

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA
ON GOD AS NOT-OTHER:
A Translation and an Appraisal
of De Li Non Aliud
(third edition)**

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**THE ARTHUR J. BANNING PRESS
MINNEAPOLIS**

This second printing of the third edition contains emendations
not found in the first printing.

The English translation was made
from the Latin text (not here reprinted) transcribed
from Codex Latinus Monacensis 24848, folios 1^v - 54^r.

Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other
Third edition, 1987 (2nd printing, 1999)
(First edition published by the University of Minnesota Press, 1979)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 82-73976

ISBN 0-938060-38-4

Printed in the United States of America

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**On Not-other
(De Li Non Aliud)**

CHAPTER 1

ABBOT:¹ You know that we three, who are engaged in study and are permitted to converse with you, are occupied with deep matters. For [I am busy] with the *Parmenides* and with Proclus's commentary [thereon]; Peter [is occupied] with this same Proclus's *Theology of Plato*, which he is translating from Greek into Latin; Ferdinand is surveying the genius of Aristotle; and you, when you have time, are busy with the theologian Dionysius the Areopagite. We would like to hear whether or not there occurs to you a briefer and clearer route to the points which are dealt with by the aforementioned [individuals].

NICHOLAS: In our respective directions we are busy with deep mysteries. And it seems to me that no one can speak of these matters more briefly and clearly than those whom we are reading. Nonetheless, I have sometimes thought that we have neglected a [point] which would lead us closer to what is sought.

PETER: We ask that this [point] be made known [to us].

- 2 FERDINAND: We are all so influenced by the truth that, knowing it to be discoverable everywhere, we desire to have that teacher who will place it before the eyes of our mind. Now, you show yourself to be tireless in your declining years; and you seem to grow young when, prodded, you discourse about the truth. So speak of that which you have reflected upon more than have we.

NICHOLAS: 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.²

FERDINAND: My teachers, the philosophers, have taught that one ought to proceed in this way.

- 3 NICHOLAS: I ask you, then, first of all, what is it that most of all gives us knowledge?

FERDINAND: Definition.

NICHOLAS: You answer correctly, for the definition is the constituting ground (*oratio seu ratio*).³ But on what basis is [definition] called definition?

FERDINAND: On the basis of defining, since it defines everything.

NICHOLAS: Perfectly correct. Hence, if definition defines everything, then does it define even itself?

FERDINAND: Certainly, since it excludes nothing.

NICHOLAS: Do you see, then, that the definition which defines everything is not other than what is defined?⁴

FERDINAND: I see [this], since [this definition] is the definition of itself. But I do not see what this definition is.

NICHOLAS: I expressed it to you most plainly. (This is what I said we have neglected and passed over in the course of tracking down what is sought.)

FERDINAND: When did you express it I?

NICHOLAS: Just now, when I said that the definition which defines everything is not other than what is defined.

FERDINAND: I do not yet understand you.

4 NICHOLAS: The few things which I have stated are easily investigated. Among them you will find *Not-other*. And if with all your might you turn the acute gaze of your mind toward *Not-other*, you will see with me the definition which defines itself and everything.

FERDINAND: Teach us how to do it; for what you assert is important, though not yet plausible.

NICHOLAS: Tell me, then, what is *Not-other*? Is it other than *Not-other*?

FERDINAND: Not at all other.

NICHOLAS: So [it is] *Not-other*.

FERDINAND: This is certain.

NICHOLAS: Then, define *Not-other*.

FERDINAND: Indeed, I see clearly how it is that *Not-other* is not other than *Not-other*. No one will deny this.

NICHOLAS: You speak the truth. Don't you now see most assuredly that *Not-other* defines itself, since it cannot be defined by means of [any] other?

FERDINAND: I see [this] assuredly. But it is not yet evident that *Not-other* defines everything.

5 NICHOLAS: Nothing is easier to recognize. For what would you answer if someone asked you, "What is *other*?" Would you not reply, "Not other than other"? Likewise, [if someone asked you] "What is the sky?" you would reply, "Not other than the sky."

FERDINAND: Assuredly, I could truthfully reply in this way regarding everything which I would be asked to define.

NICHOLAS: Therefore, since there is no remaining doubt that the mode of defining by which *Not-other* defines itself and every [other]⁵ thing is most precise and most true, there remains [for us] only to dwell attentively upon it and to discover what can be humanly known about it.

FERDINAND: You state and promise wonderful things. I would like to learn, in the first place, whether anyone among all the speculative thinkers ever explicitly expressed the foregoing [point].

NICHOLAS: Although I have read [it in] no one, nevertheless Dionysius (more than the others) seems to have come the closest [to it]. For, in all the things which he expresses in various ways, he elucidates *Not-other*. But when he comes to the end of his *Mystical Theology*, he maintains that the Creator is neither anything nameable nor any other thing whatever.⁶ Yet, he says this in such way that he there appears not to be setting forth any important point—although, for one who is attentive, he expressed the secret of Not-other, which secret he everywhere exhibited in one way or another.

6

CHAPTER 2

FERDINAND: Since all call the First Beginning *God*, you seem to intend for Him to be signified by the words “Not-other.” For we must maintain that the First is that which defines both itself and all [others]. For since there is not anything prior to the First and since the First is independent of everything posterior, assuredly it is defined only through itself. But since what is originated has nothing from itself but has from the Beginning whatever it is, assuredly the Beginning is the ground of being, or the definition, of what is originated.

NICHOLAS: You understand me well, Ferdinand. For, to be sure, many names are attributed to the First Beginning, none of which can be adequate to it, since it is the Beginning of all names as well as of all things (and nothing that is originated precedes all things). Nevertheless, the mind’s acute gaze sees the Beginning more precisely through one mode of signifying than through another.⁷ Indeed, I have not previously found that any signification directs human sight unto the First more accurately [than does the signification of “Not-other”]. For [with regard to] any signification which terminates in something other or in other itself: just as all things⁸ are *other* than Not-other, so, assuredly, they do not direct unto the Beginning.

7 FERDINAND: I see that what you say is surely so. For other, which is the terminal end of vision, cannot be the beginning of seeing. For since other is not other than other, surely it presupposes Not-other, without which it would not be other. Therefore, every signification that is *other* than the signification of “Not-other” terminates in something other than in the Beginning. I see that this [point] is certainly true.

NICHOLAS: Very good. Since each of us can disclose his own observation to the other only by means of the signification of words, surely [this disclosure] occurs no more precisely than with the words “Not-other.” Nevertheless, “Not-other” is not that name of God which is before every name nameable in Heaven and on earth.⁹ (By comparison, the way which directs a pilgrim to a city is not the name of that city.)

FERDINAND: The matter is as you say. And I see it clearly when I see that God is not other than God, something is not other than something, nothing is not other than nothing, not-being is not other than not-being—and so on regarding all the things which can be spoken of in whatever way. For I see that *Not-other* precedes all such things by virtue of the fact that it defines these things,¹⁰ and [I see that] these things are other since Not-other precedes [them].

NICHOLAS: The quickness and alertness of your mind pleases me, for you grasp rightly and immediately what I mean. From these [considerations], then, you now recognize clearly regarding the expression “Not-other” that its signification not only serves us as a way to the Beginning but also quite closely befigures the unnameable name of God, so that in this signification—just as in a quite precious symbolism—[God] shines forth to those who are searching.

8

CHAPTER 3

FERDINAND: Although it is evident that by means of the expression “Not-other” you see the Beginning of being and of knowing, still unless you disclose it more clearly to me, I shall not see it.

NICHOLAS: The theologians state that God shines forth to us more clearly in the symbolism of light, since we ascend to intelligible things by means of perceptible things. Surely, Light itself, which is God, is prior to [any] other light, howsoever nameable, and is prior to [any] other at all. Now, that which is seen prior to other is not other. Therefore, since that Light is Not-other and is not a nameable light, it shines forth in perceptual light. But perceptual light is in some way

conceived to be related to perceptual seeing as the Light which is Not-other [is related] to all the things which can be mentally seen. But we know from experience that perceptual sight sees nothing without perceptual light and that visible color is only the delimiting, or defining, of perceptual light—as [the example of] a rainbow shows. Thus, perceptual light is the beginning of both being and knowing what is visible and perceptible. Thus, we surmise that the Beginning of being is also the Beginning of knowing.

- 9 FERDINAND: Clear and gratifying guidance! Now, the same thing holds true of perceptual hearing. For sound is the beginning of both being and knowing what is audible. Therefore, God, who is signified by “Not-other” is, for all things, the Beginning of being and of knowing. If anyone were to remove God, nothing would remain either in reality or in knowledge. Just as when light is removed, no rainbow or visible thing either exists or is seen, and when sound is removed, no audible thing either exists or is heard, so when Not-other is removed, there is no thing which either exists or is known. For my part, I most surely regard these matters to be thus.

NICHOLAS: Assuredly, you understand well. But pay attention [to the following], I request. When you see something—e.g., any stone—you see it only by means of light, even though you do not pay attention to [the light]. And similarly, when you hear something, you hear it only by means of sound, even though you do not attend to [the sound]. Hence, the beginning of being and of knowing presents itself antecedently [and] as [something] without which you would endeavor in vain to see and to hear. Nonetheless, the reason you are not intent upon a consideration of the beginning—even though it is the beginning, the middle, and the end of what is sought—is that your attention is directed toward some other thing which you wish to see or to hear.

- 10 In the same way, give heed to *Not-other*. Since everything which exists is not other than itself, assuredly it does not have this fact from any other. Therefore, it has it from Not-other.¹¹ Hence, [everything which exists] is that which it is, and is known to be that which it is, only through Not-other, which is its Cause, its most adequate Constituting Ground—or Definition—and which presents itself antecedently, because it is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of what is sought by the mind. But when that which is sought is sought as an other, it is not at all considered as it is. For the Beginning—which al-

ways precedes what is sought and without which what is sought cannot at all be sought—is not a proper object of seeking. Now, everyone who seeks seeks to find the Beginning, if, as Paul says,¹² this is possible. But since it cannot be found as it is in itself, the one seeking it before any other thing rightly seeks it in another, since he himself is an other. Similarly, light—which in itself is invisible with respect to human sight (as is illustrated in the case of pure sunlight)—is looked for in what is visible. Indeed, it is not even necessary to look for light, which presents itself antecedently (for otherwise it would be inapprehensible, since we would have to look for it with light). Therefore, light is sought in what-is-visible, where it is perceived; thus, in this way it is seen at least gropingly.

11

CHAPTER 4

FERDINAND: You counseled that we ought to linger upon *Not-other*. So on account of the important points which you have promised, I shall not at all hasten to leave it. Tell me, then, what do you understand by “Not-other”?

NICHOLAS: That which I understand Not-other to be cannot be expressed in different ways by different [words]; for surely every exposition of it in other terms would be posterior and inferior to it. For since that which the mind tries to see with respect to Not-other precedes all the things which can be either stated or thought, how can we speak of it in other terms? All theologians have recognized that God is something greater than can be conceived;¹³ and hence they affirmed that He is super-substantial, and above every name, and the like. In the case of God they have not expressed to us one thing by “super,” another by “without,” another by “in,” another by “non,” and [another] by “before”; for it is the same thing for God to be super-substantial Substance, Substance without substance, insubstantial Substance, non-substantial Substance, and Substance before substance. Regardless of what words you use: since that of which you speak is not other than the self-same thing, it is evident that Not-other is simpler and prior and is inexpressible and unutterable in [any] other [terms].

12

FERDINAND: Do you wish to say that *Not-other* is an affirmation or a negation or some such kind of thing?

NICHOLAS: Not at all. Rather, [I wish to say that it is] before all such things. It is that which for many years I sought by way of the

coincidence of opposites—as the many books which I have written about this speculative matter bear witness.

FERDINAND: Does *Not-other* posit something, or does it remove something?

NICHOLAS: It is seen prior to all positing and removing.

FERDINAND: Therefore, it is not a substance or a being or one or any other thing whatsoever.

NICHOLAS: This is my view.

FERDINAND: By the same token, it is neither not-being nor nothing.

NICHOLAS: This too I regard as surely the case.

FERDINAND: I am following you, Father, as best I can. And it seems to me most certain that Not-other is not comprehended either by way of affirmation or by way of negation or in any other way.¹⁴ But in a wonderful way it seems to approach the eternal itself

NICHOLAS: The stable, the firm, and the eternal seem to participate a great deal in Not-other, since Not-other cannot at all receive otherness or change. Nevertheless, since the eternal is not other than the eternal, the eternal will indeed be something other than Not-other. And so, I see that Not-other, which is before the eternal and before the aeons, is beyond all comprehension.

13 FERDINAND: It is indeed necessary for whoever examines [the matter] with you to speak in the foregoing manner when he attends to what precedes all things which can be uttered. But, indeed, I wonder how it is that one and being and true and good exist subsequently to Not-other.

NICHOLAS: Since everything is said¹⁵ to be either one thing or the other—so that one thing appears as not-the-other—one seems very near to Not-other. Nevertheless, since one is nothing other than one, it is *other* than Not-other. Therefore, Not-other is simpler than is one, since one has from Not-other the fact that it is one, whereas the converse is not true. But certain theologians who accept the One in place of Not-other have regarded it as prior to contradiction—as we read in Plato's *Parmenides* and in Dionysius the Areopagite. Nevertheless, since one is *other* than not-one, it does not at all direct [us] unto the First-beginning-of-all, which cannot be *other* than any other thing or than nothing (and which, as you will see later, is likewise not the opposite of anything).

14 In the same way, consider being. In it Not-other seems to shine

forth clearly, since being does not seem to be *other* than any existing thing. Nevertheless, Not-other precedes it. The case is the same for the true (which also is not denied of any being) and for the good (in spite of its not being the case that anything is found to be deprived of the good). Hence, [the names of] all these things are taken as obvious names of God—even though they do not attain precision. Yet, they are not *properly* said to be subsequent to Not-other. For if they were subsequent to it, how would each of them be not other than what it is? Therefore, Not-other is seen to be before these (and other) things in such way that they are not subsequent to it but [exist] through it. Therefore, regarding these things which Not-other precedes, you were right in wondering whether they are subsequent to it and how this would be possible.

FERDINAND: If I understand you rightly, Not-other is seen before all things in such way that it cannot be absent from any of the things which are seen after it, even if these things are contradictories.

NICHOLAS: Indeed, this is my view about the truth of the matter.

15

CHAPTER 5

FERDINAND: I ask you, Father, to permit me to discourse on the things which I, having been thus led, behold in Not-other, so that in your own manner you may correct me if you detect that I am erring.

NICHOLAS: Speak forth, Ferdinand.

FERDINAND: When I see Not-other by itself before every other thing, I see it in such way that I behold in it all that can be seen. For no thing can possibly either be or be known outside of it. Even what is *other* than being and than being known cannot escape it. But I am not able even to imagine any being or understanding outside of Not-other. [This fact is true] to such an extent that if I tried to view nothing itself and ignorance itself apart from Not-other, I would try altogether in vain. For how is nothing nothing-visible except through Not-other, so that nothing is not other than nothing? The case is the same with regard to ignorance and all other things. For everything which exists exists insofar as it is not other [than itself]. And everything which is understood is understood insofar as it is understood to be not other [than itself]. And everything which is seen to be true is seen to be true insofar as it is discerned as not other [than true]. And, in sum, whatever is seen to be an other is seen to be an other insofar as it is not other [than it is]. Therefore, just as were Not-other removed there would not be anything which continued to exist or to

be known, so indeed all things exist and are known and are seen in
16 Not-other. For Not-other is the most adequate Constituting Ground (*ratio*), Standard, and Measure of the existence of all existing things, of the non-existence of all non-existing things, of the possibility of all possibilities, of the manner of existence of all things existing in any manner, of the motion of all moving things, of the rest of all non-moving things, of the life of all living things, of the understanding of whatever is understood, and so on for all other things of this kind. I see this to be necessary, in that I see that *Not-other* defines itself and, hence, all nameable things.

17 NICHOLAS: You have rightly directed your acute [mental] gaze toward God (who is signified through “Not-other”), so that in this Beginning, Cause, or Constituting Ground, which is neither other nor diverse, you have seen—to the extent presently granted you—all the things which are humanly visible. You are granted [this vision] to the extent that Not-other—i.e., the Constituting Ground of things—reveals itself, or makes itself visible, to your reason [*ratio*] or mind. But through “Not-other”—by means of the fact that it defines itself—[God] now has revealed [Himself] more clearly than before. You have been able to read in [my] many treatises in what way [God] has [previously] made Himself visible to me. But in this symbolism of the signification of “Not-other”—chiefly by way of the consideration that it defines itself—[God has] now [revealed Himself] more richly and more clearly. [He has revealed Himself] to such an extent that I can hope that He will some day reveal Himself to us without a symbolism.

FERDINAND: Whatever can be seen by us is enfolded in the foregoing statements. Nevertheless, so that we may be more keenly aroused, let us touch upon certain doubtful [points] in order that our already-trained vision may be sharpened by clearing up these [points].

NICHOLAS: It is agreeable that you do so.

18 FERDINAND: First of all, one who is desirous of knowledge asks where a rational consideration should be found [for maintaining] that the trine and one God is signified by “Not-other,” since Not-other precedes all number.

NICHOLAS: All things are seen from what has been said—seen on the basis of a single rational consideration. You have seen this to be [the consideration] that the Beginning, which is signified by “Not-other,” defines itself. Therefore, let us behold its unfolded definition: viz., that Not-other is not other than Not-other. If the same thing re-

peated three times is the definition of the First, as you recognize [it to be], then assuredly the First is triune—and for no other reason than that it defines itself. If it did not define itself, it would not be the First; yet, since it defines itself, it shows itself to be trine. Therefore, you see that out of the perfection there results a trinity which, nevertheless, (since you view it prior to other) you can neither number nor assert to be a number. For this trinity is not other than oneness, and [this] oneness is not other than trinity. For the trinity and the oneness are not other than the simple Beginning which is signified by “Not-other.”

FERDINAND: I see perfectly well that the necessity of the perfection of the First—viz., that it defines itself—demands that it be triune before other and before number. For those things which presuppose the First do not confer any perfection on it. But since you have elsewhere and often—especially in *Learned Ignorance*—attempted in some way to explicate this divine richness in other terms, it will suffice if you now add a few [points] to these others.

- 19 NICHOLAS: The mystery of the Trinity—a mystery which is received by faith and by the gift of God—by far exceeds and precedes all sensing. Nevertheless, by the means by which we investigate God in the present life, this mystery cannot be elucidated in any other way or any more precisely than you have just heard. Now, those who name the Trinity *Father* and *Son* and *Holy Spirit* approach [it] less precisely; nevertheless, they use these names suitably because of the conformity to Scripture. But those who call the Trinity *Oneness*, *Equality*, and *Union* would approach more closely [to it] if these terms were found to be inserted in Scripture.¹⁶ For these are [the terms] in which Not-other shines forth clearly. For in *oneness*, which indicates indistinction from itself and distinction from another, assuredly Not-other is discerned. And, likewise, in *equality* and in *union* Not-other manifests itself to one who is attentive.

Still more simply, the terms “this,” “it,” and “the same” imitate “Not-other” quite clearly and precisely, although they are less in use.¹⁷

So then, it is evident that in [the expression] “Not-other and Not-other and Not-other”—although [this expression] is not at all in use—the triune Beginning is revealed most clearly, though it is beyond all our apprehension and capability. For when the First Beginning—signified through “Not-other”—defines itself: in this movement of definition Not-other originates from Not-other; and from Not-other and the Not-other which has originated, the definition concludes in Not-other. One who contemplates these matters will behold

them more clearly than can be expressed.

20

CHAPTER 6

FERDINAND: Let these [points] suffice regarding this [topic]. But proceed now to show Not-other in other.

NICHOLAS: Not-other is not other; nor is it *other* than other; nor is it other in an other. [These points are true] for no other reason than that [Not-other is] Not-other, which cannot in any way be an other—as if something were lacking to it, as to an other. Because other is *other* than something, it lacks that than which it is *other*. But because Not-other is not *other* than anything, it does not lack anything, nor can anything exist outside of it. Hence, without Not-other no thing can be spoken of or thought of, because it would not be spoken of or thought of through that without which, since it precedes all things, no thing can exist or be known. Accordingly, in itself Not-other is seen antecedently and as absolutely no other than itself; and in an other it is seen as not other than this other. For example, I might say that God is none of the visible things, since He is their cause and creator. And I might say that in the sky He is not other than the sky.¹⁸ For how would the sky be not other than the sky if in it Not-other were other than sky? Now, since the sky is *other* than not-sky, it is an other. But God, who is Not-other, is not the sky, which is an other; nonetheless, in the sky God is not an other; nor is He *other* than sky. (Similarly, light is not color, even though in color light is not an other and even though light is not *other* than color.)

21

You ought to observe that the reason why all the things which can be spoken of or thought of are not the First (which is signified through “Not-other”) is that all these things are *other* than their respective opposites. But because God is not *other* than [any] other, He is Not-other, although Not-other and other seem to be opposed. But other is not opposed to that from which it has the fact that it is other, as I said.¹⁹ You see now how it is that the theologians rightly affirmed that in all things God is all things, even though [He is] none of these things.

FERDINAND: There is no one who, if he applies his mind, fails to recognize these [points] with you. Hence, it is evident to anyone that God, though unnameable, names all things; though infinite, defines all things; though limitless, delimits all things; and likewise for everything else.

22

NICHOLAS: Correct. For since if Not-other ceased existing, then

necessarily all existing and non-existing things would cease, we see clearly how it is that in Not-other all things are Not-other antecedently [to being themselves] and how it is that in all things Not-other is all things. Therefore, when I behold Not-other in an other and behold the other antecedently in Not-other as Not-other, I see how it is that through Not-other, and without any other, all things are that which they are. For Not-other creates the sky not from an other but through the sky which in Not-other is Not-other. (By comparison, we might speak of Not-other as intellectual spirit—or as intellectual light—and might consider that, in the intellect, it is the Constituting Ground [*ratio*] of all things [intellectual].) For the Constituting Ground (*ratio*)²⁰ of the sky's being the sky and not any other thing is antecedently in Not-other. Through this Constituting Ground [the sky] is constituted as the sky; and in the sky this Constituting Ground is sky. Therefore, it is not the case that the perceptible sky (1) is from an other that which it is or (2) is anything *other* than the sky. Rather, [that which the sky is] it is from Not-other—i.e., from something which you see before [any] name, because it is all things in all names and yet is none of all [these names]. For the same reason that I would call this Constituting Ground sky²¹ I would call it earth, and water, and so on in like manner regarding each thing. And if I see that the Constituting Ground of the sky ought not to be named sky—as the cause does not have the name of the caused—so, for the same reason, I see that Not-other is not nameable by any name. Therefore, I view the Unnameable not as deprived of [every] name but as prior to [every] name.

23

CHAPTER 7

FERDINAND: I understand; and I also discern that it is true. For if the cause were to cease, the effect would cease. And so, if Not-other ceased, everything other and everything nameable would cease. Hence, even nothing itself, since it is named nothing, would cease. Make this clear to me, I ask, so that I may understand it.

NICHOLAS: It is certain that if coldness were to cease, then ice (which is already seen extensively here in Rome) [would] also [cease]. But it is not the case that for this reason water, which is prior to ice, would cease. However, if the being ceased, then so too would the ice and the water, so that they would not actually exist. Nevertheless, the matter, or the possibility-of-being-water,²² would not cease. This possibility-of-being-water can be said to be one possibility. Now, if the

one ceased, then the ice, the water, and the possibility of being water would cease. Yet, not every intelligible-thing-which-Omnipotence-can-necessitate-with-respect-to-the-possibility-of-being-water would cease. For example, intelligible nothing, or chaos, would not cease. To be sure, nothing, or chaos, is more distant from water than is the possibility-of-being-water. Although this possibility is very remote and very disordered, it must obey Omnipotence. But it is not the case that by virtue of the cessation of the one, the strength of Omnipotence with respect to chaos would cease. However, if Not-other ceased, all the things it precedes would immediately cease. And so, not only would the actuality and the possibility of the beings which Not-other precedes cease, but so also would the not-being and the nothing of these beings.²³

24 FERDINAND: You have dealt successfully with my puzzlement. I now see that nothing, which is not other than nothing, has Not-other as prior to itself. It is more distant from Not-other than are actual being and possible being. For the mind sees how utterly disordered is the chaos which, to be sure, Infinite Power (which is Not-other) can constrain to be ordered.

NICHOLAS: You said that Not-other is actually infinite power. What is your reason for this view?

FERDINAND: I see that the power which is unified and less-other is the stronger. Hence, the power which in every respect is Not-other will be infinite.

NICHOLAS: You speak very rightly and very reasonably—very reasonably, indeed. For just as perceptual seeing—no matter how acute—cannot exist without any sensation or perceptual stimulus,²⁴ so also mental [seeing] does not exist without any reasoning or rational stimulus. Although I see that you have a correct viewpoint, I wish to know whether the mind so beholds Not-other in all things that Not-other cannot fail to be seen.

25 FERDINAND: I return to the *Beginning*, which defines itself and all things that can be spoken of. And I see how it is that seeing is not other than not-seeing; and I see that I behold Not-other both with respect to seeing and with respect to not-seeing. Therefore, if without Not-other the mind cannot either see or not see, then Not-other cannot fail to be seen—just as what is known through knowledge and through ignorance cannot fail to be known.

Not-other is seen in an other because when the other is seen, both

other and Not-other are seen.

NICHOLAS: Your statement is correct. But how is it that you see other unless you see it either in an other or in Not-other?

- 26 FERDINAND: Since the positing of Not-other is the positing of all things and its removal is the removal of all things, other neither exists nor is seen apart from Not-other.

NICHOLAS: If it is in Not-other that you see other, surely you do not see it *there* to be other but [you see it to be] Not-other, since it is impossible for other to be in Not-other.

FERDINAND: The reason I say that I see other in Not-other is that other cannot be seen apart from Not-other. But if you should ask me what other in Not-other is, I would say that it is Not-other.

NICHOLAS: Correct.

27

CHAPTER 8

FERDINAND: It is expedient to say something about quiddity.

NICHOLAS: I shall take up [this topic]. You do not doubt, I believe, that the quiddity of Not-other is Not-other. And so, the quiddity of God, or of Not-other, is not *other* than any quiddity; rather, in every other quiddity Not-other is no other quiddity. Therefore, [accidents, which are] *other* than the quiddity of the other, happen to the other because it is other. (If the other were without anything other, it would be Not-other.) Therefore, these accidents which follow upon the quiddity of the other are elucidations of the quiddity of the other—elucidations which sink into the shadow of nothing. Hence, the quiddity which is Not-other is the Quiddity of the quiddity of the other; the quiddity of the other is the shining forth of the First Quiddity. And the accidents are what happen to the quiddity; in them the quiddity to which they happen, shines forth.

- 28 Since the quiddity which I mentally view before quantity²⁵ cannot be imagined as non-quantitative, it admits (in imagination) of various images which are not able to be devoid of some measure of quantity. And although quantity does not belong to the essence of the quiddity which the mind contemplates above imagination, and although that quiddity-which-the-mind-sees is not *other* than the quiddity-which-imagination-imagines, nevertheless quantity follows upon the image's quiddity in such way that in the absence of quantity there can be no image.

- 29 Thus, I am talking about the magnitude which is mentally viewed

beyond imagination and before imagined quantity. However, quantity is seen in the imagination. But the freer the imagination-of-quantity is from coarse and shadowy quantity and the subtler and simpler it is, the more simply and certainly there shines forth in the imagination the quiddity of magnitude and the truer is the image [of quantity]. For quantity is not something necessary to the quiddity of magnitude, as if magnitude were constituted by quantity; for Maximal Simplicity, or Maximal Indivisibility, is great without quantity. But if magnitude is to be imagined or is to appear imaginatively, then quantity is immediately necessary; for quantity is that without which this [imagining] is not possible. Therefore, quantity is the shining-forth-of-magnitude, imaginatively, in the image of quantity.

30 But magnitude shines forth more certainly in the understanding. For we speak of the understanding as great, and we speak of knowledge as great. But in the understanding magnitude shines forth intellectually—i.e., abstractly and absolutely, before corporeal quantity. Yet, it is seen most truly above all understanding—i.e., above and before every cognitive mode. And so, it is comprehended incomprehensibly and is known unknowably, even as it is seen invisibly. Since this knowledge is above human knowledge, it is descried only negatively in the things which are known to humans. We do not doubt that imaginable magnitude is not other than imaginable and, likewise, that intelligible [magnitude] is not other than intelligible. And so, we behold the magnitude which in imaginable [magnitude] is imaginable and in intelligible [magnitude] is intelligible; [we do] not [behold] the Magnitude which is Not-other and is before other and in whose absence not even intelligible [magnitude] would be present. For imaginable magnitude presupposes a magnitude which is prior to the contraction [of magnitude] in the imagination; and intelligible [magnitude presupposes] a Magnitude which is prior to the contraction [of magnitude] in the understanding. This presupposed Magnitude shines forth in one way or another in a mirror and a symbolism,²⁶ so that that which is before *other* and *mode* and before everything effable and knowable is known. This is the kind of Magnitude which belongs to God, whose Magnitude is without end—i.e., a Magnitude which is comprehended as knowable-by-no-bounds.

31 Just as has been stated about the quiddity of magnitude, so in general the Quiddity which is Not-other defines itself and all the respective quiddities of things. Therefore, just as Not-other is not multiple,

since it is prior to number, so also the Quiddity which is Not-other [is not multiple], even though in other things and in other modes it is these others.

FERDINAND: You have opened my eyes, so that I begin to see what the truth about quiddity is. And through the symbolism of the quiddity-of-magnitude you have led me to a very pleasing sight.

NICHOLAS: Your mind now sees accurately and clearly (1) that Not-other is presupposed and known in every cognition and (2) that what is known is not *other* than Not-other but is Not-other-qua-unknown, which shines forth knowably in what is known. (By comparison, in the visible colors of the rainbow, the clarity of perceptibly invisible sunlight shines forth visibly in various ways in various clouds.)

32

CHAPTER 9

FERDINAND: Say something about the universe, I ask, in order that as I follow you, I may better come upon a vision of God.

NICHOLAS: I shall do so. When with my bodily eyes I see the sky and the earth and the objects which are in the sky and on the earth, and when in order to imagine the universe I gather together what I have seen, I behold intellectually each object of the universe in its own place and in suitable order and in tranquillity; and I contemplate the beautiful world and everything produced with reason [*ratio*]. And I find that reason shines forth in all things—as much in (1) things which merely exist as in (2) things which both exist and live and in (3) things which exist, live, and understand. In the case of the first [-mentioned] things [it shines forth] dimly; in the case of the second things, more brightly and clearly; but in the case of the third things, most clearly; and in each of these [three] different modes [reason shines forth] in different ways in different things. Next, I turn myself toward the Constituting Ground [*ratio*] of things—a Ground which precedes the world and through which the world is constituted, as I recognize; and I find this Ground to be incomprehensible. I do not doubt that all knowledge presupposes the Constituting Ground of the world, through which all things have been reasonably created, and that this Ground shines forth in all created things; for it is not the case that anything is created unreasonably. Nevertheless, I do not at all comprehend this Constituting Ground. For were I to comprehend it, surely I would know why the world is the way it is and not otherwise, why the sun is the sun, the moon the moon, the earth the earth, why any given thing is what it is and not another or greater or lesser. Indeed, if I once knew

all of this, I would no longer be a creature and a part of the universe, since my reason would be the Creative Principle (*ars creativa*) of the universe and the creator of itself. Therefore, I comprehend Not-other when I see that the Constituting Ground of the universe is not comprehensible since it precedes everything comprehensible. Hence, I see this incomprehensible Ground because it shines forth comprehensibly in comprehensible things.

FERDINAND: That which precedes being is difficult to comprehend.

- 33 NICHOLAS: The form bestows being and being-known. And so, what is not formed (whether because it precedes or succeeds [form]) is not comprehended—e.g., God, matter (*hyle*), nothing, and the like. When we attain to these things by mental vision, we attain to them either beyond or short of comprehension. But since we are unable to communicate the vision apart from words, we cannot without recourse to the verb “to be” discourse about what is not, because otherwise those who hear us would not understand. Hence, just as these mental visions are beyond comprehension, so too they are beyond expression. Moreover, since the locutions about them are devoid of precision, they are improper—as when we say “matter is matter,” “*hyle* is *hyle*,” “nothing is nothing,” and so on. Therefore, it is necessary to speculate. For example, when someone sees snow through a red glass, he sees the snow and attributes the appearance of redness not to the snow but to the glass. The mind does something similar when it views the unformed through a form.²⁷

- 34 FERDINAND: But how will I see to be true what the theologians say?: viz., that all things are created by the will of God.

NICHOLAS: The will of God is Not-other, for [the will of God] determines willing. A will is rational and orderly in proportion to its perfection. Therefore, the will which is seen to be Not-other and to be prior to any other is not *other* than reason or wisdom or any other nameable thing. Hence, if you see that the will is Not-other, you see that it is reason, wisdom, and order none of which it is *other* than. And so, you see (1) that all things are determined, caused, ordered, established, stabilized, and conserved by this will and (2) that [this] will, in which there is wisdom and power, shines forth in the universe, just as Trajan’s [will shines forth] in his column. For when Trajan wanted to show his glory (which could only be manifested in a perceptible symbol by perceptible things) to his posterity, to whom it was im-

possible to exhibit the [actual] presence of his glory, he did this by means of a column. This column is called Trajan's column because by his will the column is what it is and because the column is not *other* than his will, even though it is not at all his will. Rather, whatever the column is, this it has from his will, which defines and delimits the column. Now, wisdom and order are discerned in the will; the wisdom shines forth in the carvings of warfare, completed with skill. And Trajan's power shines forth in the preciousness of the work, which could not have been completed by someone powerless.

35 By means of the foregoing symbolism you will be helped to see that in order to show His glory the King of kings, who is signified by "Not-other," created by His own will (in which is wisdom and power) the universe and each part of it. His will shines forth in all things in a threefold way: viz., through being, through understanding, and through desire—as we experience in our soul. For in our soul His will shines forth (1) as the beginning-of-being, from which the soul has being, and (2) as the beginning-of-knowing, from which the soul has knowing, and (3) as the beginning-of-desiring, from which the soul has willing. And by speculating upon its own beginning, which is triune in the foregoing respects, the soul is illumined for the glory of God.

FERDINAND: I consider these matters to be exactly so; and I see that the Creative Will, which is Not-other, is desired by all things and is called Goodness. For what do all existing things desire? Nothing other than to be. What [do all] living things [desire]? Nothing other than to live. What [do all] intelligent things [desire]? Nothing other than to understand. Therefore, each thing desires that which is not *other* than itself. But since Not-other is not other than anything, all things supremely desire it as the beginning of being, the conserving means, and the rest-giving terminal goal.

NICHOLAS: You are striving aright toward Not-other, in which all things shine forth.

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CHAPTER 10

FERDINAND: Certain of the theologians maintained that the creation is none other than a participation in God.²⁸ I would very much like to hear you [speak] about this matter.

NICHOLAS: You see, first of all, that Not-other is unnameable; for no name attains to Not-other, since it precedes all things. Nevertheless, every name is-what-it-is by participation in Not-other; there-

fore, Not-other is named the Unnameable. Thus, Not-other], which cannot be participated in, is participated in by all things.²⁹ Indeed, there are things which participate in Not-other dimly, because [they participate] disorderedly and generally; there are things which [participate] in a more special way; and there are things which participate in a most special way. By comparison, some members [of the body] participate in the life of the soul dimly, others more clearly, and others in a most special way; likewise, some powers of the soul participate more clearly, and others more dimly, in intelligence. So too, those creatures which are less *other* than others—e.g., pure intelligences—participate the more in Not-other. But those which are more *other* than others—e.g., corporeal creatures, which cannot occupy one and the same place—participate less in the nature of that which is not *other* than anything.

37 FERDINAND: I see that what you have said holds true. But still, I ask, do not be hesitant to say something about how we see it to be true that the essences of things are indestructible.

NICHOLAS: First, you do not doubt that Not-other is indestructible. For if it were destroyed, it would become other. But as soon as other is posited, Not-other is posited. Hence, Not-other is not destructible. Next, it is certain that *Not-other* defines itself and all [other] things. Therefore, all the essences of things are [essences] only of Not-other. Accordingly, given the fact that Not-other is in them, how could these essences be destroyed while Not-other continued to exist? For just as Not-other precedes the essences and everything nameable, so the essences precede the mutability and fluxibility which is rooted in alterable matter. Indeed, Not-other is not an essence; but because in the essences it is essence, it is called the Essence of essences. The Apostle said: “The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal.”³⁰ For material things are those which are perceived by any one of the senses; and, in accordance with the nature of matter, they are fluxible and unstable. However, things which are not seen perceptibly but which, nonetheless, exist are not seen to exist temporally; rather, they are eternal. When [you see] an essence in something other—as [when] you see humanity in Socrates—you see it as other in this other; and so for this reason [you see the essence] to be destructible *per accidens* in Socrates, who is destructible. But if you see the essence as free from other and in Not-other, surely in accordance with the nature of that in which you see it [viz., in Not-other], you see it to be indestructible.³¹

38 FERDINAND: You seem to mean the essence (or Idea or species), which Not-other precedes and other succeeds.

NICHOLAS: This is the way Plato viewed the exemplars-of-things, which are prior to things but posterior to God. For the form (*ratio*) of a thing precedes the thing, since the thing is made in accordance with the form. But the variety of things bespeaks a variety of forms, which must exist posterior to the fount from which they emanate, according to Plato. But because Not-other is prior to things (since it is the most adequate reason (*causa*) why each thing is what it is) but is not multiple, it is the Constituting-Ground-of-things, which precedes other and number and plurality but which, though innumerable, is numbered in accordance with the things which participate in it.

39 FERDINAND: You seem to mean that the essences of things are not plural but are one essence, which you call the Constituting Ground.³²

NICHOLAS: You know that “one,” “essence,” “Idea,” “form,” “exemplar,” and “species” are not applicable to Not-other. Therefore, when I look at things, beholding their essences: since things exist in accordance with their essences, then when I behold these essences through the understanding prior to [the things’ existence], I maintain that they are different from one another. But when I view them above the understanding and prior to other, I do not see different essences but see no other than the simple Constituting Ground of the essences that I was contemplating in these things. And I call this Ground *Not-other* or the *Essence of essences*, since it is whatever is observed in all the essences.

40 FERDINAND: You claim, then, that there is an Essence of an essence. Aristotle did not concede this [point] lest there be a continuation unto infinity and we never come to a first term and all knowledge perish.

NICHOLAS: Aristotle rightly said that with respect to the mind’s conceiving of quantity there cannot be a continuation unto infinity, and hence he rules out this infinity. But Aristotle did not refute an infinity which is such that it is prior to quantity and is prior to everything other and is all in all. Rather, he traced all things back to it—as being things from the First Mover, which he found to be of infinite power. He regarded all things as participating in this power—to which infinity I give the name “Not-other.” Hence- Not-other is the Form of forms

(or the Form of form), the Species of species, the Boundary of boundary, and likewise for all things. There is no further progression unto infinity, since we have already reached an Infinity which defines all things.

41

CHAPTER 11

FERDINAND: In order that I may better discern what you mean, would you like to lead me, Excellent Father, by way of a symbolism, toward understanding what has been said?

NICHOLAS: Gladly. You see this carbuncle stone, which the peasants call a ruby. Do you see that at this third hour of the night—at a very dark time and in a very dark place—a candle is not needed because there is light in the stone? When this light wants to manifest itself, it does so by means of the stone. For in itself the light would be invisible to the sense [of sight]; for it would not be present to the sense and so would not at all be sensed, because the sense perceives only what is presented to it. Therefore, the light which glows in the stone conveys to the light which is in the eye what is visible regarding the stone.³³ I am aware that, among carbuncles, the one glows more, the other less. Now, *that* one is the more perfect which is the more glowing and is the larger. But the one which glows the less is the less valuable. Hence, I recognize that the intensity of the glow is the measure of the stone's preciousness. [The measure is] not the [stone's] physical size—unless the intensity of the glow is greater in accordance with the physical size. Therefore, I see that physical size does not belong to the essence of the carbuncle, since a carbuncle may be a small stone as well as a large one. Hence, I see the substance of a carbuncle prior to the largeness or the smallness of the physical object. The same thing holds true regarding the stone's color, its shape, and its other accidents. Thus, none of all the things which my sight, my touch, and my imagination attain regarding the carbuncle are its essence. Instead, they are other things which happen to the essence. In these other things the essence shines forth, so that it is perceptible; for without these it cannot be perceptible.

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Therefore, the substance, which precedes accident, has nothing from the accidents. But the accidents have everything from the substance, since they are its accidents—i.e., the shadow, or image, of its substantial light. Hence, the substantial light of the carbuncle shows itself more clearly—as in a closer likeness—in the glow of brighter

splendor. But the color of a carbuncle, i.e., of a ruby (viz., the color red), is only an endpoint of the substantial light. It is not the substance but a likeness of the substance, for it is exterior and perceptible. Therefore, the substantial light, which precedes color and every accident that can be apprehended by the senses and the imagination, is more internal to and more intrinsic to the carbuncle and is invisible to the senses. However, this light is discerned by the intellect, which distinguishes it antecedently. Surely, the intellect sees that the substance of the carbuncle is not other than the substance of the carbuncle. And so, it sees that the substance is *other* than every substance of what is not a carbuncle. [The intellect] witnesses this fact in different operations which follow from the power of the carbuncle's substance but not from [the power] of any other thing's [substance]. Therefore, because [the intellect] in this way sees that the substantial, invisible light of a carbuncle is one thing, the substantial, invisible substance of a magnet another thing, that of the sun another thing, that of a lion another, and so on for all things, it sees that the substantial light is distinct in all visible things. And [it sees] the intelligible prior to all that is perceptible; for the substance, which is seen prior to the accident, is seen only by the intellect, which sees only the intelligible.

- 43 If someone next mentally takes a closer look at the universe and its individual parts, he will see the following: The substance of a carbuncle is not *other* than its quantity, its color, its hardness, etc., since they are accidents of it and since in them it is whatever they are. (Nonetheless, the substance is neither the quantity nor the quality nor any of the accidents. But in the accidents [the substance is] these things which differ from one another since the quantity is one accident, the quality another, and likewise for all the other [accidents].) By comparison, I see it to be necessary that since the substance of a carbuncle is one thing, the substance of a magnet another thing, the substance of a man another thing, the substance of the sun another thing, [etc.], Not-other necessarily precedes all these different substances because it is not *other* than all existing things but is all in all—i.e., [it is] everything which exists in anything. Similarly, John the Evangelist states³⁴ that God is light prior to an other, viz., darkness; for he states that God is a light in which there is no darkness. Therefore, if you call that-which-is-Not-other *light*, then *qua* what is other, creatures will be darkness. Thus, the mind discerns—beyond intelligible, substantial light—Not-other as the Beginning of the light of individual things, because [Not-other] is not

other than [these] individual substances.

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CHAPTER 12

FERDINAND: It seems to me that I understand you. Nevertheless, so that I may test [my understanding], answer the following: you admit, do you not, that this small carbuncle is *other* than that larger one?

NICHOLAS: Why shouldn't I admit it?

FERDINAND: Well, since both are carbuncles, assuredly the substance of the one is not seen to be *other* than the substance of the other. For what reason, then, are the carbuncles *other* than each other?

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NICHOLAS: You are looking at the absolute substance, which in the different things substantified by it cannot be other. Rather, in order for the absolute substance to be made perceptible substance, it requires substantifiable matter, without which there cannot be substantification. For how could there be substantification if there were no possibility of existing perceptibly?³⁵ Therefore, since this carbuncle is *other* than that one, it is necessary that this difference be due to the possibility-of-being, which in the one carbuncle is other than in the other carbuncle. Therefore, since perceptible matter is necessary for perceptible substance, substantial matter will be present in perceptible things. Therefore, the two carbuncles differ substantially in accordance with this substantial matter, which in the one carbuncle is *other* [than] in the other carbuncle. But in accordance with the intelligible substance, which is understood to be the form-of-being for the possible and perceptible substance, the two carbuncles are not distinct.

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FERDINAND: Therefore, the carbuncular—i.e., the ruby-esque—substance will not be *other* than any substance of any carbuncle. This substance's ultimate accidents—viz., that it is perceptible and that it is material—follow from it.

NICHOLAS: You understand very well. For in the [two] different carbuncles there is a substance which is not *other* than any substance of any carbuncle. And, yet, it is not the substance of either carbuncle. The reason for this fact is the diversity both in the substantial possibility of the carbuncles and in the ensuing accidents. Therefore, first substance, which the intellect sees as abstract, is the specific substance or the specific form. But the other [substance], which is called the perceptible [substance], is specified through first [substance] and through specifiable matter.

47 FERDINAND: These points are very clear. But isn't it your view that this is how Not-other is related to the different intelligible substances?³⁶

NICHOLAS: Yes, precisely.

FERDINAND: Then, the one universe will not be like this one carbuncle.

NICHOLAS: Why is that?

FERDINAND: Because the substance of the universe would not be *other* than the substance of any part of the universe. (For example, the substance of the universe would not be *other* than the substance of a carbuncle or of a man—just as the substance of a man is not [*other*] than the substance of the man's hand, although it is not the hand, which is another substance.)

NICHOLAS: What of it?

FERDINAND: This would surely be absurd! For the substance of the universe would be Not-other; and so, the universe would be Not-other. But I see that this is impossible, since I see Not-other prior to the universe and prior to other. And I see that, assuredly, the universe is an other.

NICHOLAS: You neither err nor deviate, Ferdinand. Since all things are ordered toward God, or Not-other, and are not at all ordered toward other, which is subsequent to God, the universe must not be considered as the goal of all things; for were it the goal of all things, it would be God. But since all things are ordered toward their Beginning (for through their order all things show themselves to be from God), they are ordered toward Him who is the Order of the order in all things. For He orders all things, so that Not-other, or the Order of order, shines forth the more perfectly in the perfection of the things ordered toward God.

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CHAPTER 13

FERDINAND: To bring together the things which I have now understood: The intellect discerns in the many carbuncles something which causes them to be of the same species. Although this [something] is present in all these [carbuncles], constituting them a species, nevertheless [the intellect] sees this thing antecedently to the plurality of the carbuncles—[sees it] as a likeness of Not-other. For it causes every carbuncle to be a carbuncle; and it is the internal, substantial principle (*principium*) of every carbuncle. If this principle is removed, the carbuncle will not remain. Therefore, this specific princi-

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ple specifies the carbuncle's specifiable possibility-of-being and bestows actual being upon this possibility. For by its own actuality it causes the carbuncle's possible being to be actually a carbuncle; for we experience the indistinct possibility-of-being—experience it as it is determined and specified by the actuality of the species. And that which at first you intellectually beheld as abstract you now behold in a given carbuncle as the actuality of possibility, since it is actually a carbuncle.

The case is similar to someone who looks at ice and considers it to have first been a flowing rivulet which he now sees as solid and rigid ice. As he investigates the cause, he will discover that the coldness which he beholds intellectually as something abstract is a species of being—a species which hardens and contracts the freezable matter of all the rivulets into solid and rigid ice. Thus, each rivulet—as a result of the presence of its cause, which is actual—will actually be ice as long as it is kept, by its cause, from flowing. And although coldness is not found as separate from cold things, nevertheless the intellect beholds it prior to the cold things as their cause. In the cold things [the intellect] discerns what-is-able-to-become-cold actually made cold by coldness. [The intellect discerns] that from this cause there has arisen ice or snow or frost or hail or other things of this kind in accordance with the variety of things which can become cold.

But since matter which can become cold can also become hot, coldness—which in itself is indestructible—falls into destruction *per accidens* on account of matter (without which it is not at all actually found to be) when this matter is altered by heat, since it is capable of receiving heat. (You yourself seem to me to have been saying these things.)

- 50** I also understand how it is that accidents are consequentially related to specific substances. Just as there are some [accidents] which accompany one [piece of] ice as well as another, so there are other [accidents] which [accompany] snow, frost, hail, crystal, and any other “stone.” On the basis of these open and obvious works of nature I also sufficiently recognize that the more impenetrable matters are exactly as you yourself have briefly mentioned: viz., (1) that specific and substantial forms are seen by the intellect as abstract and (2) that in specified and substantified things they are apprehended in the aforesaid way. Now, from perceptible substances I raise myself up to intelligible [substances] by means of a likeness.

- 51 NICHOLAS: I see that you have lucidly explicated my concept by means of a most suitable example from nature; and I rejoice, for by this manner of consideration you will understand all [my points]. For instance, because of the triumph of the coldness-which-congeals, over the fluxibility of the water-which-is-congealed, a crystal (e.g., ice) is not dissolved by a small amount of heat. This fact shows plainly that where a form makes actual the entire fluxibility of matter (as in the case of the heavens) the destruction of that material does not occur. Accordingly, it is evident that destruction, which occurs in perceptible things, is impossible for intelligible things—since they are free of matter, which is suited to being changed. Now, in the case of someone who understands [heat], heat does not modify his understanding so that it becomes hot—as heat does do in the case of someone who perceives, when it modifies his sense. Therefore, it is evident that the intellect is neither material nor changeable. For perceptible things—for which change is a proper characteristic—are in the intellect intelligibly, not perceptibly. And when you consider keenly and carefully that the intellect is prior to the senses and so is not within reach of any of the senses, you will find that whatever is in the senses is antecedently in the intellect. (I say “antecedently”—that is, imperceptibly.) Just as coldness is in the intellect and cold is in the sense, [so] the coldness in the intellect is antecedent to the perceptible cold. For coldness is not perceived but is understood, since [it is] cold [that] is perceived. [Moreover,] just as we perceive not hotness but what is hot, so in the realm of perceptible things we experience not water but what is watery, not fire but what is fiery.³⁷ This [point] must be asserted in similar fashion regarding all composite things, since the simple, which is of the realm of intelligible things, precedes every such thing [i.e., every composite thing] of the perceptible world. And Not-other, which is the Simplicity of simple intelligibles, precedes the different intelligible things. Hence, Not-other is not at all understood in itself; but in the simple it is understood simply and in the composite, compositely. The simple and the composite are, so to speak, its *non aliata*—i.e., things than which it is not *other*. Therefore, regarding the things found in the realm of perceptible objects: I see that whichever-of-them-we-perceive is preceded by its simple, which is understood. And it is no less true that the Beginning, which we call Not-other, precedes all that is found in the realm of intelligible things. Indeed, the Cause which determines coldness to be no other than coldness precedes intelligible coldness. Therefore, just as the intellect (without any change in
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itself and without becoming cold) understands by means of intelligible coldness all things which are perceptibly cold, so Not-other (without any change or otherness of its own) causes through itself (i.e., through Not-other) all things existing intelligibly to be no other than what they are. And just as perceptible cold is not intelligible coldness (even though intelligible coldness is not at all *other* than perceptible cold), so intelligible coldness is not the First Beginning (even though the First Beginning, which is Not-other, is not *other* than intelligible coldness).

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CHAPTER 14

FERDINAND: I see readily and most clearly that these [matters] are as you say. And I ascertain that in intelligible things Not-other clearly shines forth as the Beginning. For although intelligible things are not perceptible things, nevertheless they are not *other* than perceptible things. For example, coldness is not *other* than cold, as you stated; for when coldness is removed, there will neither be, nor be understood to be, cold. This is the way in which the intellect is related to the sense. Likewise, I see that the reason every cause produces something similar [to itself] is that it has from Not-other whatever it is. Therefore, heat endeavors to cause-to-be-hot, and coldness endeavors to cause-to-be-cold, and likewise for all [other] things.

But let these statements now suffice. I ask that in accordance with your promises at the beginning³⁸ you introduce me, very briefly, to that great theologian Dionysius and to the others.

54

NICHOLAS: I will comply with your request and will be as brief as possible. Dionysius, the greatest of the theologians, assumes the following: that it is impossible for a human being to ascend unto an understanding of spiritual matters except by the guidance of perceptible forms, so that, for example, he regards visible beauty as an image of invisible beauty. Hence, Dionysius maintains that perceptible things are likenesses or images of intelligible things. However, he asserts that God, as the Beginning, precedes all intelligible things; and he purports to know that God is not among any of the things which can be either known or conceived. Hence, he believes that the only thing which can be known about God (whom he affirms to be the *being* of all things) is that He precedes all understanding.³⁹

FERDINAND: Cite his words—unless [to do so] is burdensome to you.

NICHOLAS: Different [individuals] have translated his words into Latin in different ways.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, I shall append in succession—from the translation of Brother Ambrose,⁴¹ general of the Camaldolese and very recent translator [of Dionysius]—some [quotations] which will be seen to serve my purpose.

55 From Chapter 1 of *The Celestial Hierarchy*: “It is impossible for a human being to ascend unto an understanding of spiritual [matters] unless he is led by forms and likenesses of perceptible things, so that, for example, he regards visible beauty as an image of invisible beauty.”⁴²

From Chapter 2: “Since in itself the simple substance of divine things is unknown to us and escapes our understanding . . .”⁴³

From the same [chapter]: “When we say that this [Substance] is not any of the things which exist, we surely speak the truth—even though we do not at all know its super-substantial, incomprehensible, and ineffable measure, since this [Substance] is undefined.”⁴⁴

In Chapter 4 of *The Celestial Hierarchy*: “Therefore, all existing things are governed by virtue of the providence which flows from the Supreme Deity, who is the Author of all things. Assuredly, none of these things would exist unless they participated in the Beginning, and Substance, of things. And so, all inanimate things receive from this Beginning that which they are. Indeed, this Divinity, which transcends the measure of every being, is the being of all things.”⁴⁵

In the same chapter: “Whatever the mystery of God ultimately is, no one ever has seen it or ever will see it.”⁴⁶

In Chapter 13 of the same work: “Therefore, from the things which he discerned, the theologian was admonished that with respect to all substantial excellence God is incomparably loftier than all visible and invisible powers.”⁴⁷

56 In Chapter 1 of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: “To speak truly and properly: what is desired by all those who display the image [*species*] of the One is one thing. But they do not participate in one manner in that which is one and the same; rather, [they participate in such way] that the divine and most equal scales distribute a destiny to each according to his merit.”⁴⁸

In the same chapter: “The Beginning is the Fount of life, the Essence of goodness, the singular Cause of all things, the most blessed Trinity. From this sole Cause-of-goodness all existing things have received the fact of their existing and faring well. Hence, the will that

is possessed by the Divine Beatitude—[a Beatitude] which is trine and one, which transcends all things, and in which, alone, being is truly present (in a manner unknown to us but clearly known and manifest to itself)—is [a will for] the rational well-being of every human and celestial substance.”⁴⁹

- 57** In Chapter 1 of *The Divine Names*: “Those who are carnal cannot perceive and inspect spiritual things; those who cling to images and figures do not aspire unto simple things and things devoid of figures; and those who are formed according to corporeal lines do not at all attain unto the formlessness of incorporeal things—a formlessness which is not susceptible to touch or to figures. Similarly, on this same basis of truth, super-substantial Infinity excels all substances; Oneness, which is loftier than the senses, excels all the senses; the One, which is higher than mind, is inconceivable for every mind; and the Good, which excels [every] word, is not effable in any words.”⁵⁰

In the same [chapter]: “in sacred Scripture this [Deity] teaches about itself that it is the Cause, the Beginning, the Substance, and the Life of all things.”⁵¹

- 58** In the same [chapter]: “You will find that all—I should have said nearly all—the praise of the theologians forms divine names for exhibiting and praising the beneficent progressions of the Divinity. Accordingly, in nearly all of the sacred books we find that the Divinity is sacredly spoken of as singular, and one, on account of the simplicity and the oneness of that excellent Indivisibility through which, as a unifying power, we mount up unto the One; and after our distinct differences have been heaped together in a supra-mundane way, we are collected into the Divine Oneness, into a union which imitates God”⁵²

- 59** In the same [chapter]: “In this [Supreme Ray] all the limits of all the sciences more than ineffably preexist; and we cannot understand, articulate, or in any way at all behold it, because it is unlike all [other] things and is perfectly unknown.”⁵³

In the same [chapter]: “If all the sciences of things pertain to substances and terminate in substances, then, necessarily, [the Supreme Ray,] which exceeds every substance, is also superior to every science. Although [this Divine Ray] perceives and comprehends and anticipates all things, it remains altogether incomprehensible.”⁵⁴

In the same [chapter]: “According to the assurance of Scripture this [Cause of all things] is all in all; it is most truly lauded as the

Bestower and Completer of substance, the containing Repository and Abode, the Converter to itself—[being all of] these conjointly, uncircumscribedly, and excellently.”⁵⁵

In the same book, Chapter 2: “The Ineffable is spoken of by many words: ‘Ignorance,’ ‘What is understood through all things,’ ‘the Positing of all things,’ ‘the Negating of all things,’ ‘What transcends all positing and negating.’ The divine things are known only by participation.”⁵⁶

- 60** In the *Letter of Hierotheus*: “[The divinity of Jesus] is neither part nor whole, and it is both part and whole, so that it is what includes in itself everything—both part and whole—and has it in an excellent way and has it antecedently. In things imperfect, it is perfect because it is the Principle of perfection; on the other hand, among things perfect it is imperfect, transcending in duration [*tempus*] and in excellence what is perfect.”⁵⁷

In the same [letter]: “[The divinity of Jesus] is the measure and the duration of things; and it is above duration and before duration.”⁵⁸

In the same [letter]: “[God] is not one, nor does He participate in one; and yet, in a far different sense, He is One above the one which is present in the case of substances.”⁵⁹

- 61** In Chapter 4 of the same book of *The Divine Names*: “From among all things the theologians ascribe especially goodness to the Supreme Deity—calling, I believe, the Divine Substance *Goodness*.”⁶⁰

In the same [chapter]: “Since the Substance which is the Good can neither be increased nor decreased”⁶¹

In the same [chapter]: “Light is from that Good and is the image of Goodness; therefore, just as an original form is expressed in an image, so the Good is praised in speaking of it as light.”⁶²

In the same [chapter]: “[The Divine Goodness] illumines all things that admit of light; and it creates, enlivens, contains, and perfects them. It is the measure, the duration, the number, the order, etc., of substantive things.” (Note the example of the sun.)⁶³

- 62** In the same [chapter]: “This Good is spoken of as intelligible light, for it fills every super-celestial spirit with spiritual light; it dispels all ignorance, and drives out all error, from all the souls into which it has introduced itself,” etc.⁶⁴

In the same [chapter]: “Therefore, that Good, which (as a primordial ray and an abundant discharge of light) transcends all light, is said to be intelligible light.”⁶⁵

In the same [chapter]: “This Good is also spoken of as the Beautiful by the holy theologians.”⁶⁶

In the same [chapter]: “As having in itself most excellently, before time, the original Beauty of everything beautiful”⁶⁷

In the same [chapter]: “The Beautiful is seen to be the same thing as the Good.”⁶⁸

In the same [chapter]: “Among substances there is not anything which does not to some extent participate in the Beautiful and Good. And we presume to say in our discussion even this: that even what-is-not participates in the Beautiful and Good. For then . . . ,” etc.⁶⁹

In the same [chapter]: “To summarize briefly: all existing things are from the Beautiful and Good; and all non-existing things are super-substantially in the Beautiful and Good, which is the Beginning and the End of all things,” etc.⁷⁰

- 63** In the same [book], Chapter 8: “He does not exist; but He is the being of the things which exist. And not only those things which exist but also the being of that which exists is from Him who precedes the aeons. For He who is before the aeons is the Aeon of aeons.”⁷¹

In the same [book], Chapter 8: “And so, let us say by way of summary: all existing things and all aeons have being from Him who pre-exists; indeed, every aeon and all time come from Him.”⁷²

In the same [chapter]: “All things participate in Him, and He is absent from no existing thing.”⁷³

In the same [chapter]: “If something in any way exists, then it exists and is conceived and is preserved in Him who pre-exists. Moreover, [this existential participation] takes precedence over the other participations in Him.”⁷⁴

- 64** In the same [chapter]: “God pre-possesses, so that He pre-exists and exists most eminently and exists excellently.”⁷⁵ He has determined beforehand that in Himself all things are being itself; and by His own being He has caused to exist everything-which-in-any-way-exists. Finally, by participating in His being, all the beginnings of things exist and are beginnings; first they exist, and then they are beginnings. And if you want to call life itself the beginning of living things *qua* living things and call likeness [the beginning] of like things *qua* like things . . . ,” etc.⁷⁶

In the same [chapter]: “You will find that (1) first these [beginnings] participate in being and by means of being remain in being and (2) then they are beginnings of this or that and (3) by participating in

being, they both exist and are participated in. But if they exist by participation in being, this is all the more true of the things which participate in them.”⁷⁷

In the same [chapter]: “Goodness is honored as the first of the participations.”⁷⁸

In the same [chapter]: “He is not in any existing things; nor is He any of these things.”⁷⁹

65 In the same [book], Chapter 9: “Nothing [is] opposite to [the Divine Life].”⁸⁰

In the same [book], Chapter 10: “He who is discovered from all things is called by the theologians incomprehensible and undiscoverable.”⁸¹

In the same chapter: “We ought not to understand divine things in a human manner; rather, we all [ought] wholly [to] take leave of ourselves and cross over straightway unto God.”⁸²

In the same chapter: “God does not have one knowledge which is exclusively of Himself and a distinct [knowledge which is] common and which comprehends all things. For, if the Cause of all things knows itself, how will it fail to know the things which exist from it and of which it is the cause?”⁸³

In the same chapter: “God is known in all things and apart from all things. And God is known through knowledge and ignorance.”⁸⁴

In the same chapter: “In all things He is all things, and in nothing He is nothing.”⁸⁵

66 In the same [book], Chapter 11: “God is Power; and He is the Author of all power.”⁸⁶

In the same chapter: “The infinitely powerful Divine Distribution stretches forth into all existing things; and among [these] things there is nothing which is not suitable for receiving power.”⁸⁷

In the same chapter: “For what is not at all supported by any power does not exist; nor is it anything; nor is there any positing of it at all.”⁸⁸

In the same chapter: “... who by His own super-substantial power contains all existing things excellently and before [all] times and who from the fullness and the abundant outpouring of His excellent power bestows upon all existing things their ability to exist and the fact that they are this [or that thing].”⁸⁹

67 In the same book, Chapter 12: “Indeed, God is called great in accordance with His own greatness, which bestows on all great things

communion with itself, and which is shed from without upon every magnitude, and which is extended above, containing every place, transcending every number, surpassing every infinity.”⁹⁰

In the same [chapter]: “This greatness is both infinite and free of quantity and of number.”⁹¹

In the same [chapter]: “That which transcends all size and distance and which passes unimpeded to all things is called small or tiny. And yet, this small thing is assuredly the Cause of all things; for you will never discover the form of [this] small thing to be incommunicable.”⁹²

In the same [chapter]: “This small thing is free of quantity and is possessed of no, quality; it is infinite and undetermined, encompassing all things and yet able to be encompassed by none.”⁹³

In the same [chapter]: “... which cannot be increased or decreased.”⁹⁴

- 68** In the same [chapter]: “But God is called Other because He is present to all things by virtue of Providence and because for the well-being of all He becomes all in all, while remaining in Himself and [retaining] His own identity.”⁹⁵

In the same [chapter]: “... the power of their likeness to God, through which all created things are turned toward their Creator. Created things must be said to be like unto God and formed according to the image and likeness of God. However, God must not be said to be like unto created things; for not even a man is similar to his own image.”⁹⁶

In the same [chapter]: “Theology itself says that, as something other than all things, He is unlike all things and is free from all things; and—what is surely more marvelous—it denies that anything is like unto [Him]. And, assuredly, this point is not opposed to the [doctrine of the] likeness-to-God. Indeed, the same things are both similar and dissimilar to God—similar because, as much as they can, they imitate Him who cannot possibly be imitated clearly.”⁹⁷

In the same [chapter]: “But this [is true] because created things are much lower than their Creator and are infinitely and distinctly distant from Him.”⁹⁸

- 69** In the same [book], Chapter 12: “... producing all things from Himself, as from an omnipotent Source.”⁹⁹

In the same [chapter]: “... and not allowing them to fall away from Himself.”¹⁰⁰

In the same [book], Chapter 12: “He is the duration and the time

of all things, and He is before the days and before duration and before time—although we can very suitably call Him time and day and moment and duration and Him who is unchangeable and immovable by any motion. And although He is always moved, He remains in Himself as the Creator of duration and of time and of the days.”¹⁰¹

In the same [book], Chapter 13: “The One, which principally and divinely and causally excels all beginnings, we have called the Life of all living things, and the Cause-of-life-itself, and Being itself, and Life itself, and Deity itself.”¹⁰²

- 70** In the same [book], Chapter 15: “[The Perfect] is the End of every infinity and is extended beyond every end and is not contained or encompassed by anything; rather, it stretches forth to all things at once.”¹⁰³

In the same [chapter]: “And that One, the Cause of all, is not a one composed of many, but is before one,” etc.¹⁰⁴

In the same [chapter]: “... the limitation both of everything one and of everything many.”¹⁰⁵

In the same [chapter]: “If someone were to suppose that everything is conjoined with everything, then everything would be wholly one.”¹⁰⁶

In the same [chapter]: “The One is the ‘elemental principle’ (so to speak) of all things.”¹⁰⁷

In the same [chapter]: “If you remove the One, then there will remain neither the whole nor any part nor any other thing at all. For the One uniformly and antecedently contains and includes all things in itself.”¹⁰⁸

In the same [chapter]: “The One is prior to the finite and the infinite,” etc.¹⁰⁹

In the same [chapter]: “[The One] determines both all existing things and being itself.”¹¹⁰

In the same [chapter]: “What is above the one determines that which exists as one.”¹¹¹

In the same [chapter]: “The one which exists is numbered among existing things, and number participates in substance. But that super-substantial One determines both the existing one and every number.”¹¹²

- 71** Toward the end of *The Mystical Theology*: “He is not any other of the things which are known to us or to anyone else in the world; nor is He any existing or non-existing thing.”¹¹³

In the same [*Theology*]: “There is no positing of Him and no negating of Him.”¹¹⁴

In the *Letter to Gaius*. “If anyone who has seen God understands what he has seen, then he has not seen God but something [else] Not being known and not existing, He exists super-substantially and is known super-mentally. Our knowledge of Him who is above all known things is perfect ignorance.”¹¹⁵

72

CHAPTER 15

FERDINAND: I see that these statements of the Theologian¹¹⁶ are weighty and deep and such that, in the manner granted unto man, they direct our sight unto the Ineffable Divinity.

NICHOLAS: Did you notice the way in which he speaks of Not-other?

FERDINAND: I have not yet clearly discerned [this point].

NICHOLAS: You at least noted that he is speaking about the First Cause, which he shows—now in this way, now in that way—to be all in all.

FERDINAND: So it seems. But guide me, I ask, so that with you I may view this [point] more clearly.

73

NICHOLAS: When he gives to the Beginning the name “One,” did you not note how thereafter he says that the super-substantial One determines the existing one and every number?

FERDINAND: I noted it; and it pleased me.

NICHOLAS: Why did it please you?

FERDINAND: Because, although the one approaches closely to Not-other, nevertheless [Dionysius] states that before the one there is the super-substantial One; and assuredly this One is prior to the one which exists as one.¹¹⁷ And you see that this [super-substantial One] is Not-other.

NICHOLAS: You have understood perfectly! Hence, if A were what is signified by “Not-other,” then A would be that of which he speaks.¹¹⁸ But if, as he says, the One is prior to the finite and the infinite and is the End of every infinity and stretches forth unto all things at once and remains unencompassable by all things and is the limitation both of everything one and of everything many, then, surely, since A defines the one, A precedes the one, which is an other. For since the one is not other than the one, the one would cease to be if A were removed.

FERDINAND: Right! For since he speaks of how the One-which-

is-above-the-one determines that which exists as one, assuredly he previously spoke of this One-above-one as One-before-one. Therefore, A determines the one and all things, since (as he says) the One itself is the limitation both of everything one and of everything many.

74 NICHOLAS: You were able to see how it was that the Theologian turned his attention to *before (ante)*—saying that God pre-possesses, so that He pre-exists and exists most eminently. Nevertheless, A is seen before *before*, since *before* is not other than *before*. Hence, since *before* is understood only before something which it precedes, assuredly A is most eminently *before*, since A precedes every other thing. But *before* can be predicated of an other—so that what precedes and what succeeds are distinct. Therefore, if, as the Theologian proposes, all things which exist in something posterior exist eminently and antecedently in something antecedent, then assuredly we discern all things most eminently in A, since A is before *before*.

75 FERDINAND: You recollect perfectly. For I noticed the Theologian's saying that God, who is before the aeons, is the Aeon of aeons; and I think he wants to speak in a similar way about all things. Therefore, by virtue of the fact that I see God antecedently as A itself, I see that in Him all things are Him; but by virtue of the fact that I see God subsequently in an other, I see that in all things He is all things. If I see God before the aeons (*saecula*), then I see that in God duration (*saeculum*) is God; assuredly, in its own Beginning or Constituting Ground, duration is seen before duration. If I see God in duration, I see Him as duration. For what I saw antecedently as God, I see subsequently as duration. For the duration that I saw in God as God, I view in duration as duration. This [point] is no different from the following [point]: viz., that when the later is seen in the earlier, it is the earlier; but if the earlier is seen in the later, it is the later.

NICHOLAS: You grasp all these [points] by means of the things you have understood about Not-other; and insofar as A, the Beginning, has accorded to you light, you will see those things which otherwise would have been hidden from you.

But tell me one more thing. In what way do you construe the Theologian's statement that God can most suitably be called duration and time and day and moment?

76

CHAPTER 16

FERDINAND: I understand [the foregoing] in accordance with

the view of the Theologian. For he saw all things temporal as moved temporally in time but, nonetheless, saw time itself as always remaining immutable. (Hence, in time an understanding of Not-other is especially manifest.) For example, in an hour [time] is the hour; in a day it is the day; in a month, the month; in a year, the year. And as [time] is seen before all these things, [so] in time they are time—just as in all things time is all things. And although in all the things which partake of time time is all things, and although time proceeds to all things and remains with them inseparably and defines them and delimits them, nonetheless within itself it remains fixed and immovable, and is neither increased nor decreased, although it seems to be greater in a greater duration. For example, in a month [time seems to be] greater than in a day. This [impression] comes about only because of the thing other [than time] which participates more or less in time. Therefore, time is participated in in different ways, while remaining unable to be participated in in different ways.

77 NICHOLAS: It seems to me that nothing is hidden from you. But you need to pay attention to all the words of the Theologian, for he says nothing in vain. For example, he says that God can very suitably be called the Moment.

FERDINAND: Yes, he says this. But why do you caution that this [statement] ought to be carefully noted?

NICHOLAS: The moment is the substance of time. For if it were removed, nothing would remain of time. Therefore, because of its most simple indivisibility and unchangeableness, the moment participates to a very great degree in A; for [the moment] seems to be substantiality. If this [substantiality] were called duration, then we would discern very easily how it is that in eternity duration is eternity; in time it is time; in a month, the month; in a day, the day; in an hour, the hour; in a moment, the moment; and [so on] in the same way for all things which partake of duration. Moreover, duration is not *other* than all the things which endure; and especially it is [not *other*] than the moment or the now, which endures in a fixed way. Therefore, in all things duration is all things, even though it precedes all things, which participate in it. Hence, from the fact that the things which participate in it are *other* [than it] but it is not *other* than the things which participate [in it], we see clearly how Not-other is participated in by eternity or, more truly, by duration and the moment.

78 FERDINAND: I think that by “moment” you mean “the present.”

NICHOLAS: I intend for *now*, *moment*, and *present* to be the same thing.

FERDINAND: I now see clearly that the present is the beginning of being and being known for all the differences and varieties of time. For by means of the present I know past and future things. And whatever they are they are through the present. Indeed, in what is past the present is the past; in what is future the present is the future; in a month it is the month; in a day, the day; and so on for all things. And although [the present] is all things in all things and although it proceeds to all things, it is not encompassable by anything, and it remains fixedly without otherness.

NICHOLAS: You have explored [the matter] perfectly; and so, it is also not at all hidden from you that A is the Present of the present. For [A] precedes the present, since the present (which is not other than the present) presupposes Not-other (because in Not-other the present is Not-other). And because the present is the substance of time, you rightly see that A is the Substance of substance. For if the present were removed, no time would remain; but if A were removed, neither the present nor time nor anything else could possibly remain.

79 FERDINAND: You have cautioned well, Father; and now I see clearly that all the statements of the Theologian are elucidated through A. And I am very much pleased by Dionysius's statement that the theologians esteem the first participation in God to be goodness. Herefrom I see that all the names of God signify a participation in Him who cannot be participated in. But since if A were removed, all such things would cease signifying and participating (because A is participated in by all things), I rejoice to be situated in goodness—indeed, [situated there] first of all, according to the theologians. For, since that which is desired by all is desired under the form of the good, then A—without which all things would cease to be—is rightly called goodness. Moses says that the Creator was moved to create all things because He saw that they were good. Therefore, if the Beginning of things is good, assuredly all things exist insofar as they are good. Just as the good is not *other* than the beautiful (as Dionysius says), so [it is] not [*other*] than any existing thing. But the good has this [fact about itself] from A. Hence, the good shines forth perfectly in A. For if A shines forth perfectly in something [else], then assuredly this other thing both is, and is said to be, good.

NICHOLAS: You discern clearly, because you rightly behold all things by means of A. But have you also considered the Theologian's

affirming that the One is the “elemental principle” (so to speak) of all things, whereas in *The Mystical Theology* he denies that God is one?

80

CHAPTER 17

FERDINAND: I indeed observed that Dionysius spoke as you say; but explain, I ask, what he meant by this.

NICHOLAS: I think he meant [the following]: just as, if the one were removed, single things would cease to be, and just as, if the elemental principle were removed, things composed of elemental principles would cease to be, so likewise, if A were removed, all things would cease to be. For [A] is more intimately and inwardly related to all things than the elemental principle is related to things composed of elemental principles.

81

FERDINAND: Therefore, David of Dinant and the philosophers whom he followed did not at all err when they called God matter [*hyle*] and thought [*nous*] and nature [*physis*] and when they called the visible world the visible God.

NICHOLAS: David calls *hyle* the beginning of physical objects, calls *nous* or *mens* the beginning of souls, and calls *physis* or *natura* the beginning of motions. But he did not see that they differ among themselves as beginnings. Hence, he spoke as he did. However, you now have seen that A defines these things and that in these things A is these things, even though it is none of them. And so, let not these [statements] and [statements] of this kind—e.g., the Theologian’s saying that the One is the “elemental principle,” as it were—at all disturb you. And you will not err if you have recourse always to A and to the aforementioned [points].

FERDINAND: You instruct and teach me faultlessly. Moreover, that which the Theologian wrote to Gaius is also very agreeable to me. (For it is clear; and it is conformable to, and harmonious with, what you have said.)

NICHOLAS: What was that?

FERDINAND: When the Theologian said: “If anyone who has seen God understands what he has seen, then he has not seen God but something else.” Hence, if David of Dinant saw that God is matter or thought or nature, assuredly he saw not God but something [else].

82

NICHOLAS: You are remarkable, Ferdinand. And you are truly the more remarkable if in these cited words you have noted [the point] which is deeper.

FERDINAND: What [point] is that, pray tell?

NICHOLAS: When he says: “since all things which are understood are something, they are not God.” Now, “something” [here] means “something other.” If God were understood, then He would be understood not to be an other. Hence, if [God] cannot be understood to be what is signified by “other” and “something,” and if whatever is not signified by “something” cannot be understood, then if God were seen, He would have to be seen above and before any other thing and above the intellect. But nothing except Not-other can be seen before other. Therefore, you see that Not-other directs us unto the Beginning, which excels and precedes the intellect and other and something and everything intelligible. The Theologian here shows these things; and he also shows how it is that our knowledge of Not-other can be called perfect ignorance, since it is knowledge of Him who is beyond all known things.

Let these statements concerning our admirable theologian be enough for now,¹¹⁹ since for present purposes they avail for whatever else he said along similar lines.

83

CHAPTER 18

FERDINAND: Let us now, if you have the time, explore various written statements (statements perhaps not unworthy of this beginning of ours) of the greatest and most acute Peripatetic, viz., Aristotle. Since he is not altogether unknown to you, tell [me], I ask, what the Philosopher was so concerned to show us.

NICHOLAS: I surely think [he wanted to show us] what he had found out regarding knowledge of the truth.

FERDINAND: What, then, had he found out?

NICHOLAS: Indeed, to be candid, I do not know. But he says that quiddity, which is the object of the intellect and which is always sought, has never been found. For in *First Philosophy* he says: “It is [a question] very difficult for all and very much in doubt: namely, whether or not one and being are not something other but are the substance of beings, as the Pythagoreans and Plato said, or whether there is some other substance (*subjectum*); for example, Empedocles speaks of friendship; another speaks of fire; another, of water; and another, of air.”¹²⁰ And elsewhere in the same book the same [philosopher says]: “In time past, as now and always, it is asked, and is ever in doubt, what being is—i.e., what substance is. Some say that it is one thing, others that it is many things.”¹²¹

84 FERDINAND: These words of the great Philosopher are surely worthy of esteem. See to it, then, that we examine with acute vision these words of the Philosopher.

NICHOLAS: I will do my best. I will consider his inquiring whether one and being are not something other but are the substance of beings—his having sought, through Not-other, the substance of things. For he saw that the substance of things is not anything other; and so, with regard to being and one and friendship and air and water and all things, he was uncertain whether any of these is the substance of things, since he recognized that all of them are something other. Therefore, he presupposed that the substance of things exists and that there is not more than one substance. However, like all the others, he was uncertain what this substance is. As he inquired, he encountered all those who gave substance various names; and he asked whether it had been rightly named by anyone. And, at last, it seemed to him that no one had named it correctly. For whoever named it, named something other (*aliquid aliud sive quid aliud*) and not that most simple quiddity-of-things, which Aristotle saw not to be able to be anything other. And he did not stray in this matter; but he stopped there, as had other men. For he saw that no rational mode of pursuit sufficed at all for acquiring that savory and so greatly desired knowledge.

FERDINAND: I see that there has happened to the Philosopher what you spoke of earlier.

NICHOLAS: What was that?

85 FERDINAND: That if someone seeks to see what the substance of visible things is, then if he seeks this substance among visible things and by means of sight, he does not attend to perceiving antecedently the light without which he could not either seek or find what is visible. But if he were to attend to this light, then he would stop seeking [it] in something that is other. Surely, such a thing happened to the Philosopher; for when with his mind he sought the quiddity of things, the light which is signified by “Not-other” presented itself to him as that without which he could not at all make his discovery. Notwithstanding, he did not notice that the light, which was not *other* than what was sought, was not an other. But because through Not-other he sought an other, he found only what is other than others. Hence, in his inquiry he found [only] what is very far removed from this [i.e., from Not-other].

NICHOLAS: You speak the truth. For surely he would not have gone astray, and he would have cut short such extensive efforts, if he

had recognized that the light which he mentally saw to be the means of arriving at the sought-after beginning was also the end. For example, he might have said:

I see very clearly that the quiddity of things cannot be anything other. For how would it be the quiddity of things if it were other? For the very thing which is sought denies that it is other. Now, if it must not be other, then it must surely not be *other* than any other. But that which must not be *other* than any other must surely be named accordingly.¹²² Therefore, it will rightly be named “Not-other.” Therefore, if it be the case that A is signified by “Not-other,” then surely A will be what is sought.

86

CHAPTER 19

FERDINAND: Would that Aristotle had been attentive, as you say! He would have spared us and himself great labor. Surely he would have handed down this hidden truth by means of words which are very simple, very clear, and very sparse. For he would not have had need either of an elaborate logic or of the difficult art of definition—neither of which this man was able to bring to perfection, even though he had studied the matter extensively. Moreover, all the difficulties and the diversities of opinions regarding species and Ideas would have ceased; and he would have gloriously perfected human knowledge.

87

NICHOLAS: You display extraordinary affection toward the admirable Philosopher, who seems indeed to have been endowed with very clear reasoning. But presumably the same [claim] can be made for all the speculative philosophers. For clear reasoning is a facility with difficult matters. [It is the facility] which directed speculating [philosophers] to the truth indubitable to all mental sight—[the truth] than which (in my judgment) none more brief or more concise can be either taught or apprehended.¹²³ Only this truth is perfect; no human being can possibly add anything to it. For it directs sight to the Beginning, so that one who meditates thereupon is delighted and is constantly nourished and grows. No other discoverable teaching is perfect, absolute, and complete. For whatever is investigated by reason but yet is not seen by the acute gaze of the mind’s eye has not yet reached ultimate certainty, even though it may seem to come very close to the truth. But the certainty which is ultimate and entirely perfect is identical with seeing.

88

FERDINAND: All that you say is surely so. The Philosopher certainly seems throughout his lifetime (1) to have concerned himself with eliciting from reason a way, or an art, for pursuing the substance

of things and (2) to have come upon none which sufficed. For not even reason attains to what precedes reason; and even less can any of the arts produced by reason furnish a way to what is unknown to all reason. The Philosopher held it to be most certain that an affirmation contradicts a negation and that both cannot at the same time be said of the same thing, since they are contradictories. He said this on the basis of reason's concluding it to be true. But if someone had asked Aristotle, "What is other?" he surely could have answered truly, "It is not other than other." And, if the questioner had thereupon added, "Why is other other?" Aristotle could rightly have answered as at first, "Because it is not other than other." And thus, he would have seen that Not-other and other do not contradict each other as contradictories. And he would have seen that that to which he gives the name "the first principle" (*primum principium*) does not suffice for showing the way to the truth which the mind contemplates beyond reasoning.

- 89** NICHOLAS: I laud your remarks. And I add that also in another manner Aristotle closed off to himself a way for viewing the truth. For, as we mentioned earlier,¹²⁴ he denied that there is a Substance of substance or a Beginning of beginning. Thus, he would also have denied that there is a Contradiction of contradiction. But had anyone asked him whether he saw contradiction in contradictories, he would have replied, truly, that he did. Suppose he were thereupon asked: "If that which you see in contradictories you see *antecedently* (just as you see a cause antecedently to its effect), then do you not see contradiction without contradiction?" Assuredly, he could not have denied that this is so. For just as he saw that the contradiction in contradictories is contradiction of the contradictories, so prior to the contradictories he would have seen Contradiction before the expressed contradiction (even as the theologian Dionysius saw God to be, without opposition, the Oppositeness of opposites; for prior to [there being any] opposites it is not the case that anything is opposed to oppositeness). But even though the Philosopher failed in first philosophy, or mental philosophy, nevertheless in rational and moral [philosophy] he wrote many things very worthy of complete praise. Since these things do not belong to the present speculation, let it suffice that we have made the preceding remarks about Aristotle.

90

CHAPTER 20

PETER BALBUS OF PISA: I have been listening to you, Father,

discussing with Ferdinand many [points] which are very satisfying to me; I especially admired what you cited from the books of the greatest theologian, Dionysius. For I recently have been translating Proclus the Platonist from Greek into Latin. [While translating] in the book on the theology of the divine Plato, I discovered these very [points], with virtually the same manner and tenor of expression. Accordingly, I would like to hear from you something about *The Theology of Plato* also.

NICHOLAS: It is certain, Peter, that your Proclus was later in time than Dionysius the Areopagite¹²⁵ But it is uncertain whether he saw the writings of Dionysius. State more specifically in which saying they agree.

PETER: Just as Dionysius says that the *one* which exists is posterior to the unqualifiedly *One*, so also Proclus makes [the same point] in referring to Plato.

91 NICHOLAS: Perhaps all the sages wanted to make the same point about the first principle of things [*primum principium rerum*] and various of them expressed it variously. But Plato—whom Proclus so greatly exalts (as if he were a humanified god) and who was always looking to what is anterior—endeavored to see the substance of things before everything nameable. Hence, since he saw that a thing which is corporeal and divisible cannot exist from itself and cannot conserve itself (because of its weakness and fluxibility): prior to any material object he saw the soul, and prior to the soul he saw intellect, and prior to intellect he saw the One.

92 Now, what is posterior exists by means of participation in what is prior. Hence, what is the first (by participation in the first all things are what they are) is seen prior to intellect; for it is not at all the case that all things participate in intellect. Therefore, intellect does not attain to “what is earlier, or older, than intellect itself”—to use his words.¹²⁶ Wherefore, I think that Plato mentally viewed the substance, or the beginning (*principium*), of things by way of revelation—in the manner in which the Apostle tells the Romans that God has revealed Himself to them.¹²⁷ I understand this revelation by means of a likeness to light, which through itself presents itself to sight. It is not seen or known in any other way than it reveals itself, since it is invisible, because it is higher than, and antecedent to, everything visible. In his letters Plato very briefly declares that these matters are thus—saying that God eventually manifests Himself to one who seeks Him stead-

fastly and very vigilantly.¹²⁸ (Proclus, too, repeats these [views] in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*.)¹²⁹ Therefore, since [Plato] believes these [views] to be true, he says that the soul—which contemplates itself and enfolds within itself (in the way a soul does) the things posterior [to itself]—beholds, as in a living mirror, all the things which participate in its life and which through it live and exist vitally. And because these things are in the soul, the soul, by means of the resemblance to itself,¹³⁰ ascends upward toward the things which are prior [to it]—just as Proclus cites these [doctrines] in his theology.¹³¹

93 PETER: Show, I ask, how what you have just said makes the very same point as you have set forth about Not-other.

NICHOLAS: It will readily be clear to one who considers it. For as [Proclus] says, it is necessary that the Cause of all things be participated in by all things.¹³² And so, the One (which he says¹³³ to be prior to the one which exists as one) is not *other* than the existing one, since it is the Cause of the existing one. Therefore, to the Cause of the existing one he gives the name “One,” in order to express Not-other. Hence, just as he calls the Cause of the existing one *One*, so he calls the Cause of being *Being*, and [the Cause] of substance *Substance*, and [so on] in the same way for all things. Hereby we are given to understand that all the things which exist and are named have that-which-they-are-and-are-named from the Cause-of-all-things, which in all existing things is that which they are and are named but is not an other. Therefore, you see that all the names which he says precede the names of named things (as *One* precedes the one which exists and is named “one”) are ascribed to the Cause in order to indicate that the Cause is not *other* than the caused. Therefore, in all names Not-other is what is signified.

94 PETER: I see, Father, that these points are indubitable. But when I turn to *Not-other*, I cannot mentally conceive what it is.

NICHOLAS: If you were able to conceive it, then by no means would it be the *Beginning-of-all-things*, which signifies all in all. For every human concept is a concept of some one thing. But *Not-other* is prior to [every] concept, since a concept is not other than a concept. Therefore, *Not-other* may be called the Absolute Concept, which is indeed seen mentally but which, notwithstanding, is not conceived.

PETER: Well, then, since Not-other is not *other* than anything, but in all things is all things, is it not everything in every concept?

NICHOLAS: Yes, indeed. And so, since every concept is not other

than a concept, in every concept Not-other is whatever is conceived. But, without doubt, the concept *Not-other* remains inconceivable.

95

CHAPTER 21

PETER: When you say by way of definition “The earth is not other than the earth,” the word “than” (“*quam*”) troubles me. So I would like you to explain it.

NICHOLAS: Clearly, you see to be true the definition of “earth” which says “The earth is not other than the earth”; and you see to be false [the definition which says] “The earth is other than the earth.”

PETER: Yes, I do.

NICHOLAS: On what, then, does the truth of the definition depend?

PETER: I see clearly that “than” is present both in the true definition and in the false one; and so, I cannot say that the truth depends on “than.” Rather, [it depends] on “Not-other.”

NICHOLAS: Excellent! So “than” does not define. So don’t let it trouble you.

PETER: Why is it added [to the definition]?

NICHOLAS: Because it directs our sight. For when I say that Not-other is not other than Not-other, the word “than” simply directs sight to Not-other insofar as it is prior to other. But when I say “Other is not other than other,” [the word “than”] directs sight to Not-other insofar as in an other it is the other. And when I say “The earth is not other than the earth,” [the word “than”] directs sight to Not-other insofar as in the earth it is earth. And in like manner for all things.

96

PETER: Very good, indeed! For now I see that to the question “What is the earth?” the answer “The earth is not other than the earth” displays the acute mental gaze by which the mind sees the following: that the Beginning of all things—which is signified by “Not-other”—defines “earth” (i.e., that in the earth Not-other is the earth). But if the question “Why is the earth the earth?” is asked, then the answer “Because it is not other than the earth” ought to be given. For the earth is the earth because its Beginning, or Cause, is, in the earth, the earth. And if the question “From where does the earth have the fact that it is the earth?” is asked, then the answer “It has it from its Beginning, i.e., from Not-other” surely ought to be given. For the earth has the fact that it is the earth from that from which it has the fact that it is not other than the earth. Accordingly, if the question “From what does

the good have the fact that it is good?" is asked, the answer "From not *other* than the good" can be given. For since the good does not have from any other than the good the fact that it is good, then, necessarily, it has it from not *other* than the good. Thus, the earth has from not *other* than the earth the fact that it is the earth. And similarly for each thing. In this manner I see all things antecedently in the Beginning, which is Not-other. And [the Beginning] is signified absolutely and very simply by "Not-other," because A is not *other* than anything. And so, "cause," "exemplar," "form," "Idea," "species," and names of this kind are ascribed to A by the philosophers—just as you previously made me see.

- 97 NICHOLAS: You have explored [the matter], Peter; and you see that the Beginning-of-all is signified by "Not-other" and, consequently, is not *other* than anything but is all in all.

Turn back now to Plato, whose intention was to view the Beginning, which is all in all. Accordingly, he did not at all regard any of the things which can exist in different ways—e.g., figure, name, definition, concept (*ratio*), opinion, and the like—as showing quiddity; for the essence, and quiddity, of things precedes all these. Therefore, antecedently to these things which are other and changeable and variable, he saw that what is prior to other is the Substance of all substances and the Quiddity of all quiddities. Since in all things this [Substance or Quiddity] is all these things, it is that which is signified by "Not-other." Hence, he saw that within the First all things are the First; and he saw that all things emanate *from* the First (as from a fount or a cause) and *on account of* the First.

PETER: In his letters¹³⁴ Plato clearly writes these things about his views. But he adds the following: that all things exist first within the first King, and secondly within the second, and thirdly within the third.

- 98 NICHOLAS: He saw the different modes-of-being of things. For prior to *other*, he saw everything as the most simple Beginning, in which everything-that-exists-differently-in-another is discerned as Not-other. For example, when I turn my attention from the earth (which by rational sight I see to be something other than not-earth or sky or fire) to viewing the earth in the Beginning, I do not see it there as *other* than not-earth; for I see it as the Beginning, which is not *other* than anything. [I do] not [mean] that I see it in a more imperfect manner than at first; rather, [I mean that I see it] in a most precise and most true manner. For each thing is seen most precisely when it is seen as

Not-other. For example, he who sees the earth in such way that he sees it as Not-other sees it most precisely. And this is to see the Quiddity both of its quiddity and of all things.

Another [kind of seeing] is the seeing of the quiddity of the earth. The earth's quiddity is seen by the intellect to be other than the quiddity of water or of fire. Moreover, the earth's quiddity is posterior to Not-other, because it is other than other [quiddities]; and this is the second, or the intellectual, mode-of-being of quiddity.

But the third mode-of-being is such as is attained by the soul's discriminating (in the way souls do) between this and that—according as the thing (or the thing's quiddity) is perceived.

Presumably, Plato wanted to make either the foregoing points or deeper ones. He disclosed his secret very tersely and cautiously; and with his few words he stimulated the sharpest intelligence of many [others].

99

CHAPTER 22

ABBOT JOHN ANDREA: Often in the past and also especially just now, I have heard you, Father, conveying to us the vision of your mind. [I have heard] you directing this [mental vision] toward the First, which is all in all,¹³⁵ that than which something prior cannot be conceived, and that to which you give the name “Not-other.” However, you also maintain that the First is seen prior to everything nameable. These [two claims] certainly seem to me to be opposed.

NICHOLAS: You remember well, Father Abbot, what you have heard. But I certainly do not mean that “Not-other” is the name of that whose name is above every name.¹³⁶ Rather, through “Not-other” I disclose to you the name of my concept of the First. There does not occur to me any more precise name which expresses my concept of the Unnameable, which, indeed, is not *other* than anything.

100

ABBOT: I would wonder—except for the fact that Plato also said almost the same thing in the *Parmenides* and that the commentator Proclus clarified his unclear statement—how that which you view before and above every other could be Not-other, given that Not-other seems to be opposed to other.¹³⁷ It is true that, in these respective works, both Plato and Proclus discuss *one* and *other*, stating that one [of them] cannot possibly be *other* than the other [of them]. Nevertheless, you, because of the more precise expression of your concept, make me see clearly by means of “Not-other” that Not-other cannot

be *other* than any other, whether nameable or unnameable; for “Not-other” defines all things in such way that in all things it is all things. But Dionysius the Areopagite said¹³⁸ that even God is called Other—something which is denied in the *Parmenides*.

- 101** NICHOLAS: As you recall, I believe, Plato denies any attaining of a thing’s definition, because (as Proclus, too, explains) the definition circumscribes the quiddity. Hence, this kind of defining is not what takes place when *Not-other* defines itself and all things. For *Not-other* defines the quidditative beginning not as does someone who determines, or defines, a triangular surface by means of circumscribing lines but *as if* someone constructed a surface which is called a triangle. But you see from the following [consideration] that Plato and Dionysius are not opposed to each other or at odds with each other: Dionysius asserts that God is other (1) in a sense comparable to our commonly saying “a friend is another I” (i.e., not on account of a separation but on account of an attachment) and (2) in relation to an “essence” (so to speak) of such a kind that it is all in all (as he says). And Plato did not intend anything else.
- 102** ABBOT: I certainly see that this definition which you assert to be the only true and quidditative definition is not the one which Plato calls incomplete and defective. And when I give the matter more thought, I am greatly amazed at how the more known, the more clear, and the more easy this mode [of seeing] is, the more free it is from all dimness and uncertainty. Therefore, since no one can doubt that these definitions of yours are so true that they cannot be truer, the quiddity of things truly shines forth in them. But what will you say with respect to the Gospel, where we read that John the Baptist (than whom no one among those born of women is greater)¹³⁹ asserts that no one has ever seen God and that the Son of God, who in the same Gospel is called Truth,¹⁴⁰ has revealed this [fact]?¹⁴¹
- 103** NICHOLAS: I say the very same thing, viz., that God is invisible to every mode of seeing. Even if someone asserted that he had seen Him, surely he would not be able to express what he had seen. For in what sense is He (who is prior to the visible and the invisible) visible except in the sense that He excels everything visible, which apart from Him is (seen to be) nothing? Hence, when I see that He is neither the sky nor *other* than the sky and is not at all either other or *other* than any other, I do not see Him as if I knew what I saw. For the seeing which I direct toward God is not a visible seeing but is a seeing of

the invisible in the visible. For example, when I see it to be true that no one has seen God, then I see God, above everything visible, as not *other* than everything visible. But *that* actual Infinity which exceeds all sight and which is the Quiddity of all quiddities I do not at all see as visible—since what is visible, or is an object, is *other* than the power [of sight], whereas God, who cannot be *other* than anything, transcends every object.

104

CHAPTER 23

ABBOT: We must not be surprised that God the Creator is invisible. Indeed, although in municipal buildings, in ships, artifacts, books, paintings, and countless other things we see the marvelous works of the intellect, nevertheless we do not make contact with the intellect by means of the sense of sight. In like manner, we discern God in His creatures, although He remains invisible to us. Thus, indeed, heaven and earth are the works of God, whom no one has ever seen.

NICHOLAS: Sight does not see itself, although it comes to be aware of itself in the other which it sees. However, *that* sight which is the Sight of sights does not come to discern itself in an other, since it is prior to other. Therefore, since it discerns prior to other: in its vision (1) the one who sees and (2) what is seeable and (3) the actual seeing that proceeds from these two are not distinct. Therefore, it is evident that God, who is called *theos* ([a word] which comes from “*theoro*,” i.e., “*video*”), is—prior to other—this vision which we cannot see as perfect unless [we see it] as trine. (And [it is evident] that to see God in an other—God, who is infinite and boundless—is to see [Him who is] not *other* than anything.) Therefore, the sages say that God sees Himself and all things by means of one indescribable viewing, because He is the Vision of visions.

105

ABBOT: Who would not see to be true what you have shown that you already see? Surely, no one maintains—unless he is devoid of intelligence—that God (who is the Beginning, who is prior to other and to all things, and who is even prior to all privation) is deprived of sight. But if He is not deprived of sight but because of sight is called *theos*, then He has most perfect sight, which perfects, (or defines) itself and all things in the manner in which you explained a moment ago. But that which God has is prior to other. Therefore, it is not the case that Sight, which is the triune *Theos*, sees itself by means of one seeing and sees other things by means of another. Rather, by means

of that seeing by which it sees itself it also sees all things. This seeing is defining. For [God's] seeing does not have its stimulus from another, as in our case an object moves the power [of sight]. Rather, His seeing is constituting; as Moses says, God saw that light was good, and light was created. Therefore, light that is not other than light—which exists through Sight, which is Not-other—is light that is seen. Hence, I see from one consideration that all things are no other than what they are: viz., [the consideration] that Sight, which is Not-other, saw what is not *other* than itself.

But it remains for me to hear you [discourse] about the good, which Moses mentions when he says: “God saw that it was good,¹⁴² and straightway He created it.”

106 NICHOLAS: You have read in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* that God is called both Good and One. [Proclus] proves them to be the same since they pervade all things. It is as if he were saying: because God is all in all, we ought to ascribe to Him the name which we see to belong basically to all things. Now, the good shines forth in all things. Since the good is desirable and lovable of itself and since [existence is] a good, all things desire their own existence. Therefore, when Moses wanted to describe the creation of the universe, wherein God has manifested Himself, he said (with regard to the universe's creation) that each created thing is good, so that the universe is the perfect revelation of the glory and the wisdom of God. Therefore, that which [God] saw as good in itself, prior to other, entered (because it was good) into the creation of the universe. But because God saw the good prior to other, surely He Himself was not *other* than the good. Now, if someone were able to behold the good in isolation and prior to every other, according as it is Not-other, then surely he would see that no one is good except God alone, who is prior to not-good. Indeed, all things other [than God] are able to exist differently because they are an other. Therefore, *good*—which (because it is Not-other) cannot exist differently—is not at all predicated truly of these things. But notice how it is that (1) the good befits the Beginning since good precedes not-good, and (2) Not-other precedes other and befits the Beginning, and (3) *good*, which is predicated of *Beginning*, is *Not-other*. Nevertheless, *Not-other* is more precise, since it defines itself and the good.

107 ABBOT: Determine whether it is true that good precedes not-good. For according to Plato not-being precedes being and, generally

speaking, negation precedes affirmation.

NICHOLAS: When it is said that not-being precedes being, this not-being is better than being, according to Plato—and likewise for negation, which precedes affirmation (for it precedes because it is better). But not-good is not better than good. Hence, in accordance with this [consideration], good precedes. Now, God alone is the good, since nothing is better than the good. But because *good* is seen as *other* than not-good, it is not a precise name for God. And so, it is not predicated of God (nor are any other names), since it is not the case that God is *other* than good or not-good or, indeed, than anything nameable. Therefore, the signification of “Not-other” more precisely directs [us] unto God than does [the signification of] “good.”

108

CHAPTER 24

ABBOT: I now see very clearly why the Teacher of truth¹⁴³ said that God alone is good.¹⁴⁴ But add still one more point, I ask, Father—viz., why this same teacher says¹⁴⁵ that God is a spirit—and then we shall stop being a bother to you.

109

NICHOLAS: He says that God is a spirit for the following reason: since He is incorporeal, He is not enclosed within a space, as is a body. The incorporeal is prior to the corporeal; the non-spatial, to the spatial, the incomposite, to the composite. For in everything composite, what indeed is discerned except what is simple or incomposite? For the composite testifies about itself that its beginning is incomposite. For if in what is composite a composite were seen, and in this latter composite still another composite, then one [of these] would have to be more composite and the other less composite. At length, we would arrive at what is incomposite, since prior to what is composed there is what composes; for nothing which is composite has composed itself. Therefore, there will be something which composes but is incomposite and which is prior to part and to whole and is prior to the universe and to everything; and in it all things are antecedently and incompositely present. Therefore, to be sure, in things composite there is seen only what is incomposite. Thus, the mind beholds the incomposite point prior to the composite line. The point is a sign, but the line is something signified. Yet, what is seen in the signified except the sign?

110

Indeed, a sign is a sign for what is signified. And so, the sign is the beginning, the middle, and the end of what is signified; and the

point is [the beginning, the middle, and the end] of a line; and rest is [the beginning, the middle, and the end] of motion; and the moment is [the beginning, the middle, and the end] of time; and, in general, the indivisible is [the beginning, the middle, and the end] of the divisible. But I do not see the indivisible in the divisible as its part. For a part is a part of a whole; but in the divisible I see the indivisible prior to part and whole, and I see it as not *other* than the divisible. For if I did not see the indivisible, I would not see anything at all. Therefore, when in what is divisible I see that which is altogether other, I see only Not-other. Hence, God is the Spirit of spirits, which by way of Not-other is seen prior to every spirit. If God were removed, neither spirit nor body nor anything nameable could remain.

111 Now, coldness can be called “*spiritus*” on account of its invisibility and of the activity which is perceived in ice or in what is cold. If coldness is removed, the ice ceases existing; for if the congealing, or freezing, power [*spiritus*] is removed, the ice ceases to exist. Similarly, if the binding power ceases in composite things, what is composite ceases; and if the power-of-being ceases, the being ceases; and if the distinguishing, or separating, power ceases—or (to speak more precisely) if the not-othering power ceases—then all [the different] things also cease. The Spirit, or the Power, which works all in all and through which each thing is no other than it is, I call Not-other. It is the Spirit of spirits, since every spirit is no other than spirit. This Spirit is seen truly only by spirit, or mind. For only that rational spirit which belongs to a creature and which is called a mind can view truth. In the truth [the mind] sees the Spirit which is the Spirit-of-truth, which truly causes all things to be that which they are. And just as [the mind] sees this Spirit, so it also worships it in spirit and in truth.¹⁴⁶

112 ABBOT: You have led me, Father, unto a Spirit which I see to be the Creator of all—just as was seen by the prophet who said to the Creator: “Send forth Your Spirit, and they will be created.”¹⁴⁷ (It is as if one who desired ice were to ask that a spirit with congealing breath be sent forth—and so on for every desired thing.) And [you have led me] to see that the mental spirit is an image of this Spirit. For, indeed, this [mental] spirit—which of its own power goes forth unto all things—examines all things and creates the concepts and likenesses of all things. I say “creates” inasmuch as [this spirit] makes the conceptual likenesses of things from no other thing—even as the Spirit which is God makes the quiddities of things not from another

but from itself, i.e., from Not-other. And so, just as [the Divine Spirit] is not *other* than any creatable thing, so neither is the mind *other* than anything which is understandable by it. And in the case of a mind which is more free of a body, I clearly see a spirit (1) shining forth more perfectly as creator and (2) creating more precise concepts.

But since it is your purpose only to take us along with you and to lead us to the pathway of the vision of the First—which is all in all—and because on this pathway one [person] is quicker to understand than is another, I shall now let you rest at more length. For we find to be sufficient the guidance by which you have endeavored to guide us to the Beginning, which defines itself and all things. [This Beginning] has hitherto been sought by all; and it is always to be sought in the future. We are indeed satisfied with the pathway which you have revealed to us by means of *Not-other*. I give you undying thanks on behalf of all; and we shall be grateful always, until such time as we see face to face¹⁴⁸ in Zion the God of gods,¹⁴⁹ blessed forever.¹⁵⁰

114 PROPOSITIONS OF THE SAME MOST
REVEREND FATHER, LORD CARDINAL NICHOLAS,
ON THE POWER OF NOT-OTHER

1. The definition which defines itself and all things is the definition which every mind seeks.

2. If anyone sees that “definition is not other than definition” is most true, he also sees that *Not-other* is the definition of definition.

3. He who sees that Not-other is not other than Not-other sees that *Not-other* is the definition of definition.

4. If anyone sees that *Not-other* defines itself and is the definition which defines all things, he sees that *Not-other* is not *other* than every definition and everything defined.¹

115 5. If anyone sees that *Not-other* defines the beginning—since the beginning is not other than the beginning—he sees that Not-other is the Beginning of beginning; and he sees that it is also the Middle of middle, the End of end, the Name of name, the Being of being, the Not-being of not-being, and so on for each and every thing which can be spoken of or thought of.²

6. If anyone sees how from the fact that *Not-other* defines itself, [there follows that] Not-other is Not-other of Not-other, and [if he sees] how from the additional fact that it defines each and every thing,

[there follows that] it is all in all and each in each, then he sees that Not-other is the Other[ness] of other and sees that Not-other is not opposed to other. This is a hidden truth of which there is not the like.

7. Suppose someone sees how if Not-other were removed, it is not the case that either other or nothing would remain, since Not-other is the Nothing[ness] of nothing. Then he sees that in all things Not-other is all things and in nothing it is nothing.

116 8. Without Not-other it is not possible that anything can come into human thought, for Not-other is the Thought of thoughts. Moreover, although Not-other is not *other* than Thought-thinking-of-itself, it is not thought itself. For thought is not unqualifiedly *Not-other* but is not other than thought; nor does Not-other exist with any difference in any of the things which can be spoken of.

9. Whatever the mind sees, it does not see without Not-other. For example, it would not see other if Not-other were not the Other[ness] of the other. Thus, it would not see a being if Not-other were not the Being of the being—and so on for all things which can be spoken of. So the mind sees every other by means of the other which Not-other is—and thus also for all others. For example, by means of the truth which Not-other is, [the mind] sees an other which is a truth; by means of the for which Not-other is, [the mind sees] an other which is a form. Therefore, [the mind] sees whatever-is-other antecedently as Not-other. And, similarly, it sees that all things have from Not-other their names and quiddities and whatever else they have.

117 10. Suppose someone sees that the finite is not other than finite, the infinite not other than infinite—and in like manner with regard to the visible and the invisible, the numerable and the innumerable, the measurable and the immeasurable, the conceivable and the inconceivable, the imaginable and the unimaginable, the intelligible and the unintelligible, and other such things—then he sees that God, who is signified by “Not-other,” is not limitable either by the finite or by the infinite; is not measurable either by a measurable measure or by an immeasurable measure; is not numerable either by a numerable number or by an innumerable number; and similarly is not conceivable, imaginable, or intelligible; and is not nameable by any nameable name or by any unnameable name. Yet, [God] is not *other* than any of these and others which can be spoken of; and in them He is not an other.

118 11. If anyone sees how it is that by defining itself *Not-other* defines all things, he sees that Not-other is the most congruent measure of all things—a greater measure for greater things, a lesser measure

for lesser things, an equal measure for equal things, a beautiful measure for beautiful things, a true measure for true things, a living measure for living things, and so on in the same way for all things.

12. If anyone sees that *Not-other* is not only the definition of itself and of all things but also the object of its own definition and of the definition of all else, then in all the things which he sees, he sees only *Not-other* defining itself. For what does he see in other except *Not-other* defining itself? What else [does he see] in the sky except *Not-other* defining itself? And similarly for all things. Therefore, the creature is the manifestation of the Creator defining Himself—or the manifestation of the Light (which is God) manifesting itself. This is comparable to a proclamation of a mind which defines itself—[a proclamation] which through living speech is made to those who are present and through a messenger or a writing is made to those who are distant. In these manifestations of the mind there is no other than the mind defining itself, manifesting itself vitally and most clearly to listeners through its speech, to those far away through a delegated speech, to those farthest away through a writing. In this manner, *Not-other*, the Mind of mind, shows itself more clearly in the first creatures but more dimly in the others.

119 13. If anyone sees how it is that *Not-other*, which is *Not-other* of *Not-other*, shines forth (1) in the eternal, where it is the Eternalness of the eternal eternity, and (2) in the true, where it is the Truthfulness of the true truth, and (3) in the good, where it is the Goodness of the good goodness (and similarly in the remaining things), then he sees that God, who defines Himself, shines forth triunely in all things. For example, in what-is-one the triune *Not-other* is the Oneness of the one oneness; in a being it is the Being of the existing being; in a magnitude, the .Magnitude of the great magnitude; in a quantity, the Quantitativeness of the quantitative quantity (and similarly for other things).

14. If anyone sees that in an other *Not-other* is the other, he sees that in an affirmation a negation is affirmed. And if anyone sees God prior to affirmation and negation, he sees that, in the affirmations which we make about God, God is not a negation which is affirmed but is the Affirmativeness of the affirmation.

120 15. If anyone sees that in an other *Not-other* is the other, he sees that in something hot What-is-not-hot is the hot thing; in something cold, What-is-not-cold is the cold thing; in what is formed, What-is-not-formed is the formed thing; in something created, What-is-not-created is the created thing; in something divisible, What-is-indivisible

is the divisible thing; in something composite, What-is-incomposite is the composite thing; and, in general, in something affirmed, What-is-not-affirmed is the affirmed thing. And he sees that negation is the following kind of beginning of affirmation: viz., such that if the negation is removed, the affirmation results. Therefore, negations direct the mind's sight unto *what (quid)*, whereas affirmations [direct it] unto *what is such (tale quid)*.

121 16. If anyone sees how it is that negations (which direct the mind's sight unto quiddity) are prior to affirmations, then he sees that every name signifies what-is-such (*tale quid*). For example, "body" does not signify quiddity, which is incorporeal, but [signifies a quiddity which is] such as to be corporeal. In like manner, "earth" [signifies a quiddity which is such as to be] terrestrial; "sun," [a quiddity which is such as to be] solar; and similarly for all things. Therefore, all names signify in accordance with some perceptible sign; these signs are subsequent to the respective quiddity of the things. Hence, they signify not *what [quidditas]* but *what is such [talis quidditas]*. But the mind, which beholds the quiddity antecedently, denies that the name is the proper name of the quiddity which it sees.

122 17. The mind sees how it is that Not-other is the Actualness of actuality, the Maximality of maximum, and the Minimality of minimum. And so, it sees that pure actuality, which cannot be purer, was never in [the state of] potency. For [otherwise] it would have come into actuality by means of a still purer actuality. Hence, [the mind] sees (1) that all the things which *could* be other can *always* be other and (2) that, consequently, in the case of things which admit of being more, or of being greater, we never come to an actual maximum, than which there cannot be a greater. Those things which *can* be something other can *always* be something other because they never attain to Not-other.

123 18. If anyone sees how it is that Not-other (which is the Other[ness] of the other) is not the other, then he sees the Other[ness] of the other—i.e., the Other[ness] of other things. In this manner, he sees the Equal[ity] of the equal—i.e., the Equal[ity] of equal things. [Or he sees] the Good[ness] of the good—i.e., the Good[ness] of good things. And similarly for all things.

Assuredly, he sees how it is that Not-other, which is the Other[ness] of the other, is not participated in by the other (for [Not-other] is not *other* than other but in other is the other); yet, other is participated in by others. (The same holds true regarding the equal and the good and so on). Therefore, the Good (than which Not-other is

not *other*) is participated in by all other goods; and it is differently participated in by different [goods]. Therefore, there will never be two equally good things (or two equally equal things) which cannot be better (or more nearly equal). And similarly for similar things. For everything which is an other must be other than another, since only Not-other is not *other* than any other.

124 19. If anyone sees that God is not *other* than anything which understands and [is not *other*] than anything which is understood, then he sees that God (1) bestows upon the intellect the fact that it is not other than an intellect which understands and (2) bestows upon what is understandable the fact that it is not other than what is understandable by an intellect and (3) causes that the intellect which understands is not *other* than what is understood. Therefore, Not-other shines forth more clearly in the intellect than in the senses; for the intellect is not *other* than what is understood—even as knowledge is not *other* than what is known. For [compared with the intellect] seeing is not as clearly not-*other*-than-what-is-seen; nor hearing, [not-*other*-] than-what-is-heard. But the intellects, in which Not-other shines forth more clearly, understand intelligible objects more quickly and more lucidly; for it is less the case that they are *other* than these [intelligible objects]. Indeed, [for the intellect] to understand is [for it] to make intelligible objects to be not *other* than itself—just as light, when it is more intense, more quickly makes the illuminable objects to be not *other* than itself. But Not-other is seen to shine forth in all things by virtue of the fact that all things endeavor to define themselves in all things. For example, hotness endeavors to make all things so hot that it is not *other* than they and that it defines itself in all things. Similarly, the intellect [endeavors to bring it about] that all things are intellect and that it defines itself in all things. And similarly for the imagination and all other things.

125 20. When the mind considers what-is-not-hot becoming hot and what-is-cold becoming hot, the mind makes contact through the *intellect* with what-is-not-hot, through the *sense* with what-is-cold. And [the mind] sees that [not-hot and cold] are not the same thing, since it makes contact with them by different powers. And when [the mind] considers the fact that (1) what-is-not-cold is seen by the mind (even as is what-is-not-hot) and that (2) what-is-not-hot can become hot and what-is-not-cold can become cold and that (3) what-is-cold can become hot and what-is-hot can become cold, then [the mind] sees the sense in which the same object can be both not-hot and not-cold. This

object is called not-hot for the following reason: although it is not actually hot, it can become hot. And, likewise, it is called not-cold for the following reason: although it is not actually cold, it can become cold. And so, when it is actually hot, a potency for being cold still remains; and when it is actually cold, a potency for being hot still remains. Now, a potency does not cease unless it is actualized. For [actuality] is the end and the perfection of potency; otherwise, the potency would be in vain. And so, there would be no potency, since nothing is in vain. But because potency does not bring itself into actuality (for this would be inconsistent), a mover is needed in order to move the potency to actuality. In this way, the mind sees nature and natural motion and Not-other, which is the Nature-of-nature, which shines forth in nature.³

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DI</i>	<i>De Docta Ignorantia: On Learned Ignorance</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>De Possess: On Actualized-possibility</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>De Li Non Aliud: On Not-other</i>
<i>VS</i>	<i>De Venatione Sapientiae: On the Pursuit of Wisdom</i>
<i>S</i>	Codex Latinus Monacensis 24848
<i>U</i>	Codex Latinus Tolletanensis 19-26

The abbreviations for the books of the Bible are the standard ones.

PRAENOTANDA

PRAENOTANDA FOR THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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

2. Quotation marks are employed when Nicholas mentions a word rather than uses it. On occasion, however, he both mentions and uses a word in the same sentence. In such cases the word is italicized in the translation. (E.g., 37:7-8: "It is certain that *Not-other* defines itself and all [other] things.")

3. When words such as "beginning," "being," "truth," "absolute," "wisdom," "form," etc., refer to God, they are capitalized. Where used as a noun, the words "not other" are hyphenated, and the hyphenated expression is capitalized irrespective of whether or not it is being used as a name for God.

4. Throughout this dialogue Nicholas uses three expressions which, in translation, the reader needs to construe properly: (a) "*x* is not other than *x*"; (b) "God (or Not-other) is not *other* than *x*," which always means "God is not other-than-*x*, i.e., is not not-*x*," for God transcends all differentiation between *x* and not-*x*; and (c) "In *x* God (or Not-other) is not other than *x*," which always means "In *x* God is *x*." (See n. 46 of the Notes to the Introduction and n. 1 of the Notes to the Propositions.) To exhibit an instance of each expression: (a') the sky is not other than the sky; (b') Not-other is not *other* than the sky; and (c') in the sky Not-other is not other than sky. [In expressions *b* and *c* Nicholas's characteristic use excludes the possibility of instantiating '*x*' by "God" (or "Not-other").]

In order to eliminate ambiguity I have, where necessary, italicized "other" for emphasis and used "no other" or "none other" in place of "not-other."

PRAENOTANDA FOR THE ENGLISH NOTES

1. All references are to the Latin texts. See the list of texts at the beginning of the Notes.
2. The numbering of the Psalms accords with the Douay Version of the Bible and, in parentheses, with the King James Version.

NOTES

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

- A. Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia: De Concordantia Catholica, Sermones, De Coniecturis, De Deo Abscondito; De Quaerendo Deum, De Filiatione Dei, De Dato Patris Luminum, Idiota* (1983 edition) *de Sapientia, de Mente, de Staticis Experimentis; De Venatione Sapientiae, Compendium, De Apice Theoriae*.
 - B. Text authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Meiner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia* (Book I, 3rd ed., 1979; Book II, 2nd ed., 1977; Book III, 1977); *De Beryllo*.
 - C. Paris edition (1514) of *Nicolai Cusae Cardinalis Opera: Complementum Theologicum, De Aequalitate, De Principio* (=Paris edition, Vol. II, Part I, fol. 7^r - 11^v).
 - D. Strasburg edition (1488) of the *Opera Cusana* as edited by Paul Wilpert and republished by W. de Gruyter (Berlin, 1967, 2 vols.): *De Ludo Globi*.
 - E. Banning Press editions: *De Visione Dei; De Possess; De Li Non Aliud*
- N. B.: For some treatises the references in the notes indicate book and chapter; for others, section and line; for still others, page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. E.g., "DI II, 6 (125:19-20)" indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19-20. And "Ap. 8:14-16" indicates *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, p. 8, lines 14-16. Citations of *De Possess* are in terms either of margin numbers alone or of both margin and line numbers.

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

1. The *incipit* reads: “Here begins the book of the most reverend lord and father-in-Christ Nicholas of Cusa, cardinal of St. Peter in Chains—[a book] which is entitled *Guidance for one who is speculating*. With the Cardinal are the interlocutors Abbot John Andrea Vigeuius, Peter Balbus of Pisa, and Ferdinand Matim of Portugal.”

John Andrea Vigeuius, who also appears as one of the interlocutors in DP, was abbot of the monastery of St. Justine of Sezadium; Ferdinand Matim of Portugal was Nicholas’s personal physician; and Peter Balbus of Pisa was a translator of Proclus and, later, bishop of Nicotera. For further information see pp. 142-148 of Johann Uebinger’s *Die Gotteslehre des Nikolaus Cusanus* (Münster: F. Schönningh, 1888) and pp. 99-103 of Paul Wilpert’s German translation *Vom Nichtlanderen* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1976, 2nd edition).

2. Cf. the opening sentences of the prologue to Anselm of Canterbury’s *Monologion* [J. Hopkins, *A New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm’s Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1986)].

3. In *Compendium* 9 (25:8-9), Nicholas writes: “*Oratio enim est rei designatio seu definitio.*” And he thinks that to define something is to specify or determine it through genus and differentiae [VS 14 (39:11-12)]. In this respect he is following Aristotle and Thomas, both of whom regard a definition as a *logos (oratio)* signifying an essence.

In the present passage Nicholas supposes that just as a given definition defines a given kind of thing, so definition as such defines everything. For a fuller discussion of Nicholas’s views on definition see Nikolaus von Kues, *Vom Nichtlanderen*, translated by Paul Wilpert (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1976, 2nd edition), pp. 110 - 112; and Gerhard Schneider, *Gott—das Nichtandere* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), pp. 109-117.

In VS 33 (“The Meaning of a Word”) Nicholas mentions both Aristotle and Thomas, uses “*ratio*” in the sense of *form* and “*oratio*” in the sense of *definition by words*, asserts that human words can suitably be predicated of God only if their meanings are transferred, and so on. I here translate the entire chapter:

“If with deep meditation you ponder all things, you will find that the pursuers of wisdom looked carefully at a word’s meaning, as if a word were a precise representation of things. But because the first man assigned words to things on the basis of the form which he conceived, it is not the case that words are precise and thus that a thing cannot be named by a more precise word. For the form which a man conceives is not the thing’s essential form, which precedes each thing. If anyone knew the name of that form, he would name all things correctly and would have a most perfect knowledge of all things. Hence, there is no discord in the substantifying form of things but only in the words variously assigned to things on the basis of the various forms. And the entire difference of opinion among those who dispute has to do with the representation of a thing’s essence—a representation which likewise varies. As Plato in his letters to the tyrant Dionysius writes most elegantly: truth precedes words, *orationes* (i.e., definitions by words), and perceptible representations. He gives

as an example a depicted circle, its name, its definition [*oratio*], and the concept of it. And for this reason Dionysius the Areopagite instructs us to turn to the [user's] intention rather than to the word's [usual] meaning—although in *On the Divine Names* he himself, like Plato, places much emphasis upon the signification of a word.

“Moreover, no one was more intent than Aristotle upon seeking out a word's meaning—as if the one who assigned the names for all things had been most skilled at expressing in his words that which he knew, and as if [for us] to attain to his knowledge were [for us] to attain to a perfect knowledge of [all] things knowable. And for this reason Aristotle asserted that the light of knowledge is in the definition, which is the unfolding of the word.

“I believe that these points hold true for the human knowledge which the one called the first Adam, or first man, is thought excellently to have possessed in the beginning. And for this reason knowledge which is consolidated in the meaning of a word is most pleasing to man, as conforming to his nature. But the pursuer of divine Wisdom must refuse to predicate of God human words according to their human assignment. For example, the life which extends to all living things does not reach unto God, who is the Cause of all life—and similarly for all words.

“Also, the distinctions made by pursuers who interpret words should be carefully heeded. For example, St. Thomas, in his commentary on Dionysius's book *On the Divine Names*, maintains that three things must be noticed with regard to the substances of existing things: First, [there is] the particular (e.g., Plato); it includes—in itself and actually—individuating and last principles. Second, there is the species or the genus (e.g., *man* or *animal*), in which the last principles are included actually but particulars potentially. For example, ‘man’ signifies ‘who has humanity’—apart from any distinguishing because of individuating principles. The essence (e.g., humanity) is third; by the word ‘humanity’ only the principles of the species are signified. For no individuating principle belongs to the form of humanity; for ‘humanity’ signifies exclusively that in virtue of which a man is a man, and no individuating principle is of such a kind. Hence, by the word ‘humanity’ no individuating principle is signified, whether actually or potentially; and to this extent [the humanity] is said to be the nature. See that by this [threefold] distinction of terms [that] very learned man clarified many things which elsewhere are obscure. How greatly Aristotle, too, labored to distinguish words is shown by his *Metaphysics*. Hence, through the distinctions of words, with which task many very learned men have been engaged, many differences among writers are harmonized.

“But our quest for Ineffable Wisdom, which precedes both the assigner of names and everything nameable, takes place in silence and by seeing rather than in talkativeness and by hearing. Our quest presupposes that the human words which it uses are neither precise nor angelic nor divine. But it adopts them because otherwise it could not express what is conceived. [It. adopts them] on the assumption, however, that (1) it does not intend for them to signify any such thing as that for the sake of which they received their meaning, but to signify the Cause of such things, and that (2) the verbs are timeless, since the intention of our quest is to represent eternity by means of them.”

4. In *VS* 14 (“The Third Field, viz., Not-other”) Nicholas states unequivocally that God is this definition: “Therefore, the trine and one God is the Definition defining itself and all things.” (Throughout *NA* Nicholas attempts to elucidate the sense in

which God is not *other* than anything even though these things are *other* than God.) Since Chapter 14 captures many of the main themes of *NA*, I here present it in translation:

“In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle writes that in the first place Socrates turned his intellect to definitions, for the definition imparts knowledge. For the definition expresses the agreement in genus, and the difference in species, of the thing defined; and this agreement and this difference are enfolded by the word in its signification. Therefore, what we are seeking is seen—in the way in which it can be known—in its definition. Therefore, the intellect, which pursues that which precedes the possibility-of-being-made, must consider the fact that it also precedes other. For that which precedes the possibility-of-being-made cannot be made other, because other is subsequent to it. And because of this fact no other terms can define it, i.e., specify or determine it through genus and differentiae, which it precedes. Hence, it must be the definition of itself. This point is also clear from the foregoing, since [that which we are seeking] precedes the difference between the definition and the defined. And not only [must it be the definition of itself], but also all things must be defined through it, since they cannot exist unless they exist and are defined through it. Dionysius saw these points very clearly in the chapter on the Perfect and the One, in *The Divine Names*, where he says: ‘That One—the Cause of all—is not a one out of many; rather, it is prior to everything one, prior to all multitude, and is the definition of every one and of all multitude.’

“Now, to the field where there is the most delightful pursuit of that which defines itself and all things I give the name ‘Not-other.’ For Not-other defines itself and all things. For when I ask ‘What is Not-other?’ the following answer will be the most suitable: ‘Not-other is not other than Not-other.’ And when I ask ‘What, then, is other?’ the following answer will be correct: ‘Other is not other than other.’ And, in like manner, the world is not other than the world; and similarly about all other things which can be named.

“You now see that the Eternal, that Most Ancient, can be sought in this field by a very delectable pursuit. For inasmuch as it is the Definition of itself and all other things, it is not found more clearly in any other [field] than in Not-other. For in this field you come upon the trine and one Most Ancient, who is the Definition even of Himself. For Not-other is not other than Notother. The intellect marvels over this mystery when it notices attentively that *trinity*, without which God does not define Himself, is *oneness*, because the Definition is the defined. Therefore, the trine and one God is the Definition defining itself and all other things. Hence, the intellect finds that God is not *other* than other, because He defines other. For if Not-other is removed, other does not remain. For if other is to exist, it will have to be none other than other. Otherwise, it would be something other than other and hence would not exist. Therefore, since Not-other is prior to other, it cannot be made other, and it is actually everything which is at all possible to be.

“But notice that ‘Not-other does not signify as much as does ‘same.’ Rather, since same is not other than same, Not-other precedes it and all nameable things. And so, although God is named ‘Not-other’ because He is not *other* than any other, He is not on this account the same as any other. For example, it is not the case that just as He is not *other* than the sky, so He is the same as the sky. Therefore, all things have, from the fact that God defines them, their being not other than they are; and from Not-

other they have the fact that they beget no other in species but produce what is similar to themselves. Therefore, goodness is good-making, and whiteness is white-making; and sin-fflarly for all other things.

“Pursuers who are philosophers did not enter this field, in which, alone, negation is not opposed to affirmation. For Not-other is not opposed to other, since it defines and precedes other. Outside this field negation *is* opposed to affirmation—for example, immortal to mortal, incorruptible to corruptible, and so on for all other things except Not-other alone. Therefore, seeking for God in other fields, where He is not found, is an empty pursuit. For God is not someone who is opposed to anything, since He is prior to all difference from opposites. Therefore, God is named *animal*, to which not-animal is opposed, and *immortal*, to which what is mortal is opposed, in a more imperfect way than He is named *Not-other*, to which neither other nor nothing is opposed. For Not-other also precedes and defines nothing, since nothing is not other than nothing. The divine Dionysius said, most subtly, that God is *all in all and nothing in nothing*.

“Last year at Rome I wrote more extensively about Not-other in a tetralogue. And so, enough about this [topic] at this time.”

5. VS 14 (40:9-10) shows that Nicholas intends for the reader to supply the word “other” here and elsewhere.

6. *The Mystical Theology 5* [*Dionysiaca* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937) I, 599-600].

7. Passages like this one have led interpreters such as Rudolf Haubst to the conclusion that Nicholas subscribes to the doctrine of *analogia entis*. See Haubst’s “Nikolaus von Kues und die Analogia Entis,” pp. 686-695 in Paul Wilpert, editor, *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter Ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung* [Vorträge des II. internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie, Köln, 31. August - 6. September 1961 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963)].

8. Throughout his works Nicholas generally uses “*omnia*” to indicate all things other than God. That is, God is not among the *omnia*. The *omnia* are the *principiata*, whereas God is the *principium*. That is, God is the Principle, the Beginning, the Foundation, the unoriginated Source of all originated things. Although there is much to be said for translating “*principium*” as “principle” and “*principiatum*” and “*principiate*,” I tend to favor the non-Scholastic expressions “beginning” and “what is originated.” Both of these expressions are used in the opening speech of *NA 2*.

9. See Philippians 2:9.

10. Not-other, which is identified with God, is here said to precede God insofar as God can be *spoken* of.

11. Generally, when Nicholas uses “*non-aliud*” as a noun or a name, he uses it indeclinably. (Often, it is used with a form of “*ipsum*” to indicate its case.) However, this practice is not uniform, as the present sentence and the sentences at 19:18-22 and 25:9 through 26:6 show.

12. See Acts 17:27.

13. Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion 15*. [J. Hopkins, *A New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm’s Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1986)].

14. Although Nicholas deems the *via negativa* to be superior to the *via positiva* since it furnishes a more fitting concept of God, even this more *fitting* concept falls

infinitely short of representing God as He is in Himself. See J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1986, 3rd edition), pp. 21-27.

15. That is, we commonly use the expression “it must be one thing or the other.”

16. In *DP* Nicholas refers to the Trinity as Actuality, Possibility, and their Union.

17. Cf. *DI* I, 9 (25:7).

18. In *DI* II, 4 (115:14-16), Nicholas asserts: “It is not the case that God is in the sun sun and in the moon moon; rather, [in them] He is that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference.” However, throughout *NA* he makes such statements as the following: “In the sky He is not other than the sky” (*NA* 6). “Through this Constituting Ground [the sky] is constituted as the sky; and in the sky this Constituting Ground is the sky” (*NA* 6). “Indeed, Not-other is not an essence; but because in the essences it is the essence, it is called the Essence of essences” (*NA* 10). “When I say ‘The earth is not other than the earth,’ [the word ‘than’] directs sight to Not-other insofar as in the earth it is the earth” (*NA* 21).

Is it possible to reconcile the statements in *NA* with the statement in *DI*? Or has Nicholas simply changed his mind during the interval between 1440 and 1461? Cf. *VS* 14 (41:1-6): “ ‘Not-other’ does not signify as much as does ‘same.’ . . . And so, although God is named ‘Not-other’ because He is not *other* than (*non aliud ab*) any other, He is not on this account the same as any other. For example, it is not the case that just as He is not *other* than the sky, so He is the same as the sky.” In accordance with this distinction it might seem that, for Nicholas, in the sky God is (not other than) the sky and yet that in the sky God is not (identical with) the sky. But this interpretation would not accurately reflect either the sense of the passage from *VS* or the distinction between “*non aliud a*” and “*non aliud quam*”.

19. The allusion is to *NA* 2 (7:3-4).

20. Nicholas also discusses *ratio* in *NA* 9.

21. Cf. *DP* 11, the example of the sun.

22. Here, as in *DP* and *DI*, *materia* is identified as *possibilitas essendi*. Cf. *DP* 28.

23. Here Nicholas distinguishes *potentia* (possibility) and *non-ens*. In *DP* 73 he states, not inconsistently, that in God “not-being is everything which is possible to be.”

24. For this meaning of “*motus*” see also *NA* 23 (105:11).

25. “*Quantitas*” may also be translated as “extension.” An image, Nicholas goes on to say, must be the image of something extended.

26. I Cor. 13:12.

27. More literally: “Just as someone does when he sees snow through a red glass (he sees the snow and attributes the appearance of redness not to the snow but to the glass), so does the mind when it sees the unformed through a form.”

28. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* IV (*Dionysiaca* II, 801-802). This passage is cited in *NA* 14.

29. Cf. *De Coniecturis* II, 6 (98:4-5).

30. II Cor. 4:18.

31. For a limited discussion of Nicholas’s view of universals see my *Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-36. Also see my review article “A Detailed Critique of Pauline Watts’ Nicolaus Cusanus. A Fifteenth-

Century Vision of Man,” *Philosophy Research Archives*, 9 (1983), Microfiche Supplement.

32. Literally: “You seem to mean that there are no essences of things but that there is one Essence, which you affirm to be the Constituting Ground.”

33. The light which is in the eye is sight, *das Augenlicht*. Note Stephanus page 266c of Plato’s *Sophist*, as well as 46a of his *Timaeus*.

34. I John 1:5.

35. Here and in Chapter 13 matter is identified with *possibilitas essendi*—i.e., with the possibility-of-existing, or the possibility-of-being.

36. I.e., Not-other is to intelligible substances as intelligible substances are to perceptible substances.

37. Cf. Proposition 16 (*NA* 121:3-7).

38. See the opening speeches of *NA* 1.

39. See the citations referenced by notes 43-45 below.

40. Regarding the translations with which Nicholas was familiar, see the section of the present Introduction where note 20 occurs. In *NA* 14 Nicholas’s citations of Ambrose’s translations are not always exact.

41. Ambrose Traversari (1386-1439) entered the Camadolese monastery of St. Mary of the Angels, at Florence, in 1400. He attended the Council of Basel (1431-1437), which sought the reunification of Eastern and Western Christendom.

42. *Dionysiaca* II, 735.

43. *Ibid.*, II, 745.

44. *Ibid.*, II, 758.

45. *Ibid.*, II, 801-802.

46. *Ibid.*, II, 809.

47. *Ibid.*, II, 962.

48. *Ibid.*, II, 1084-1085.

49. *Ibid.*, II, 1089-1090.

50. *Ibid.*, I, 9-11.

51. *Ibid.*, I, 19.

52. *Ibid.*, I, 22-24.

53. *Ibid.*, I, 33.

54. *Ibid.*, I, 34-35.

55. *Ibid.*, I, 49-50.

56. *Ibid.*, I, 77-78.

57. *Ibid.*, I, 106-107.

58. *Ibid.*, I, 108.

59. *Ibid.*, I, 115.

60. *Ibid.*, I, 145-146.

61. *Ibid.*, I, 159-160.

62. *Ibid.*, I, 162.

63. *Ibid.*, I, 163.

64. *Ibid.*, I, 172-173.

65. *Ibid.*, I, 174-175.

66. *Ibid.*, I, 178.

67. *Ibid.*, I, 182-183. The subject here is Super-substantial Beauty.

68. *Ibid.*, I, 185.

69. *Ibid.*, I, 185.
70. *Ibid.*, I, 198.
71. *Ibid.*, I, 334-335. From this point on Nicholas's numbering of the chapters in *The Divine Names* does not follow the order of the editions printed in *Dionysiaca*.
72. *Ibid.*, I, 335.
73. *Ibid.*, I, 336.
74. *Ibid.*, I, 336-337.
75. Cf. NA 15 (74).
76. *Dionysiaca* I, 338-340.
77. *Ibid.*, I, 341-342.
78. *Ibid.*, I, 342.
79. *Ibid.*, I, 366.
80. *Ibid.*, I, 376-377.
81. *Ibid.*, I, 383.
82. *Ibid.*, I, 385-386.
83. *Ibid.*, I, 400-401.
84. *Ibid.*, I, 404.
85. *Ibid.*, I, 405.
86. *Ibid.*, I, 417-418.
87. *Ibid.*, I, 42 1.
88. *Ibid.*, I, 428.
89. *Ibid.*, I, 433.
90. *Ibid.*, I, 452.
91. *Ibid.*, I, 454.
92. *Ibid.*, I, 454-455.
93. *Ibid.*, I, 456-457.
94. *Ibid.*, I, 458.
95. *Ibid.*, I, 460-461.
96. *Ibid.*, I, 468-469.
97. *Ibid.*, I, 471-472.
98. *Ibid.*, I, 472.
99. *Ibid.*, I, 483.
100. *Ibid.*, I, 484.
101. *Ibid.*, I, 485-486.
102. *Ibid.*, I, 520-521.
103. *Ibid.*, I, 538-539.
104. *Ibid.*, I, 541-542.
105. *Ibid.*, I, 542.
106. *Ibid.*, I, 544.
107. *Ibid.*, I, 545.
108. *Ibid.*, I, 545.
109. *Ibid.*, I, 548-549.
110. *Ibid.*, I, 549.
111. *Ibid.*, I, 549.
112. *Ibid.*, I, 549-550. Note the various Latin translations given for the Greek phrases τὸ ἐν ὄν and τὸ ὄν ἔν.

113. *Ibid.*, I, 599-600. This is a passage from Pseudo-Dionysius which stimulated Nicholas's views regarding *non-aliud*. See the end of NA 1, where this fact is mentioned.

114. *Ibid.*, I, 600-601.

115. *Ibid.*, I, 606-607.

116. Nicholas refers to Dionysius as "the Theologian" in the way that Thomas refers to Aristotle as "the Philosopher."

117. Cf. NA 14 (70:15-16 and 70:18-19).

118. Vansteenberghé [*Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues* (Frankfurt: Minerva GmbH, 1963; reprint of the 1920 Paris edition), p. 419] and Wilpert, translator [Nikolaus von Kues, *Vom Nichtanderen* (Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1976, 2nd edition), p. 192, n. 5], regard the use of "A," to signify God, as indicative of the influence of Raymond Lull. "It was Lull's idea," writes Wilpert, "to derive from several first principles the entire domain of knowledge and thereby to obtain mathematical certainty in all branches of knowledge. Cusa, to be sure, is not thinking of mathematical certainty; nonetheless, the thoughts of Lull made a great impression on him."

119. Literally: "Let these statements now have been made in this way concerning our admirable theologian."

120. *Metaphysics* 996^a 5-9 (Loeb Library edition).

121. *Metaphysics* 1028^b 2-4 (Loeb Library edition).

122. Literally: "But that which must not be *other* than any other surely cannot be named in another way."

123. That is, the truth about Not-other.

124. Nicholas's understanding of Aristotle is not always precise. For example, in NA 10 he mentions that though Aristotle disallowed a quantitative infinity, he nonetheless traced all things back to a First Mover, which is of infinite power. Now, in *Metaphysics* 1066^b Aristotle does reject the view that there can be an actual infinity. But he does not, as Nicholas supposes, trace all things back to a First Mover having infinite power. Aside from the problem that the *Metaphysics* contains conflicting accounts about the number of Unmoved Movers, Aristotle nowhere teaches that the Mover (or Movers) is of unlimited power—though it is the ultimate power behind everything caused to be or to occur.

125. Nicholas does not realize that the author of *The Divine Names* and of the other works cited is not the Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17.

126. See *The Theology of Plato*, Book II, Chapter 4—especially the last sentence, where Plato is cited. [*The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*. Translated by Thomas Taylor (London, 1816, Vol. I)].

127. Rom. 1:19.

128. See the last line of Epistle 6 (323d).

129. Wilpert takes this reference to correspond to p. 924, lines 27 ff. of the text edited by Victor Cousin [viz., *Procli Philosophi ... continens Procli Commentarium in Platonis Parmenidem* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961; reprint of the 1864 Paris edition)].

130. That is, the soul regards all things as participating in the One analogously to the way in which whatever is known or envisioned by the soul participates in the soul.

131. Proclus, *The Theology of Plato*, Book III, Chap. 2 [*The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*. Translated by Thomas Taylor (London, 1816), espe-

cially p. 163 of Vol. I]. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*. Text and translation by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 160-185.

132. Cf. *Elements of Theology*, *op. cit.* Proposition 12.

133. In the English translation of *NA* see the passage marked by n. 117. Also see Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, *op. cit.*, Proposition 2.

134. Plato, Epistle 2 (312e); Loeb Library edition.

135. I Cor. 15:28.

136. Phil. 2:9.

137. That is, Not-other seems to be diametrically other than other. Because of the punctuation of this sentence in the manuscript, I take “*ipsi*” with “*aliud*” rather than with “*non-aliud*.” The Latin sentence at 100:7-8 best shows that Nicholas does not uniformly place “*ipsum*” before “*non-aliud*”; and 6:16 shows the same thing about “*ipsum*” and “*aliud*.”

138. See *Dionysiaca*, *op. cit.*, I, 460-461. This passage is also cited in *NA* 14-at the place marked by n. 95 of the English translation.

139. Matt. 11: 11.

140. John 14:6.

141. John 1: 18.

142. Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

143. Viz., Jesus.

144. Matt. 19:17.

145. John 4:24.

146. John 4:24.

147. Ps. 103:30 (104:30).

148. I Cor. 13:12.

149. Ps. 83:8 (84:7).

150. The manuscript adds (though in Latin): “The end. Praise to God.”

NOTES TO THE PROPOSITIONS

1. In the Latin sentence I regard an “*esse*” as having to be understood. Cf. 3:10-11 and 118:6-7. See the discussion of this passage in my introduction. In contrast to Paul Wilpert, Rose Finkenstaedt recognizes that this is the correct rendering. See p. 292 of “A Translation of *De Non Aliud* by Nicholas de Cusa with an Introduction and Critical Notes” (Columbia University doctoral dissertation, 1966).

When Nicholas uses “*non-aliud*” to express identity, he generally adheres to the following stylistic forms: “*x est non aliud quam x*”; “*x est non aliud quam y*” [But he also writes: “*Sensibile igitur caelum non est ... quid aliud a caelo*” (22:11-12 of *NA* 6). Note *DI* II, 4 (115:4-6); *DI* I, 21 (63:15-18). See the switch from “*aliud quam*” to “*aliud a*” at 20:18 of *NA* 6.1 For example, in *NA* 6 (20:16) he states that *in caelo* [*deus est*] *non aliud quam caelum*. Here the phrase “*non aliud quam*” suggests an identification: viz., that in the sky God is sky.

Accordingly, Nicholas distinguishes the statements “*Deus est non aliud a caelo*” and “[*In caelo*] *deus est non aliud quam caelum*.” In general, he uses “*non aliud a*” in order to avoid expressing identity. In the English translation of *NA* “*non aliud a*” has been rendered as “not other than” and “*non aliud quam*” as “not other than,” “no other than,” or “none other than.”

2. Nicholas uses expressions such as “Being of being” and “Substance of substance” in a vague way. Sometimes he seems to mean that God is the very being itself of all beings, the very essence of all essences, the very substance of all substances. Accordingly, at the end of Chap. 10 he indicates that we may call God either “Form of form” or “Form of forms.” (Note also Proposition 13.) At other times, he seems to regard these expressions as functioning as do the titles “King of kings,” “God of gods,” “Lord of lords”—i.e., as pointing to God’s supremacy, loftiness, and priority. “Mind of mind” and “Beginning of beginning” appear to be titles. (See Propositions 5 and 12.) Similarly, “Actuality of actuality” seems to express the belief that God is the purest of all actualities—even purer than can be conceived. (See Proposition 17.)

3. The manuscript adds (though in Latin): “End of the propositions. Praise to the best God. I, Hartmann Schedel, doctor both of arts and of medicine, copied [this] in Nuremberg on April 6, 1496.”