

4. *The A Priori: Cusa’s conception.*

Piecing together the different statements that Nicholas makes at dif-

ferent times about (what we call) *a priori* knowledge is no easy task. But in doing so we must keep in mind a simple exegetical rule: viz., that whatever Nicholas states unclearly in one place is to be interpreted in the light of that which he obviously and clearly maintains in other places. Of course, one must always be open to the possibility that from one work to another (or even within one and the same work) Nicholas changes his mind (or even contradicts himself). However, where we find him at different times clearly maintaining one and the same doctrine, we should not suppose that less clear statements made in between these two times indicate a radical shifting away from the earlier clearly stated position—a position to which he then (still later) reverts. (That is, we should not make this inference unless there is *clear and sufficient* evidence for ascribing such a double reversal.) For example, if we find Nicholas clearly teaching the doctrine of learned ignorance not only in his early work (1440) by that title but also in later works such as *De Deo Abscondito* (1444?),⁴⁴⁷ *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (ca. 1449), *De Possess* (1460),⁴⁴⁸ and *De Venatione Sapientiae* (1462),⁴⁴⁹ it is unlikely that in *De Mente* (1450) he (1) would deliberately be playing down the theme, (2) would be avoiding not only the theme of learned ignorance but also the very word “*ignorantia*,” and (3) would introduce the theme only to direct attention away from it.⁴⁵⁰

When we examine Nicholas’s works, we find two very explicit statements of his position on *a priori* knowledge: (1) a statement made at the time of his writing *De Mente* (1450) and (2) a statement made in his *Sermo CIV* from September 29, 1451.⁴⁵¹ In *De Mente* 4 (77) the Layman, speaking for Nicholas, is asked the following question by the dialogue’s Philosopher: “Aristotle claimed that no concept is concreated with our mind or soul, inasmuch as he likened the mind to a blank tablet. But Plato maintained that concepts *are* concreated with our mind or soul, but [he said] that because of the burden of the body the soul has forgotten [them]. What do you believe to be true in this regard?” The Layman’s answer includes the following words:

The visual power of the soul cannot succeed in its operation (so that it actually sees) unless it is stimulated by an object; and it cannot be stimulated except by encountering forms conveyed, in a replicated way, by the intermediacy of the [sense] organ; and so, the soul needs the eye. Similarly, the power of the mind—a power that grasps things and is conceptual—cannot succeed in its operations unless it is stimulated by perceptible objects;

and it cannot be stimulated except by the intermediacy of perceptual images. Therefore, the mind needs an instrumental body—i.e., one of such kind that without it stimulation could not occur. *In this respect, then, Aristotle seems rightly to have thought that there are no concepts concreated with the soul at its beginning—concepts that the soul forgot upon becoming embodied* (my emphasis).

But since mind cannot *learn* if it lacks all power of judgment..., our mind has—concreated with it—power-of-judgment, without which it could not learn. This power of judgment is, by nature, concreated with the mind. Through it the mind makes its own judgments about rational considerations—[judging] whether they are weak or strong or conclusive.⁴⁵²

This is a clear case of Nicholas's aligning himself (in certain respects) with Aristotle. Yet, he seeks (no doubt wrongly) to harmonize Aristotle's and Plato's views in this regard, so that he offers the suggestion: "If by 'concreated concept' Plato meant this power, then he did not at all err [in this respect]."⁴⁵³ Following through on his suggestion that by "concreated concept" Plato meant only "concreated power of judgment," Nicholas gives the following "reconciling" account: Aristotle "takes reason to be basic to the ascent of the intellect, whereas Plato takes intellectibility to be basic to the descent of the intellect. Thus, between Plato and Aristotle there seems to be no difference except in the manner of their consideration."⁴⁵⁴ Yet, Nicholas manages this alleged *rapprochement* between Plato and Aristotle by interpreting Plato in a more Aristotelian way, not by interpreting Aristotle in a more Platonic way. So Nicholas in *De Mente* aligns himself with Aristotle's view that there are no concepts imprinted on the soul at birth. And he proceeds with an attempt to bring Plato more into line with Aristotle, pointing out that Plato, too, recognized (to some extent) the role of intellectual (and rational) judgment.⁴⁵⁵

In *Sermo CIV* Nicholas also expressly disassociates himself from Plato's view by asserting "*non ut ait Plato*":

In nobis est quoddam semen divinum. Hoc semen est vis quaedam intellectualis. Et est in terra sensibilis vitae seminata. Et in parte illa in qua contingit vitam sensibilem est ratiocinativa, nam est seminata illa vis ut proficiat—non ut ait Plato.⁴⁵⁶

Nicholas is here once again directly disassociating himself from Plato's view that the human soul is such that it pre-exists its birth into a body and, when born into a body, has concepts already imprinted on it—concepts that it forgets upon being united to a body and that it must there-

fore *recollect*. Rather than requiring stimulation in order to recollect items of knowledge that it previously possessed, the mind (according to Nicholas) requires stimulation in order to exercise its intellectual power so that that power may *make* concepts for the first time. Some of these concepts will be *a posteriori*; others will be *a priori*.

4.1. *Concepts made, not found*. In *De Mente* 7 Nicholas, through the character of the Layman, discusses the mind's making of both empirical and non-empirical concepts. He compares the human mind with the Divine Mind: "The Divine Mind *creates* by conceiving; our mind *assimilates* by conceiving—i.e., by making concepts, or intellectual viewings. The Divine Mind is a reifying power; our mind is an assimilative power."⁴⁵⁷ Throughout *De Mente* Nicholas repeatedly states (à la Aristotle) that the mind *makes* for itself concepts; and he never states (à la Plato) that the mind *finds* within itself concreated concepts, or pre-formed knowledge.⁴⁵⁸ In speaking of empirical knowledge, Nicholas tells us that mind assimilates itself to (i.e., likens itself to) material objects by making use of perceptual forms (i.e., perceptual images), "so that by way of the assimilation it makes a judgment regarding the object."⁴⁵⁹ Now, the human mind assimilates both by receiving images and by making concepts.⁴⁶⁰ Nicholas tells us that the human mind uses perceptual images to form concepts whereby to make judgments regarding one or more material objects. This way of stating the matter relates to Aristotle's view that, in knowing, the mind (i.e., the possible intellect)⁴⁶¹ becomes the thing known, becomes it by receiving an image of it. As Nicholas writes, "mind makes these assimilations in order to have concepts of perceptible objects...."⁴⁶² And he concludes: "So, then, I maintain that concepts which are attained by means of assimilations made by reason are subject to uncertainty, because they are [made] in accordance with *images* of the [true] formal natures rather than in accordance with the true formal natures themselves."⁴⁶³ That is, the assimilations are made in accordance with forms-in-matter, which are said to be images of forms conceived of as forms-free-of-matter. In a perceptive comparison, Nicholas likens the mind, in its empirically perceiving of objects, to a slab of wax that is informed with a mind. "In that case, the mind existing within the wax would configure the wax to every shape presented to that mind."⁴⁶⁴ Similarly, through assimilation the mind configures itself to perceptible objects.⁴⁶⁵ The assimilating is a two-staged process:

first there arise the images (which Nicholas also speaks of as assimilations); then from these images the mind makes concepts, which are also likenesses⁴⁶⁶ of the perceptible objects.

But in *De Mente* 7 Nicholas also addresses the topic of non-empirical knowledge—for example, our knowledge of a circle, all of whose radii are equal. This knowledge, says Nicholas, is not of a circle insofar as it either exists or can exist in the perceptible world; for in the world there are no perfect circles, no objects each point on whose circumference is equidistant from its center. In forming the concept of a (perfect) circle, the mind is stimulated by seeing perceptible circles; and the mind assimilates itself to the abstract form of a circle, i.e., to circular form insofar as it is conceived of as free of everything material.⁴⁶⁷ Our knowledge that the radii of a circle are all equal in length is, thus, not empirical knowledge but is *a priori* knowledge. Alluding to his illustration of wax-that-is-informed-with-a-mind, Nicholas now reconstitutes the illustration by imagining away the wax, in order for the illustration to be applicable to non-empirical knowledge: The situation now is as if “absolute pliability (i.e., pliability free from wax, clay, metal, and all pliable [materials]) were alive with a mental life, so that of itself it could assimilate itself to all shapes as they exist in themselves and not in any material. For such a mind would see that because it could conform itself to them all, the *concepts of them all would be present in the power of its own living pliability, i.e., would be present in the mind itself*” (my emphasis).⁴⁶⁸ So with regard to our knowledge of truths about circles, triangles, etc., and about numbers, these concepts are in the power of our mind to form and to define. And our having this power is our having these concepts in our mind’s power. That is, these concepts are concreatedly in our minds only in the sense that they are present in the mind potentially, i.e., with respect to the mind’s power. They are not imprinted on the mind from birth. “Because mind as it is in itself, i.e., as free from matter,⁴⁶⁹ makes these assimilations [of immutable quiddities], it assimilates itself to abstract forms. In accordance with *this* power [of assimilation] it produces the mathematical branches of knowledge, which [deal in] certainty.”⁴⁷⁰ Moreover, the mathematical branches deal with necessary truths and with necessary connections, affirms Nicholas.

All of the foregoing remarks make clear Nicholas’s affinity with

Aristotle rather than with Plato. Empirical concepts are *abstracted*⁴⁷¹ by, and non-empirical concepts are *constructed* by, a mind that, initially, is without any concepts at all: “*Layman*: ... mind is that power which, when stimulated, can assimilate itself to every form and can make concepts of all things, *even though, [initially], it lacks all conceptual form*” (my italics).⁴⁷² Moreover, that which Nicholas says in this regard in *De Mente* he also says, in a gist, at I, 1 (2) of his earlier work *De Docta Ignorantia*, where he writes: “The intellect insatiably desires to attain unto the true through scrutinizing all things by means of its innate faculty of inference.” And he says it, too, at 1 (4:15-16) of his later work *De Venatione Sapientiae*: “our intellect is endowed by nature with logic, so that by this means it infers and makes its own pursuit.” Nicholas, of course, does not mean that the human mind is born with a forgotten knowledge of logic, à la Plato, or that the human mind has as imprinted upon it concepts of logic, of which it becomes aware when stimulated during the course of experience. Rather, he means that the mind is endowed with the power to formulate *a priori*, and has a natural tendency to formulate *a priori*, the rules of logic—indeed, the very concepts of logic—even though the mind itself is, initially, contentless pliability, i.e., is conceptless formability. Why, then, does Nicholas declare at *De Mente* 5 (81:7-8) that “the mind is a ‘divine seed’ that conceptually enfolds within its own power the exemplars of all things....”⁴⁷³ To be sure, he makes this statement not because he holds that exemplars are present to the mind at birth but rather because he holds that the mind has the innate *power to formulate* not only empirical concepts but also *a priori* concepts and that the mind *will* formulate them once it is stimulated by data from the senses. Accordingly, he says not that exemplars are enfolded in the *mind* but rather that they are enfolded in the mind’s *power*,⁴⁷⁴ a claim that signifies that exemplars are at birth not yet actually present in the mind but are present there only as potentially *makeable* by the mind. Indeed, the mind has a natural tendency to make the non-empirical concepts of number, of figure, of the five predicables,⁴⁷⁵ and of the ten Aristotelian categories.⁴⁷⁶

In other ways, too, Nicholas is, throughout his works, allying himself with Aristotle.⁴⁷⁷ For example, in *De Mente* 2 (64:12-13) Nicholas appears to endorse the view that “in our reason there is nothing that was not previously in our senses.” Yet, he does not go on to endorse

the view that “in our intellect there can be nothing that was not first in the senses,”⁴⁷⁸ for in *De Mente* he wants to maintain that the power of judgment is present inherently in the intellect, so that at birth the mind is not an Aristotelian *tabula rasa*. Later, however, having made clear his view about the mind’s *vis iudiciaria*, he asserts in *De Visione Dei* 24 (107:14-15) that “there cannot be in the intellect anything which is such that it was not first in the senses.” And at *De Beryllo* 52:7 he repeats: “... our intellect derives all [its contents] through the senses”; from these contents the intellect makes empirical concepts through abstraction; and because of stimulation by these contents the intellect constructs *a priori* concepts. In *Sermo CLXXXVII*, from 1455, Nicholas reiterates: “... *nihil sit in humano intellectu quod medio sensuum ad eum non perveniat*.”⁴⁷⁹ In the *Compendium* a corresponding point is accepted as regards the imagination: “... there is in the imagination nothing that was not previously present in the senses.”⁴⁸⁰ None of these statements are at all Platonistic. Nicholas does say, in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 29 (86:7-8) that “the intellect apprehends nothing which it has not found within itself.” But he does not mean anything Platonistic by this assertion. Rather, he means that “in its [i.e., the intellect’s] power all things are enfolded conceptually.” For what is present in the intellect are concepts, or notions, and these are “assimilations and likenesses of things.”⁴⁸¹ For the intellect has the power to “assimilate itself to all intelligible things.” And in the course of so assimilating itself, it *makes* (not *finds*) concepts. “Our intellect understands when it assimilates itself to all things. For it would not understand anything if it did not assimilate itself to what is intelligible, in order to read within itself that which it understands—i.e., to read it within its own word, or concept. Moreover, within itself the intellect is able to attain unto its own quiddity and essence only in the manner in which it understands other things: viz., by forming, if it can, an intelligible assimilation of itself.”⁴⁸² So if the intellect finds within itself concepts, it finds only concepts that it has already made; the intellect qua intellect apprehends no object whose concept it has not already made from images or through itself because of the stimulation of images. The intellect understands objects by means of these concepts, which it, so to speak, “reads within itself.” In the intellect’s power, repeats Nicholas here, “all things are enfolded conceptually.”⁴⁸³ They are enfolded conceptually in the sense that the intellect

has the *power* to form (imprecise) concepts of all things that are humanly knowable.

Thus, Nicholas observes, in *Sermo CLXIX*:

“Now, we experience this living, wondrous power, [this] divine seed, to be in us as a living image; for we are creators who make assimilations [i.e., likenesses]. Just as God the Creator truly creates and forms by understanding, so we produce from our understanding likenesses of things; and we show by means of the arts that we are makers of likenesses. And just as within His own being God enfolds, actually, all things that either exist or can exist, so the intellect enfolds in its power all the likenesses of all things; and it unfolds them all in making assimilations. And this is the act of understanding. But many prods are given to the intellectual nature in order that that seed may be stimulated and may sprout up in producing the fruit of knowledge, even as God displays the riches of His own glory.”⁴⁸⁴

So the intellect produces forms—i.e., concepts and conceptions—within itself either from images or through the stimulation of images that have been presented to it by the senses. We must not be misled by Nicholas’s also saying the following:

In all things that flourish by means of reason we experience that there is judgment about the beautiful. For example, [these rational beings] call *this* circular figure beautiful, *that* rose beautiful, *this* piece of wood beautiful, *this* song beautiful. Hence, unless the judge that is the intellect had within itself a specific form [*species*] of beauty—a form that enfolds all perceptible beauty—it could not make a judgment between things beautiful, saying this thing to be beautiful, that thing to be more beautiful. Therefore, the intellect is a certain universal⁴⁸⁵ beauty, or a specific form of specific forms, since specific forms are contracted beauties Intellect is a power that enfolds all intelligible forms. For the intellectual nature—which is the first irradiation of the beautiful (in the sense that the intellectual nature is the image of God, who is Beauty itself)—enfolds antecedently within itself all natural beauties, which are unfolded in the universe by way of specific forms.⁴⁸⁶

The intellect is itself a representation of beautiful objects, which are representations of Beauty itself. The intellect is this representation both because it itself is something beautiful and because it makes representations of beautiful objects. As Nicholas says, with a glance at Pseudo-Dionysius: “... the intellectual spirit is moved by wonder, and the intellect’s power is stimulated to proceed unto the act of running intellectually toward the beautiful that it makes contact with very slightly through the senses.”⁴⁸⁷ Under the stimulus of the senses the intellect recognizes its own beauty as well as the beauty of material

objects and of mathematical objects. It recognizes that the beauty of the intellect is greater than the beauty of the senses and of things perceptible.⁴⁸⁸ This recognition comes through the intellect's God-created capability for discernment. The concept of beauty that the intellect makes from looking unto itself is a universal concept, i.e., is the concept of a universal beauty that is partaken of by all intellects qua intellects. And since the intellect not only makes an (imprecise) concept of absolute beauty but also is itself something beautiful, Nicholas is willing to call it a kind (*species*) of beauty or a form (*species*) of beauty; and kinds and forms are universals.

4.2. *Crux of Nicholas's view.* We come now to the crux of Nicholas's view: the mind's innate power of judgment is also its innate power of *recognition*—in particular, its power to recognize the truth of first principles. Thus, for example, when the first principle “each thing either is or is not [the case]” comes to mind, it is immediately recognized to be true and always to have been true.⁴⁸⁹ As early as *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 1 (2) Nicholas spoke of an innate sense of judgment and of an innate faculty of inference. And he went on to aver: “that from which no sound mind can withhold assent is, we have no doubt, most true.” However, although *a priori* truths are regarded by Nicholas as being such that every sound mind, upon thinking of them, assents to them, not every truth that all sound minds assent to is an *a priori* truth. Nicholas gives an illustration of an undisputed empirical truth: “Now, I assert that everyone who sees snow affirms that it is white. To contradict this assertion would be madness. Thus, an assertion which every intelligent man calls true cannot [reasonably] be denied to be true.”⁴⁹⁰ Or again: “*Philosopher*: How clear your teaching is! Each one who hears it is bound to assent to it.”⁴⁹¹ So empirical truths are subject to recognition, even as are *a priori* truths. However, *a priori* truths are recognized to be necessary, certain, and unjustifiable by appeal to sense-experience.

Just as Nicholas maintains that mathematical and metaphysical first principles are known *a priori*, so also he maintains that certain moral principles are also known *a priori*. Examples of metaphysical first principles include, besides the one mentioned at the outset of this section, such principles as “*ex nihilo nihil fit*”⁴⁹² and “*nihil ... potest esse causa sui ipsius*.”⁴⁹³ As soon as a reasonable man understands what these words mean, he will (believes Nicholas) recognize that they ex-

press truths that are metaphysically necessary and metaphysically certain. But *a priori* knowledge goes beyond the knowledge of first principles and of concepts (such as the concept of a circle). It includes, for example, the knowledge that the number four is not the number two and that the number 4/2 is equivalent to the number 2.⁴⁹⁴ Likewise, one knows *a priori* that a square is not a circle; and one may attempt to determine *a priori* whether there can be constructed—using only an unmarked straight-edge, a pair of drawing compasses, and Euclidean techniques—a square whose area is equivalent to a given circle's area.⁴⁹⁵ Something similar is the case regarding moral principles and rules.⁴⁹⁶ As soon as there comes to mind (whether naturally or by hearing) the precept “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,” the mind assents to the precept, recognizing its validity⁴⁹⁷ as a precept of reason,⁴⁹⁸ as belonging to the natural law.⁴⁹⁹ *De Mente*'s Philosopher observes: “... we experience that there is a mental power [*spiritus*] speaking within our mind and judging *this* thing to be good, *that* thing to be just, *another* thing to be true—and reproving us if we veer from what is just. The mind did not at all *learn* this discourse and this judgment; rather, they are innate to it.”⁵⁰⁰ Recognition and judging go together, for the power of recognizing *is* the power of judging, and vice versa. Indeed, the power of judgment and of recognition is the light of reason (or the light of intellect) that God has concreated with the soul. In short, it is the power to recognize, and to judge oneself by, the natural law, whose precepts are in us in the sense that we see them to be binding upon us as soon as they come into our minds, and they will at some point come into our minds on the occasion of our experiences.

The light of the intelligence (*lumen intelligentiae*) that we bear in the likeness of the Divine Light, which is Truth itself, is the light of reason (*lumen rationis*) and is natural to reason. Without that light our reason is not perfect reason. In that light we see which things are of the law: viz., that God (the Giver of life) is to be loved and that, in God, our brother (i.e., our neighbor) is to be loved as we ourselves wish to be loved.... He who does not receive Christ—although he is seen to have the light of reason by which he sees that God is to be worshiped and that his neighbor is to be loved—remains in the darkness of ignorance, since he does not receive the light of grace, which conducts the spirit unto being a son of God.”⁵⁰¹

Here Nicholas tells us that even unbelievers have the light of reason, the natural light, although they do not attain unto the perfection of

their rational spirit, since they are without the light of grace. The light of reason also instructs us that a just order is to be maintained, that an immutable good is to be preferred to a mutable good, that what is honorable is to be preferred to what is useful, that what God wills is to be preferred to what we ourselves will, that reason is to take precedence over sensuality,⁵⁰² and that good is to be done. Only someone grievously devoid of reason would fail to recognize these precepts. For even the reasoning Fool who has said in his heart “There is no God”⁵⁰³ would agree that God, if He exists, ought to be worshiped and obeyed, Nicholas seems convinced.

Basically, Nicholas agrees with Albertus Magnus that as soon as a man knows what thievery is or what adultery is, he knows that one ought not to steal and ought not to commit adultery.⁵⁰⁴ Such a recognition, Nicholas would concur, is ours by nature, although not by nature but through teaching we learn the meanings of the words “thievery” and “adultery”. Of course, a child must have reached the “age of discernment” before the reproving judgment will follow upon understanding the meaning of the words.⁵⁰⁵

4.3. *Clarification of statements made by Nicholas.* A human being has a natural desire for what is good,⁵⁰⁶ affirms Nicholas, and a natural ability to discern good from evil. However, he cannot exercise this power as an infant or as a very young child:

Mind has within itself that unto which it looks and in accordance with which it judges about external objects. It is as if a written code of law were alive: because it was alive, it could read within itself the judgments that were to be dispensed. Hence, mind is a *living* description of Eternal, Infinite Wisdom. But in our minds, at the beginning, that life resembles someone asleep,⁵⁰⁷ until it is aroused to activity by wonder, which arises from the influence of perceptible objects. Thereupon, by the operation of its intellectual life, mind finds described within itself that which it is seeking. (Understand this description, however, to be the shining forth of the Exemplar-of-all-things in the way that a true object shines forth in its image.) [The situation is] as if an indivisible and most simple pointed tip of an angle of a very highly polished diamond were alive and as if in this pointed tip were reflected the forms of all things. By looking at itself this [living tip] would find the likenesses of all things; *and by means of these likenesses it could make concepts of all things* (my emphasis).⁵⁰⁸

Here we must understand Nicholas in the light of his clear claims, elsewhere in *De Mente*, that the mind has no concreated concepts and that initially it is formless, having only the power to receive sensory

impressions, from which (or from whose stimulus) to make concepts and to form judgments. The judgments that it forms will be in terms of its rational recognition, its rational discernment, of what is honorable, just, and good. Mind “finds” within itself what it is seeking because it finds within itself the power to form concepts and to recognize first principles and to judge concerning them and by means of them. It does not find within itself judgments that are already formulated, standards that are already articulated and that it may read off from its, so to speak, “codified” nature. The first principles of morality are said by Nicholas to be present within the mind in the way that all things are said by him to be present in formless matter.⁵⁰⁹ As formless matter receives form, so the human mind has received from God the form of rationality, which form just *is* the power to discern between right and wrong, between the just and the unjust, between the logical and the illogical, etc.

Let us take a second example of Nicholas’s writing something that requires clarification, so as not to mislead. In *De Ludo Globi* II (80:7-9) we read his words (in translation): “As God has within Himself exemplars of all things in order to be able to form all things, so our mind has within itself exemplars of all things in order to be able to know all things.” But our mind, we must remember Nicholas to be teaching, does not have these exemplars, or concepts, innately or concreatedly—except in the sense that our mind has the innate ability to make concepts of all things humanly knowable. Thus, the concepts of all humanly knowable things are present in the human mind potentially, never actually, since—as Nicholas explicitly says and as common-sense tells us—no man knows all that is humanly knowable.⁵¹⁰ Thus, at *De Ludo Globi* II (80:11-12) Nicholas goes on to use the word “makes” (“*facit*”): “Our mind is a conceptual power; in accordance with this power it makes all things to exist in a conceptual way.”

A third example of a statement calling for clarification on Nicholas’s part occurs in *De Aequalitate* 13:11-13: “Through itself [the soul] makes judgments about all things. For example, [the soul makes judgments] about just causes, [doing so] through its concept-of-justice, which is consubstantial with it, because the soul is the conceptual form of justice through which it judges what is just and what is unjust.” Someone might be inclined to take this statement to be advocating the doctrine that the concept of justice is concreated—might

take the statement this way on the grounds that “consubstantial” implies “concreated”. Yet, Nicholas is saying something different from the assertion that the concept of justice is concreated with the soul. For here he speaks, expansively, of the judging soul as itself a conceptual form of justice. Now, the soul is the discerning and judging form of justice in the sense that inherent in its power is the capability to distinguish the just from the unjust and the ability to recognize that an encountered or a proposed action is, say, unjust. That the human soul also “unfolds” the various arts and sciences “from its own conceptual power”⁵¹¹ is Nicholas’s way of indicating that the soul constructs or formulates these arts and sciences by means of its native power of inference, its native power of conceptualizing.

Similarly, when in *De Mente* 15 (159:7) Nicholas speaks of “*con-nata religio*” (i.e., “innate religion”), he does not mean that some pre-formed religious doctrines are imprinted on the soul. Instead, he means to indicate his conviction that the human soul is created with an inborn tendency to ask religious questions and to seek after God⁵¹² when the soul comes to the age of understanding.

If Nicholas sometimes evokes the impression that concepts are con-created with the soul, it is not because he believes that they are; rather, it is because he sometimes uses the word “concept” as a substitute for the phrase “power of conceiving,” as he makes clear at *De Mente* 8 (109). This innate power of conceiving is an innate *aptitude*,⁵¹³ not an innate *content*. Accordingly, Nicholas does not hesitate to state:

You know that our mind is a certain power that bears an image of the aforementioned Divine Art [viz., God]. Hence, whatever things are present most truly in the Absolute Art [i.e., in God]⁵¹⁴ are present truly in our mind as in an image [of the Divine, Creative, Infinite, Absolute Art]. Therefore, mind is created by the Creative Art—as if that Art willed to create itself but as if because the Infinite Art is unreplicable, there arose its image.

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Every mind—even ours, too, although it is created as lower than all other minds—has from God the fact that, as best it can be, it is a perfect and living image of the Infinite Art. Therefore, mind is three and one—having power, wisdom, and the union of both in such a way that it is a perfect image of the Art, i.e., in such a way that it can conform itself, when stimulated, ever more and more to its Exemplar. In this way, even though our mind at the outset of its creation does not have the *actual* reflection of the Creative Art in terms of trinity and oneness, nevertheless it does have the concreated power through which it can make itself, when stimulated, more

conformed to the actuality of the Divine Art. Hence, in the oneness of the mind's essence there is power, wisdom, and will. And master and mastery coincide in the essence as in a living image of the Infinite Art—an image which, when stimulated, can make itself always more conformed to Divine Actuality, while the preciseness of the Infinite Art remains always inaccessible.⁵¹⁵

Nicholas's emphasis here is upon the human mind's rationality—whereby it can make itself more conformed to its Triune Exemplar [viz., God]. It does so, for example, by acting upon its predisposition to believe that others are to be treated as one would have himself be treated and upon its predisposition to believe that God is to be worshiped—predispositions which Nicholas relates to the light of reason.⁵¹⁶ The rational soul conforms itself to God by way of two routes that are different from each other: by way of inquiry that makes use of the senses and by way of inquiry that makes use of the mind alone.⁵¹⁷ Regarding the latter route, the mind through itself, stimulated by the senses, constructs mathematical and other concepts and attains a knowledge of metaphysical and of moral first principles.

4.4. *Further clarifications.* In his sermons Nicholas pursues further the notion of trinitarian likenesses that are to be found in all creatures but that are found especially in the human mind. One such likeness he identifies as *memoria* (memory, mindfulness), *notitia* (knowledge), and *voluntas* (will)—three features of the *one* human mind.⁵¹⁸ And he likens these three features to three regions, or kingdoms, or heavens. In the first heaven all things “are present in memory (*memoria*), which is our mindfulness (*memoria*) of Him who is all in all. In the second heaven (*notitia*) all things come to the light because of the mind's measuring them. In the third heaven (*voluntas*) mind takes delight in what it has found.

Memoria intra se habet veritatem, iustitiam, pulchritudinem, et quaecunque talia perpetua et aeterna ut memoria aeternitatis. In secundo regno iudicat de iusto, vero, pulchro. Et nisi primum regnum ministraret ei veritatem, iustitiam, et pulchritudinem, non haberet cum quo iudicaret quid iustum, quid verum, quid pulchrum. In tertio regno delitiatur et gaudet se reperisse iustum, verum, pulchrum.⁵¹⁹

Now, the sense in which *memoria* has within itself truth, justice, and beauty dare not be misconstrued. Nicholas is not here going back on his earlier claim that the human mind at its origin is contentless. Rather, he is alluding to the mind's having formed for itself *a priori*

concepts of truth, justice, and beauty—having formed them on the basis of its natural ability to recognize a difference between the beautiful and the not-beautiful, the just and the not-just, the true and the not-true.⁵²⁰

In the very process of forming these concepts the mind is making judgments not only about what is beautiful (just, true, etc.) and what is not beautiful (not just, not true, etc.) but also about what is more beautiful and what is less beautiful, so that Nicholas writes: “Unless the first kingdom [of the mind] ministered to the second kingdom [of the mind] truth, justice, and beauty, then the second kingdom would not have that with which to judge what is just, what is true, what is beautiful.” That is, the mind judges about truth, justice, and beauty on the basis of the concepts that it is forming. The mind’s judgments are, necessarily, *conceptual* judgments. Nicholas is not here advancing the view that the human mind is created with *a priori* concepts already placed by God within it. Instead, he is seeking a trinitarian likeness to God in a unitary mind’s being also a trinity of *memoria*, *notitia*, and *voluntas*. This likeness is seen in the mind’s ability to *make* concepts, to *use* concepts, and to *delight* in that of which it has conceived. Thus, when Nicholas adds that “God is hidden in His image, viz., in *memoria*,”⁵²¹ he means that the human mind is endowed both with a natural *ability* to think of God and with a natural *tendency* to do so. In other words, God is said to be hidden in our memory in the way that religion is said to be innate to the soul. For God is revealed not only through Christ but also “*lumine naturae per inclinationem interioris hominis*” (*Sermones*, p, Vol. II, f. 156^f, lines 31-33).

In *Sermo* CCXLI, also from 1456, Nicholas draws the following conclusion:

Therefore, in the heaven of the intellectual nature there are many powers (*virtutes*),⁵²² just as there are many stars in the firmament. These powers all have light from the Sun of Justice [i.e., from God]. Without this Spirit [viz., the Sun of Justice] these powers would be altogether without any loveliness or beauty, and thus without virtue. For there is no virtue without elegant loveliness. Yet, only the Spirit of the Sun of Justice produces the divine life that is called sonship with God.⁵²³

This adorning light from the Sun of Justice is something other than the light of God-given reason and intellect, through which a human being

can aim for, and attain, virtue. It is the light of assisting grace, of which we have already seen Nicholas speak.⁵²⁴

Finally, we may look at *Sermo* CCLXXIII, from 1457, where Nicholas expressly states that the intellectual memory (*memoria intellectualis*) is not acquired from the senses but is concreated.⁵²⁵ Now, intellectual memory is a power of conceiving; for the mind, as such, is a power of conceiving,⁵²⁶ and the mind is intellect.⁵²⁷ Nicholas reminds us, as well, of the following:

If, then, the spirit that is from God and that is called the intellect is to walk, or proceed, in all goodness, justice, and truth, then its eyes must look within unto its intellectual memory, (1) which is not acquired from things perceptible but is concreated and (2) which is that spirit's essence, because it is the image of God. And within [its intellectual memory] that spirit [viz., the intellect] will find the light of goodness, of justice, and of truth—a light that is the lucid law of nature enlightening its eyes so that it may make from those lights a concept that it may imitate in walking [i.e., in acting]. And this light is nothing but the enlightening word of God, [given] so that you may know how to discern good from evil, the just from the unjust, the true from the false.⁵²⁸

The intellectual memory is a faculty that is concreated with the soul. Yet, importantly, Nicholas does not state that its contents are concreated with the soul. Rather, it has a concreated light of goodness, justice, and truth. This concreated light Nicholas identifies with the illuminating internal word of God, by virtue of which our immaterial spirit is called reason or intellect. and by whose enlightening it makes moral concepts. And for us to walk in accordance with the word of God is for us to walk in accordance with the commands of reason. In articulating these views, Nicholas uses a comparative illustration:

Unto what does a man look who wishes to read a book? Does he not look within his memory before he reads the writing? For he reads in the writing that which he saw antecedently within himself in the concept that flows from his memory. For memory begets, in an inner concept, a knowledge of the letters and the words. And there is a looking within memory before there is a reading of the writing. For one comes to the reading on the basis of his knowledge of the letters. When I see the perceptible letters, I recur to memory and I present [to it a configuration] similar [to the letters]. But if I do not have that form in my memory, I cannot make for myself a concept nor can I read [the writing].⁵²⁹

Just as one who reads looks within himself to his knowledge of the letters and the words, so one who judges regarding the good, the just,

and the true looks within himself to his knowledge of goodness, justice, and truth. But Nicholas's parallel is to be continued: just as one who reads has previously learned to read and now looks within himself to what he has already learned, so one who judges regarding the good, the just, and the true looks within himself to concepts and standards that he has already formulated on the basis of his innate power of recognition and discernment.⁵³⁰

4.5. *More on mathematics.*⁵³¹ Nicholas endorses Boethius's statement that "in the mind of the Creator number was the principal Exemplar of the things to be created."⁵³² And he goes on to say that mathematical numbers are images of number that proceeds from the Divine Mind.⁵³³ Thus, number exists only from mind—either from the Divine Mind or, in an ectypal way, from the human mind.⁵³⁴ Indeed, says Nicholas, "number is a mode of the mind's understanding."⁵³⁵ Thus, our human mode of understanding symbolically resembles in certain respects the Divine mode of understanding. For example, since only mind numbers, the human mind can decide whether to view a tree as a unity, whether to view it as a composite of roots, trunk, and branches or as a composite of roots, trunk, branches, bark, and leaves. (It can decide whether or not to consider the bark as a part of the trunk or the leaves as part of the branches) Similarly, it can decide whether to divide a day into twenty-four hours of sixty minutes each or into forty-eight hours of thirty minutes each. And so on. Yet, there does not follow that the plurality exists only because of the human mind. For an "objective" plurality exists—because of the Divine, Creative Mind. "Hence, just as with respect to God," writes Nicholas, "the plurality of things is from the Divine Mind, so with respect to us the plurality of things is from our mind."⁵³⁶ And he adds: "The plurality of things has arisen from the Divine Mind's understanding one thing in one way and another thing in another way. Hence, if you look closely, you will find that the plurality of things is only a mode-of-understanding on the part of the Divine Mind."⁵³⁷

Our mind, which constructs mathematical entities, has these mathematical entities, which are in its power, more truly present with itself than as they exist outside the mind.⁵³⁸

For example, man knows the mechanical art, and he has the forms of this art more truly in his mental concept than as they are formable outside his mind—just as a house, which is made by means of an art, has a truer form in the mind than in the pieces of wood. For the form that comes to char-

acterize the wood is the mental form, idea, or exemplar. A similar point holds true regarding all other such things—regarding a circle, a line, a triangle, and regarding our numbers and all other such things which have their beginning from our mind’s concepts and which lack a nature. But it does not follow that the house which exists in terms of wood (i.e., the perceptible house) exists more truly in the mind—even though the form of the house is a truer form in the mind. For there is required—for the true being of the house and because of the end for the sake of which the house exists—that the house be perceptible. And so, the house cannot have a form that exists as separated from it, as Aristotle rightly saw.⁵³⁹

Here again Nicholas distances himself from Plato and favors Aristotle. Moreover, a few lines later he explicitly rejects Plato’s theory of mathematics.⁵⁴⁰ In the course of doing so, he makes a noteworthy parenthetical remark: “... mathematical entities, which are abstracted from perceptible objects ...”⁵⁴¹ By this remark Nicholas does not mean that numbers or polygonal forms, etc., are arrived at empirically. Instead, he means that the mind, taking its start from sensory perceptions, abstracts certain specific forms (such as the form of a circle or of a triangle) that it then idealizes into forms of perfect figures (such as the form of a perfect circle or of a perfect triangle), which are not found in the material world. Something similar is true of numbers, thinks Nicholas: the human mind, moved by sensory perception, forms a concept of oneness, which it then idealizes into the concept of perfect oneness, from which are derived all numbers,⁵⁴² each of which has its own perfection, even though none of the things that are numbered are perfect. Since a number of things is always a plurality, Nicholas thinks of oneness, which is not a plurality, as not a number but as the source of all numbers.⁵⁴³ Thus, the first number is the number two, which is oneness taken twice.⁵⁴⁴ In *De Coniecturis* Nicholas asserts that arithmetical propositions such as that two plus three equals five are always true and certain⁵⁴⁵ within the domain of *reason*. But with regard to the *intellect* “the number 5 is not *greater than* the number 2 or the number 3 For in the domain of intellect you will view reason’s every number as resolved into most simple oneness.”⁵⁴⁶ For intellect contemplates the infinite, and at infinity the finite number 5 is not greater than is the finite number 3, just as “in an infinite line a line of two feet and a line of three feet do not differ,” writes Nicholas.⁵⁴⁷ Moreover, in God, who is Infinity itself, trinity and oneness are not at all numerical, so that God is not numerically three and

one,⁵⁴⁸ because His trinity is His Oneness.⁵⁴⁹

In the end, Nicholas is prepared to call the human mind a living number⁵⁵⁰—and even a living divine-number.⁵⁵¹ For every created thing is a number in the Divine Mind;⁵⁵² and numbers that the human mind constructs are images of the numbers in God's Mind. The human mind is alive in such a way that it itself numbers and is incorruptible, i.e., immortal.⁵⁵³ Although numbering is something done by our reason and although numbers are said to be from our mind or reason,⁵⁵⁴ nevertheless numbers have objective application to the world because numerical relationships in our mind are a reflection of God's understanding in creation when He understood one thing in one way and another thing in another way.⁵⁵⁵ As for the infinite number: it is "no more even than odd and ... no more a number than not-a-number, but is an innumerable number"⁵⁵⁶

5. *Cusanus and Leibniz.*

We know that Leibniz was familiar with Cusa's views on squaring the circle, because occasionally in this regard he mentions Cusa by name in his correspondence and elsewhere.⁵⁵⁷ Moreover, he uses, in his work *Von der Allmacht*,⁵⁵⁸ the same diagram that Nicholas uses in *De Coniecturis* I, 9 (41), viz., the diagram called by Nicholas "P" which stands for "paradigmatic".⁵⁵⁹ Yet, historians of philosophy and of science are generally agreed that Leibniz was familiar with Nicholas's ideas fundamentally through secondary sources⁵⁶⁰ and not through a study of Nicholas's texts themselves. For Leibniz exhibits only a vague familiarity with a number of Cusan themes, never a detailed knowledge of Nicholas's writings themselves. Still, these themes do seem to have *influenced*⁵⁶¹ Leibniz, who, once he encountered them from secondary sources, worked them into his own philosophy without concerning himself with how others, including Nicholas himself, may have used them. Accordingly, it would be better for us to speak of Nicholas not as a "forerunner (*Vorläufer*) of Leibniz" but as a "catalyst of Leibniz." For Leibniz's philosophy is so very different from Nicholas's that it does not show any systematic conceptual connection. Nonetheless, the parallels are certainly noteworthy. However, of those parallels pointed out by Edmond Vansteenberghe, citing Robert Zimmermann, only the second one is significant. "As for Leibniz," says Vansteenberghe (as we have seen in n. 561), "Zimmermann

has superabundantly shown what he owes to Nicholas: individualism, the principle of indiscernibles, optimism, the idea of monads, the importance given to the idea of force, etc.”⁵⁶² Yet, individualism, optimism, and the emphasis upon force are not motifs unique enough to Nicholas to speak of an influence. Moreover, Nicholas himself has no doctrine of monads. He speaks of God as *unitas* or *unum*;⁵⁶³ but he would also be willing to refer to Him as *monas*, which, he says, Pythagoras called the beginning of all things.⁵⁶⁴ Primarily, however, he uses the word “*monas*” to speak of the *unitas*, or oneness, from which number arises.⁵⁶⁵ Accordingly, he does not use “*monas*” of the human soul, which he calls a living *number*.⁵⁶⁶ The one point about which Vansteenberghe is indisputably right is the point about the identity of indiscernibles: Nicholas, as also Leibniz, holds that no two things are exactly similar in every respect, differing in number alone.⁵⁶⁷ Indeed, this is a major theme in his philosophy.

Secondly, Nicholas holds that every extended thing is, in principle, infinitely divisible, although a practical limit of divisibility is reached in what he terms an atom.⁵⁶⁸ Leibniz also holds the view that whatever is extended is divisible. This tenet conduces to his proposing that the basic units of reality are not physical atoms but are immaterial monads. Thirdly, Leibniz picks up Nicholas’s theme of mirroring, vividly put forth in *De Filiatione Dei* 3 (65-68) and elsewhere.⁵⁶⁹ In *De Filiatione* Nicholas likens all creatures unto differently curved mirrors; and among all creatures he likens intellectual natures to living mirrors. Moreover, he likens the Word of God, who is the Reflection of God the Father, to a non-curved Mirror that is without blemish and that reflects all things as they are, so that it is called the Mirror-of-truth.

When any intellectual, living mirror is brought unto that first and straight Mirror-of-truth, in which all other mirrors appear truly and accurately as they are, then the Mirror-of-truth reflects itself, along with all that it has received from all the mirrors, into the intellectual, living mirror. And the intellectual mirror receives unto itself that mirror-ray from the Mirror-of-truth, which Mirror has within itself the truth of all the mirrors. However, it receives [this ray] in its own manner. But that [intellectual], living mirror (as it were, a living eye)—upon receiving the first Mirror’s reflected light—in [one and] the same moment of eternity beholds (in that same Mirror-of-truth) itself as it is and beholds (within itself) all the mirrors in its own [conditioning] manner.⁵⁷⁰

Nicholas even uses the illustration of physically curved mirrors placed in a circle in such a way that each mirror reflects all the others. *De Filiatione*'s elaborate illustration may well have moved Leibniz to refer to his finite monads as mirroring the world from their own point of view and as "windowless," each monad being cognizant of other monads by observing them within itself. We know that Leibniz spoke of there being a great mirror in God.⁵⁷¹ And he likened each human mind to a mirror: "Tot sunt specula universi quot mentes; omnis enim mens totum universum percipit, sed confuse."⁵⁷²

Closely related to Nicholas's tenet that no two things are exactly alike, differing only in number, and to his claim that each mind is a living mirror, is a further Cusan doctrine: viz., that every thing is as perfect as it can be,⁵⁷³ so that even the universe is as perfect as it can be.⁵⁷⁴ For although, according to Nicholas, God could have created a better universe, He could not have created this present universe, with its matter, to be any more perfect than it originally was. Moreover, Nicholas emphasizes that in the universe "God created all things in such way that when each thing desires to conserve its own existence as a divine work, it conserves it in communion with others. Accordingly, just as by virtue of the fact that the foot exists merely for walking it serves not only itself but also the eye, the hands, the body, and the entire human being (and similarly for the eye and the other members), so a similar thing holds true regarding the parts of the world."⁵⁷⁵ Or, as Nicholas states in *De Docta Ignorantia* II, 13 (178): God "considered in advance the sizes, the placing, and the motion of the stars in the one world; and He ordained the distances of the stars in such way that unless each region were as it is, it could neither exist nor exist in such a place and with such an order—nor could the universe exist.... And He established the interrelationship of parts so proportionally that in each thing the motion of the parts is oriented toward the whole." Parallel to Nicholas's doctrine of harmony is Leibniz's accentuation of universal harmony within the creation. Moreover, teaches Leibniz, since each monad mirrors the entire world, each monad can be said to contain the world within its own mirroring self. In a somewhat cognate way—a way that is, nonetheless, significantly different—Nicholas maintains that "in each created thing the universe is this created thing; and each thing receives all things in such way that in a given thing all things are, con-

tractedly, this thing.”⁵⁷⁶

A fifth noteworthy parallel between Nicholas’s system of thought and Leibniz’s consists in the principle of sufficient reason, which Nicholas states, simply, as: “Nothing is without a cause and reason,”⁵⁷⁷ meaning not only that whatever happens is caused to happen but also that whatever God created, He created for a reason.⁵⁷⁸ Moreover, implicit in this principle is, for Nicholas, the principle of perfection: God wills and does nothing without a good reason, viz., the best of all the appropriate reasons, so that whatever He creates is the best thing that *it* can be.⁵⁷⁹

Sixthly, Nicholas and Leibniz share a partly similar doctrine of innate ideas. We have already glanced at Nicholas’s doctrine, which centers on the mind’s innate *vis iudiciaria* and on its concreated *aptitudines*, to the exclusion of inborn *conceptiones*, *exemplares*, *seu rationes*, except insofar as they are potential contents that the mind can make either from perceptual data or because of perceptual stimulation. Leibniz himself wants to emphasize that “nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu, excipit: nisi ipse intellectus.”⁵⁸⁰ But, for Leibniz, “*ipse intellectus*” includes not only *vis discernendi*, *vis iudicandi*, and *vis intelligendi* but also whatever ideas do not derive from the senses, even though we are not aware of these ideas at birth or as small children. Examples of such ideas are not only mathematical concepts but also the ideas of being, substance, unicity, identity, cause, perception, and reasoning.⁵⁸¹ Without such innate ideas as identity and unicity (oneness), we could not at all arrive at a knowledge of necessary truths, Leibniz says.⁵⁸² So, basically, for Leibniz, innate knowledge is knowledge that does not derive from the senses and thus is not justified by appeal to the senses. Yet, he is willing to concede: “If someone wishes to give this appellation [viz., ‘innate’] only to truths that one receives initially by instinct, I will not contest his doing so.”⁵⁸³

Contrary to John Locke, Leibniz holds that there is moral knowledge—of rules and principles—which is innate in the same way that the knowledge of arithmetic is innate: we do know moral (or arithmetic) truths from our birth on; but we are not aware of them, i.e., do not apperceive them at the time of our origin. However, when we are able to pay attention and when we do pay attention, we will become aware of them and will be able to demonstrate them (i.e., moral truths

as well as arithmetical truths) without appeal to empirical considerations. Leibniz is also willing to admit that *instinct* plays a partial role in our adhering to principles of conduct such as the principle that joy is to be pursued, whereas sorrow is to be shunned.⁵⁸⁴ Yet, these instincts need the illumination that reason and experience can help afford. As for the moral rule “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,” Leibniz expresses the opinion that “le veritable sens de la regle est, que la place d’autrui est le vray point de veue pour juger plus equitablement lorsqu’on s’y met.”⁵⁸⁵ Unlike Nicholas, too, Leibniz maintains that the mind can have thoughts of which it is not conscious, i.e., can have unconscious and subconscious thoughts. Indeed, the context of Leibniz’s discussions on innate knowledge is vastly different from the context of Cusa’s discussion, because Leibniz is responding to Descartes and to Locke and is not doing so by quoting Cusanus.

Seventhly, Leibniz’s thought parallels Cusanus’s in a number of lesser ways. In particular, Leibniz takes an interest in the notions of the maximal and the minimal. (This interest fosters his formulation of the calculus.) He maintains—but never in a systematic and thematizing way—that there is no proportion (comparative relation) between the finite and the infinite.⁵⁸⁶ He is concerned with the problem of squaring the circle. And he holds on a grand scale a belief that Nicholas held only on a vastly more limited and more qualified scale: viz., in Nicholas’s words, that each intellect is “a conceptual enfolding of the world,”⁵⁸⁷ so that “within itself the soul sees all things”⁵⁸⁸ and so that “through itself the soul proceeds unto all other things.”⁵⁸⁹

Nonetheless, Leibniz never makes any extensive use of Nicholas’s pattern of thoughts, from which his own pattern varies so strikingly. We do not find in Leibniz any thematizing of the notions of learned ignorance, the coincidence of opposites, the disproportion of the finite to the infinite. We do not find him referring to God as *possest, non-aliud, posse ipsum*—or to God the Father as *posse-fieri*. Similarly, we do not find in Cusanus either a monadology or a doctrine of pre-established harmony or a relational view of space and time or a metaphysics that makes material objects to be but *phenomena bene fundata*. Moreover, whereas Leibniz speaks of his theory of knowledge as closer to Plato’s than to Aristotle’s,⁵⁹⁰ Nicholas intimates that his own epistemology is closer to Aristotle’s than to Plato’s.⁵⁹¹ And

in minor ways, too, Nicholas would be in disagreement with Leibniz—e.g., with the following claim by Leibniz:

Quantitas est ex earum rerum numero quae absolutam veramque realitatem non habent. Nam si universa quae sunt in mundo duplo majora esse fingerentur, eadem proportione nulla sentiretur mutatio ne a Deo quidem.⁵⁹²

So, in the last analysis, Zimmermann erred in speaking of Nicholas as a “Vorläufer Leibnizens”. Yet, he was insightful enough to detect in Leibniz’s writings motifs which, had they been worked out in a different context by Leibniz, would have constituted him *ein Nachfolger, ein Anhänger, des Cusanus* and, therefore, would have constituted Nicholas a *Vorläufer des Leibniz*.

CONCLUSION.

Nicholas of Cusa’s two works *De Coniecturis* and *De Ludo Globi* are, indeed, metaphysical speculations. The one was written relatively early in his intellectual career; the other was written relatively late. Yet, there is no incompatibility between them. Both raise metaphysical issues—whether about God’s relation to the world, the soul’s relation to the body, reason’s relation to intellect, number’s relation to oneness, or language’s relation to reality. Both works—one a treatise, the other a dialogue—make use of numerical symbolisms and of a “diagrammatic method.” Implicit in each of the two works is a doctrine of learned ignorance, a doctrine of the coincidence of opposites, and a doctrine of *nulla proportio inter finitum et infinitum*. Although Nicholas was not a systematic or an analytic reasoner but was rather a creative speculator, he nonetheless can be said to have developed a *system* of philosophy, but not to have developed it in a *systematic* way. In a sense, his late work *De Venatione Sapientiae* summarizes the main themes of his system. This is why Werner Beierwaltes can rightly refer to it as Nicholas’s *retractationes*, or Reconsiderations,⁵⁹³ à la Augustine’s work by that title. And this is why Giovanni Santinello can rightly speak of the thoughts expressed in *De Docta Ignorantia* as “*le prime formulazioni del sistema*” and of the subsequent work *De Coniecturis* as “*una nuova formulazione del sistema*”⁵⁹⁴ (and not as *una trasformazione del sistema*). In formulating his metaphysics, Nicholas showed himself to be an eclectic, drawing from the ancients Plato, Aristotle, Proclus,⁵⁹⁵ Plotinus, Diogenes Laërtius, Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Pythagoras, and Euclid, from the transi-

tional figures Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius, and from the medieval figures Eriugena, Anselm, Bonaventura, Thierry of Chartres, Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Eckhart, and Lull. But in spite of his eclecticism, Nicholas developed a distinctive philosophy of his own, so that an interpreter such as Karl Jaspers can declare: “Ich versuche den Grundgedanken des Cusanus zu vergegenwärtigen.”⁵⁹⁶ But Jaspers himself concludes: “In den Abwandlungen seiner Spekulation kommt Cusanus zu Unstimmigkeiten der Ausdrucksweisen. Aus seinen Schriften läßt sich ein widerspruchloses System nicht darstellen.”⁵⁹⁷ Yet, the contradictions and incompatibilities that are contained in Cusa’s works are not as extensive as Jaspers’ further judgments would lead us to believe. Some of the discrepancies are such that they do not occur in Cusa’s fundamental metaphysical and epistemological tenets. Others of them disappear when we rightly understand Cusa’s (sometimes misleading) expressions and terminology. (Klaus Kremer correctly speaks of “*die Promiskuität in der Terminologie*”⁵⁹⁸ of Cusanus.) Accordingly, we must approach Nicholas’s writings carefully and conscientiously—always comparing text with text and context with context. For sometimes the Latin phrases are amphibolous or otherwise infelicitously constructed, as the examples in section 1 above serve amply to illustrate. All things considered, however, Nicholas of Cusa remains a towering figure in the history of philosophy. To be sure, he is a figure whose pattern-of-thought—including his view of man as a microcosm and as a second god—relates to Renaissance humanism’s emphasis upon the dignity of man. Yet, at the same time, it reflects itself no less germanely into our own intellectual outlook in the twenty-first century. Accordingly, there is a measure of truth in Jaspers’ global judgment: “Cusanus ist weder alt noch neu, nicht mittelalterlich und nicht modern. Er gehört in der Zeit dem zeitlosen Geist der Menschen an, die sich durch die Jahrtausende im Gleichen begegnen, wenn sie, gekleidet in die Gewänder ihrer Zeitalter und Völker, sich zurufen aus der Erfahrung des Menschenschicksals.”⁵⁹⁹