

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S
METAPHYSIC OF CONTRACTION**

by

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*Intellectualis noster spiritus non
attingit quietem, nisi eum sua in-
tellectuali natura apprehendat, ad
quem apprehendendum esse recepit
intellectuale.*

Nicolaus Cusanus
De Dato Patris Luminum

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PREFACE

This is a book which had to be written. For during the past two decades Nicholas of Cusa's metaphysics has come to be further and further misconstrued. The misconstruals have now attained such broad proportions, and are now mistaken for the truth by so sizable a community of intellectuals, that their incommensurability with Nicholas's texts must be openly demonstrated. Accordingly, the present volume cannot escape being polemical; and it assumes, on the reader's part, a considerable degree of familiarity with Nicholas's works. In particular, the reader should be conversant with *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Possess* before attempting to comprehend the discussion which follows.¹ Authors of polemical works incur the risk of being deemed arrogant; for in criticizing other writers, they inevitably impress some readers as being disrespectful in the way that someone would be only if he thought himself infallible. Let me assure such readers that I am all too aware of my own scholarly failings; indeed, I display this awareness when, in the *Corrigenda* at the end of this volume, I include amendments to my previous translations of Nicholas's texts.

The volume is divided into five chapters. Chapter One examines the claim that the starting point of Nicholas's metaphysics characterizes the metaphysics of the modern period down to the present day—that Nicholas's metaphysics posits a dialectical relationship between Infinite Subjectivity and finite subjectivity, so that the former is considered to be both the Exemplar and the image of the latter. Chapter Two analyzes the view that Nicholas's metaphysics includes two distinct but inseparable ontologies—an ontol-

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ogy of identity and an ontology of difference—so that the world, as characterized by the inseparable ontologies, both is and is not God. Chapter Three inspects the notion that Nicholas operates with three autonomous ontologies—one of which is functionalism, i.e., the theory that each finite thing is *constituted* only by its system of relationships to every other finite thing. Chapter Four expounds the main lines of my own interpretation of Nicholas's metaphysics and contrasts this interpretation with the one that prevails in Britain and North America today. Chapter Five presents an English translation² of *De Dato Patris Luminum*, accompanied by an appendix containing the critical edition of the Latin text, first published by Felix Meiner Verlag (1959) on behalf of the Heidelberg Academy. The Epilogue reviews the goals of the entire volume and invites the reader to appraise the volume's success or failure in the light of these goals.

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INTRODUCTION

Few metaphysical systems in the history of Western philosophy have proven to be more elusive than has Nicholas of Cusa's. At least, no metaphysician's thought has been more subject to radically conflicting interpretations by both his own generation and succeeding ones. These diverse interpretations have led to strikingly divergent evaluations of his work. Heinrich Rombach, for example, considers it "scarcely possible to overestimate the importance of Cusa for the development of the modern scientific disciplines." For Cusa lays

the foundation which probably was never surpassed—perhaps, indeed, could not even be equalled—by any modern thinker. The horizon of his thought not only encompasses the sphere of Descartes' thinking and contains the most important impulses for the metaphysics of Spinoza and of Leibniz but also is exemplary and fundamental for the Kantian turn in philosophy and, therewith, for German Idealism too. Cusa opened the dimension of *speculari*. His speculation exercises an influence that extends to present-day thought—an influence even in areas where his name is not remembered.¹

Rombach goes so far as to encourage the view that Nicholas is "the Aristotle of the modern period,"² since his metaphysics sets out a new conception of being—one which became the model for the modern world.³ By contrast, Karl Jaspers assesses the historical influence of Nicholas's thought as minimal: "Through the contents of his philosophy Cusa also exercised no influence except upon a few monks. On the pathways of the Occident—the Reformation, the New Catholicism, Absolutism, the Enlightenment, the modern scientific disciplines—Cusa was nowhere

to be found.”⁴ And yet, judges Jaspers, Cusa retains a significance which is due not so much to his historical influence as to his being a focal point in the history of thought: “In the course of the modern scientific disciplines Cusa himself occupies no place as a researcher; nor did he rightly grasp the essence of these disciplines. Nevertheless, through his philosophy he is . . . a point of orientation in the scientific world that has arisen since his day.”⁵

But even if one agrees with Jaspers’ approach in distinguishing the issue of Nicholas’s historical influence from the issue of his role in the history of thought, one still must specify what exactly these respective roles are. And in order to do so, he must determine just what Nicholas’s metaphysical doctrines are. How difficult this is is evidenced by the long debate over whether or not Nicholas espouses pantheism. Almost every conceivable alternative has been ascribed to him: that he *is* a pantheist;⁶ that he *is not* a pantheist;⁷ that in accordance with one meaning of “pantheism” he is a pantheist but in accordance with another he is not;⁸ that he advocates, inconsistently, both pantheism and dualism;⁹ that though not a pantheist he is also not a dualist and not a theist, in the usual senses of these terms.¹⁰

In the English-speaking world the interpretation of Henry Bett has long prevailed. Although unwilling to call Nicholas a pantheist,¹¹ Bett regards him as *almost* that. For Nicholas

boldly identifies the opposite terms, at any rate for the purpose of his ultimate metaphysics. It is as if reality has [*sic*] two sides, of which one is God, the invisible and ultimate reality, and the other is the world, the visible and derived reality. Reality, as originative and communicative, is God; as originated and communicated, it is the world. All is in God, as uncreated; all is in the world, as created. Thus the existence of God involves the existence of the world, and gives it finite actuality. And equally the existence of the world involves the existence of God, and gives it finite actuality. For God is God, as existing infinitely, and God is the Universe, as existing finitely.¹²

Bett later repeats this same claim: “There is, so to speak, one ultimate being, which may be viewed from two sides. On the higher side, it is One and Absolute, superexistent, the essence of all that is—God. On the lower side, it is multiple and relative, a derived and dependent existence, an evolution into the visible and the temporal—the universe.”¹³ Nicholas’s alleged double-aspect theory differs from Spinoza’s in teaching that the finite and the infinite are two aspects of the same reality, whereas Spinoza taught that both aspects of reality—God and the universe—are infinite. Moreover, Nicholas advances a doctrine of creation, whereas Spinoza deemed the world to be uncreated. Bett goes so far as to attribute to Nicholas the view that the world is a *necessary emanation* from the divine nature, that God was under a *moral necessity to create*, because He is essential goodness, which, necessarily, is originative and creative.¹⁴ Bett does not stop even here but pushes relentlessly onward: “God is the absolute being of the universe; the universe is that being contracted”;¹⁵ i.e., the universe is divine being in a state of contraction.

I have elsewhere made out the case against interpretations such as the foregoing, which I regard as globally wrong.¹⁶ I shall not at the moment rehearse this case but shall rather focus upon certain other points which are distinctive to Bett. In particular, Bett claims that, for Nicholas, “the reality of things is in human knowledge more truly than in the things themselves, for they exist in knowledge in a higher mode than in their individual reality, because knowledge, as a unifying principle, approaches nearer to the unity of God.”¹⁷ In support of this claim Bett cites no texts; and it is not surprising that he does not, since his view is the very opposite of what Nicholas teaches. Indeed, in *De Beryllo* 33 we are told explicitly that though what our mind produces (e.g., a mathematical figure) exists more truly in the mind than outside it, what our mind does not produce (e.g., a natural object) exists more truly in itself than in our mind.¹⁸ Bett, furthermore, makes such uncritical assertions as that

“no philosopher, indeed, has ever had a more complete faith in reason [than did Nicholas]. He believes that knowledge is entirely valid as far as it goes, but it is always limited and always relative.”¹⁹ But assuredly there are many philosophers in the history of Western thought who have had more confidence in reason than did Nicholas; and I do not know of anyone—philosopher or not—who would reject the truism that knowledge is entirely valid as far as it goes.

Bett is not content to ascribe to Nicholas complete confidence in reason; rather, he plunges ahead to accuse him of Gnosticism, of overemphasis on knowledge:

The return of all things to God is by way of knowledge; to love God is to know God.... There can be no doubt that in the religious sense the great defect of the system of Nicholas (like that of Eri-gena) is that it emphasizes knowledge and neglects love as the spiritual principle of all religion, with the result that the Cusan philosophy as a whole takes on a character of Gnosticism.²⁰

Apparently, Bett has not remembered Nicholas’s sermons, where there is no neglect of love as a spiritual principle. And, even apart from the sermons, how could anyone read *DI III* without detecting the pervasive theme of love (e.g., at the end of III, 9)?²¹ Likewise, it should be abundantly clear that Nicholas does not teach either that to love God is to know God or that the return of all things to God is by way of knowledge. What he teaches is that God *cannot* be known and that the return of all things to God is by way of *Christ*, though only those who are Christ’s through faith, hope, and love shall be gloriously transformed into adopted sons.²²

Besides “finding” Gnosticism where none exists, Bett is also quick to find inconsistency:

There is [according to Nicholas] a centrifugal movement, from God to the world, and a centripetal movement, from the world to God. One is the departure from Unity into the multiple, the different, the separate; the other is the return of all the multiplicity and difference and separateness of the world into Unity. Now Nicholas uses the term explication of *both* these movements. One is manifestly a limitation, an impoverishment, a descent; the other is

manifestly an expansion, an enrichment, an ascent; and yet *explicatio* stands for both. This is not merely a matter of occasional laxity in the use of a phrase; it is the steady employment of a term in altogether inconsistent senses.²³

To be sure, there are certain inconsistencies in Nicholas’s writings; and, to be sure, Nicholas’s use of terminology is often enough cryptic or erratic. Nonetheless, the term “*explicatio*” (which Bett sometimes translates misleadingly as “evolution”) is *not* a term that is employed—let alone steadily employed—“in altogether inconsistent senses.” It is a term belonging primarily to the context of creation and signifying that God is the Ultimate Cause of the existence of all finite things, without, however, being the Cause of their finitude and imperfection.²⁴ It also implies that in all things God is the Ultimate Ground-of-being of these things. It is not, however, a term belonging to the context of the world’s return to God.

Bett is also too eager to stamp as unintelligible certain portions of Nicholas’s metaphysics that, after all, do admit of understanding:

One may well despair, in fact, of attaining either any consistent conception or any clear expression of this very elusive notion of *posse fieri*, or of its relation to the rest of the associated phrases. His description of it bristles with statements which contradict equally express statements found elsewhere in his philosophy. It is a kind of intelligible world between God and the material universe, and yet it is not, for there is no such intermediate existence. It is a sort of formless matter, which is something, for it is subsequent to God, and prior to the world, though it is something that we cannot conceive any more than we can conceive the existence of God; and yet it is nothing at all, for matter without form simply has no existence.... In fact the whole conception is beset with hopeless inconsistencies, and only bewilders Nicholas’s metaphysics; but it is interesting as a late development of his thought.²⁵

Here Bett misconstrues Nicholas’s teaching, thereby imposing an inconsistency upon it. *Posse fieri*, says Bett, is “a kind of intelligible world between God and the material world, and yet it is not, for there is no such intermediate existence.” But, for Nicholas, *posse fieri* is not an intelligible

world, for it is not at all a world and hence not an intelligible one.²⁶ Moreover, Nicholas never rules out, even in his early writings, the alternative that there may be something intermediate between God and the material universe. What he rules out is that there is anything intermediate between the Absolute (i.e., God) and the contracted (i.e., whatever is not God). Specifically, in *DI* II, 9, as also in *De Mente* 13, he rejects the view that there is a world-soul which is intermediate between God and the material world and which contains the exemplars of things in the material world. But his reason for rejecting this doctrine is not that it posits an intermediate between God and the material world but that each exemplar would be a maximum, and it is not possible that there be many maximal and most true things.²⁷ Since Nicholas teaches that *posse fieri* is created and contracted, he does not regard it as an intermediate between the Absolute and the contracted. And only such an intermediate is the kind to which he would object in principle. So even if *posse fieri* is an intermediate between God and the material world—as in some sense it is in *De Venatione Sapientiae*—still, Nicholas's teaching is not in this respect inconsistent.

Bett should call attention to a *difference* in Nicholas's terminology, not to an *inconsistency*. For example, when Nicholas says in *De Mente* 11 that *posse fieri* precedes *posse facere* and says in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 39 that *posse facere* precedes *posse fieri*, he is not contradicting himself. In *De Mente* 11 "*posse fieri*" is the name he gives to the first member of the Divine Trinity, and "*posse facere*" is the name he gives to the second member; just as in some sense the Father precedes the Son, so in some sense *posse fieri* precedes *posse facere*. In *De Mente* Nicholas is speaking about *absolutum posse fieri*. But in *De Venatione Sapientiae* he is speaking about *contractum posse fieri*; and *contractum posse fieri* is not the first member of the Divine Trinity—indeed, is not at all God but is rather created by God. So between the time of writing *De Mente* and the time of writing *De Venatione Sapientiae*, Nicholas developed a

new notion of *posse fieri*. Yet, this new concept, though a different concept from the previous one, is not at all incompatible with the previous one. Interestingly, in *De Venatione Sapientiae* 39 Nicholas uses "*posse facere*" to refer to God qua God rather than, as he had in *De Mente* 11, to God qua first member of the Trinity. These terminological switches are undoubtedly confusing to many readers; but they scarcely show that Nicholas's metaphysics "is beset with hopeless inconsistencies," as Bett eagerly proclaims.

Bett's *Nicholas of Cusa*, published in 1932, continues even today to influence the interpretation of Nicholas's metaphysics in the English-speaking world. This fact is lamentable, given that Bett advances an interpretation which is so generally mistaken. Closer to our own day there has been another influential interpretation which is also pervasively wrong and which therefore also misleads students of Cusa's thought. Let us use it as a second example of the difficulty of grasping accurately Nicholas's philosophy, especially his metaphysics. In *Early German Philosophy*²⁸ Lewis Beck devotes Chapter 4 to Nicholas of Cusa. Beck grants that "Nicholas' vastly complex philosophy is obscure in many details," but he thinks that, nonetheless, "its principal features... are repeated so often that they can be comprehended without great difficulty, though there will always be puzzling fragments left over that do not seem to fit into any unitary pattern."²⁹ Beck discusses these principal features under six rubrics: the coincidence of opposites, learned ignorance, complication and explication, conjecture, the cosmological structure, and the dignity of man. In each of these sections Beck attempts to excerpt from Nicholas's philosophy the principal features, which can be "comprehended without great difficulty." Yet, when we examine each of Beck's sections, we see just how much difficulty he himself had; for each section is replete with errors—errors which we may now proceed to catalogue.

Under the rubric "The Coincidence of Opposites" Beck

fails to make clear that God is *beyond* the coincidence of opposites—i.e., that, for Nicholas, to say that in God opposites coincide is to say that God is beyond all opposition, because He is undifferentiated Being itself. Moreover, Beck calls God the material cause—as well as the efficient, final, and formal cause—of all the diversity of finite beings.³⁰ Nicholas, however, does not refer to God as material cause;³¹ moreover, he clearly teaches that God is *not* the cause of the diversity of finite beings.³²

Under the rubric “Learned Ignorance” Beck misleadingly speaks of “the knowledge we have of God, that he is both white and non-white...”³³ This statement is misleading because, according to Nicholas, God is *neither white nor not-white*, so that we cannot conceivably have *knowledge* of His being *both*. Rather, Nicholas allows us to *predicate* “white” and “not-white” of God, as long as we understand this predication in the light of *De Possess* 11-12; yet, he nowhere conflates predication and knowledge. In another vein, Beck gives us, in this section, an unclear translation of *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* 6:7-9: “While now, when the Aristotelian sect prevails, the coincidence of opposites is counted a heresy, to admit it is to begin the ascent into mystical theology.” This confusing translation reads in such way as apparently to suggest that to admit a heresy is to begin the ascent into mystical theology. In any event, the translation, in one way or another, obscures the point that is clearly made in the Latin passage. A further confusion is found in Beck’s translation of “*ratio*” as *understanding* on p. 63 and as *reason* on p. 68. Since as early as *DI* III Nicholas distinguishes *ratio* (reason) and *intellectus* (understanding), it is preferable not to translate “*ratio*” in the same way in which one also translates “*intellectus*.” Another example of a faulty translation that produces an exegetically faulty argument occurs on p. 65. Here, accepting Heron’s translation of *DI* I, 4, Beck reconstructs Nicholas’s argument by means of the translated premise “the Maximum is everything it can be” instead of, correctly, “the

Maximum is everything that can be.” As a result of the mistaken premise, the whole of the argument becomes miscast. Finally, Beck writes: “when we say of God that he is the Maximum, we mean that no more perfect being can be conceived.” But, with regard to *DI*, this is not an exact unpacking of the signification of “Maximum,” for in *DI* Nicholas uses the language of possibility rather than the language of conceivability. That is, he states that the Maximum is all that which can possibly be; he does not use the formula “that than which a greater cannot be thought.” The foregoing items of translation and interpretation are subtle; but they make important differences when it comes to determining just what Nicholas’s views are.

The section “Contraction and Explication” likewise contains significant errors. Beck writes:

Out of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, opposites emerge by explication. Nicholas’ examples are drawn from geometry, but perhaps we will not be unfaithful to his teaching if we use examples of which he could know nothing. We can express a number in two ways: as a single term, for example, $\log x$ —or as a series whose sum approaches the value of the term asymptotically as the series is extended. The *explicatio* of the number is the series; the *contractio* or *complicatio* of the series is the number.³⁴

The last sentence of this quotation misleadingly implies that Nicholas uses “*contractio*” and “*complicatio*” interchangeably. How confused Beck is about this point is evidenced by his further statement that, according to Nicholas, “the world is in God ‘contractedly’ (*contracte*) as the line is in the point *contracte* . . .”³⁵ But Beck should here have said “*complicite*” instead of “*contracte*”; for, according to Nicholas, the world is *enfolded* in God ontologically prior to its creation; it is not present in God *contractedly*. That Beck should have confused these two conceptions undermines his entire exposition in this section. Indeed, he does not have any idea of what Nicholas means by “contraction”; for if he did, he would not go on to translate “*contracte*” as “in condensed form” when discussing the universe.³⁶ Nor would he speak of “the contraction of God into the universe in its infinite

plurality"; for God, according to Nicholas, is not at all contracted, nor is the universe an *infinite* plurality. In fact, Beck is also confused about Nicholas's use of the term "*explicatio*," as we see from his statement that, for Nicholas, "God is in the world spread out (*explicate*)...."³⁷ Beck, because of his incomprehension of Nicholas's terminology, is led to conclude: "Nicholas is not consistent in his use of words drawn from the mathematical analogy. Sometimes the world is the *explicatio* of God—the expansion of God, as it were; sometimes it is the *contractio* of God—the limitation of God to this and not that. Occasionally he indicates that in any one instance it does not matter which we say."³⁸ In truth, however, both the view that the universe is the expansion of God and the view that it is the limitation of God are egregiously mistaken interpretations of Cusa's metaphysics.

To return to the quotation at the beginning of the previous paragraph: Beck's mathematical example does not serve Nicholas's purpose. For Nicholas regards number as the *explicatio* (i.e., unfolding) of oneness (which he does not consider to be a number). Whether or not a given number is the *complicatio* (i.e., enfolding) of other numbers is irrelevant. For every number is a plurality; and thus the relation of any number to another number, or to a series of other numbers, cannot, on Nicholas's view, serve to illustrate the relationship between the Oneness of God and the plurality of the world. Thus, Beck's arithmetical example is not faithful to Nicholas's teaching.

Finally, Beck claims, in Nicholas's name, that "genera and species are human constructions, i.e., mental abstractions, but they reproduce inadequately the essential likeness and differences of things, which are explications of God."³⁹ Here Beck offers no textual evidence to buttress his claim about the ontological status of genera and species within Nicholas's metaphysics. Perhaps he has in mind *De Mente* 2 (53:2-5). But this passage does not support his point, since it discusses genera and species only *ut sub vocabulo cadunt*,

i.e., as they are captured by [the signification of] a word. At any rate, *DI III*, I makes amply clear that genera and species are not mere mental abstractions.⁴⁰

Under the rubric "Conjectures" Beck alleges that, for Nicholas, "the being of the world is partial, not genuine or independent...."⁴¹ What is meant by "the being of the world ... is not genuine" is not immediately clear. And instead of "independent" Beck should say, more accurately, "ultimately independent"; for the world has the kind of independence which is associated with secondary causes, though in an ultimate sense the world is not independent of the Divine Cause. Whatever Beck has in mind here, he has not stated it plainly. Perhaps his shaky grasp of this topic is what led him earlier to maintain, erroneously, that Nicholas comes close to espousing pantheism, so that "the near-deification of the world brings with it a deification of the soul."⁴²

In the section entitled "The Cosmological Structure" Beck states that according to Nicholas "the universe has no center and no circumference."⁴³ But this is a half-truth; for Nicholas teaches that though the universe has no fixed *physical* center or circumference, it does have a center and a circumference, viz., God. And this latter doctrine dare not be ignored in discussing Nicholas's cosmology, which is inextricably intertwined with his ontology.

In his final section, "The Dignity of Man," Beck wrongly translates *De Coniecturis* II, 14, where Nicholas's point is that man is *a* world, not that he is *the* world.⁴⁴ Last of all, he misconstrues Nicholas's argument (in *DI III*) regarding the need for a contracted maximum within a species—a maximum, subsequently identified as Christ. According to Beck,

The position of Christ in Nicholas's philosophy is subject to dispute. He is the "bracket of the world," a mediator between man and God. But Nicholas has repeatedly denied that there is any need of mediation, and has denied the Neoplatonic World Soul in order to maintain the direct inherence of God in the world. But

he accepts Christ on faith and attempts to make this intelligible. His arguments are sometimes quasi-numerological (trinitarian); but here [viz., in *DI III*, 3] he is arguing that the perfections he has been ascribing to man are true of men in their plurality, and he is praising humanity and not man. These perfections are not perfect if not realized in an individual, since only individuals exist. Therefore there must be one man who is truly god-like.⁴⁵

But it is not true that Nicholas repeatedly denies, *simpliciter*, any need of mediation; nor when Nicholas rejects what he calls the Platonist's theory of the world-soul does he do so primarily in order to maintain the direct inherence of God in the world. That is, what Nicholas denies is (1) that there is some *uncontracted* reality which is ontologically subsequent to God and prior to the universe, (2) that any contracted thing—whether singly or in combination with other contracted things—falls less than infinitely short of the uncontracted God, and (3) that exemplars, which are conceived as being the maximum of their respective kind, exist outside the mind of God, wherein they are really one unique "Exemplar," viz., the Word of God. The role of Christ, as outlined in *DI III*, is not inconsistent with any of these denials. And if "direct inherence" means or implies that the world is "the expansion of God, as it were," or that "God is in the world spread out"—to use Beck's earlier expressions—then Nicholas does not maintain the direct inherence of God in the world. At any rate, Nicholas's reason for rejecting a Platonistic conception of world-soul is not primarily in order to maintain the presence of God in the world but in order to preserve the consistency of his doctrine that no absolute maximum has actual existence outside of God. Finally, the entire last part of the foregoing citation from Beck—the part which purports to summarize a portion of the argument in *DI III*, 3—is pure invention, unrelated to Nicholas's actual reasoning. But even if Beck's "summary" of this portion were an approximation of Nicholas's argument—which it is not—the conclusion in the

closing sentence would be wrong. For Nicholas concludes that there is one man who is truly God—not that there is one man who is truly god-like.⁴⁶

In the closing paragraph of his chapter on Nicholas of Cusa, Beck tells us that Nicholas's misfortune "was that he had no followers." Yet, Nicholas's misfortune seems more precisely to have been that, beginning with his contemporary adversary John Wenck, he had too many interpreters who misunderstood him. Of course, the misinterpretations help explain why he had no followers. Even the quasi-follower Giordano Bruno was destined, ironically, to misconstrue Nicholas's cosmology and ontology. Such misconstructions, occurring repeatedly over the centuries that separate us from Cusa, are convincing of one thing: viz., that Nicholas's metaphysics, far from being easy to understand, is easy to misunderstand. We have just examined two interpretations that have long been favorably received among British and North American scholars. Each of these interpretations has fostered a similar global misimpression concerning Nicholas's thought. This misimpression, in one form or another, has now become so entrenched that to challenge it may even seem disrespectful. Be that as it may, the time has come to reevaluate Nicholas's metaphysics. And reevaluation inevitably requires an *Auseinandersetzung* with the prevailing interpretations of the day. In the chapters which follow I examine three further interpretations—this time, on the part of the Germans. In arguing that all three of these are, likewise, globally wrong, I hope to set in relief the viewpoint advanced in *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance*⁴⁷ and reiterated in Chapter 4 below. Throughout the present work I subscribe to the thesis of Karl Jaspers—a thesis also hinted at by Lewis Beck: viz., that though Nicholas exercised minimal historical influence on his own generation and subsequent ones, he is nonetheless an important point of orientation in the history of philosophy. Nicholas is rightly called *the first modern philosopher* and *the first German philosopher*; but because of

his continuity with the past and his lack of historical influence he cannot properly be given the title *the Father of modern philosophy*—an honor still rightfully Descartes'.