

NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S DEBATE WITH JOHN WENCK

*A Translation and an Appraisal of
De Ignota Litteratura and Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*

by

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The English translation of John Wenk's *De Ignota Litteratura* is made from the Latin text collated by Jasper Hopkins. That text is not here reprinted.

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ON UNKNOWN LEARNING
(De Ignota Litteratura)¹

by

JOHN WENCK

- 19 To the venerable and devout man, Lord John of Gelnhausen,² formerly abbot in Maulbronn, intercessor for one of his own.

Most lovable Father, I was recently presented with *Learned Ignorance*, which consists of three books (each incomplete in itself) and which is written in a sufficiently elegant style. It begins with the words “*Admirabitur, et recte, maximum tuum et iam probatissimum ingenium*” and ends “*Eo aeternaliter fruituri qui est in saecula benedictus. Amen.*” Having looked over [this work], I feel called upon to write *Unknown Learning*. Here—by means of [a view] opposed to the points which the aforementioned *Learned Ignorance* deals with (in my judgment, harmfully) in regard to God, the universe, and Jesus Christ—an entrance opens unto the powers of the Lord so that we may be mindful of His justice.³ Those who lack the knowledge of this justice have disobediently established their own, as the apostle says in Romans 10.⁴ The promise of eternal life will perhaps lighten the burden of this work which I have undertaken. [This promise] concerns the repayment of supererogation (Luke 10)⁵ and was made by God to the clarifiers of truth—[made] in what is written in Ecclesiasticus 24: “Those who explain me shall have eternal life.”⁶

- From an innate desire for health the minds of my readers will be vigilant with regard even to this *Unknown Learning*. With spiritual weapons, however, I am going to rebut certain statements from *Learned Ignorance*—[rebut them] as being incompatible with our faith, offensive to devout minds, and vainly leading away from obedience to God. At the head of what must be said comes the [command] in Psalms 45 (“Be still and see that I am God”)⁷ as being the legitimate enlistment of all our mental activity. For if I behold the mind of the prophet: after the elimination of malevolent wars, which are repugnant to our God, and, moreover, after the weapons of treachery have been broken⁸ and knowledge is to be had of Christ, our peace-maker and defender, then comes the command “Be still and see that I am God.” For He envisioned certain who were free to spend time in the Lord’s vineyard and who are accused in Matthew 20: “Why do
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you stand here all day idle?”⁹ Very many *see*—not unto salvation, the end of our faith, but with regard to curiosity and vanity. [We read] about these [individuals] in Romans 1: “They became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.”¹⁰ The Lord God desires to remove, exclude, and separate us from these. Turning our leisure and our sight back toward Himself, He commands us—in order that we may behold with quietude—to be still. [The point is] not (1) that [we be still] in the sense of remaining in a mere cognitive seeing, which puffs us up (from which cognitive seeing even the demons derive their name in Greek, for “demons” means “those who know”), but is rather (2) that by directing our unbusied sight unto that which is truly God, we may have satisfying rest from all our commotion. Therefore, having beautifully prescribed *being still*, He added expositively, “and see.” And He attached, explanatorily, what is supposed to be seen: viz., “that I am God.” Here “I” singularizes and openly excludes every creature from the Divine Nature—distinguishing God from every creature, since God is Creator, not creature. Therefore, the whole exercise of busying our mind with *Unknown Learning*—[an exercise] necessary with respect to the struggle of making an inroad against *Learned Ignorance*—is governed by this verse.

This man of learned ignorance glories, telling the Cardinal that at sea, on his return from Greece, and being guided by supernal light, he found what he formerly had striven after by way of various doctrinal paths. And further specifying that which he found, he says: . . . *in order that I might embrace—in learned ignorance and through a transcending of the incorruptible truths which are humanly¹¹ knowable—incomprehensible things incomprehensibly.*¹² He says that thanks to Him who is Truth he has expounded this [learned ignorance] in three books. Yet, that disciple whom Jesus loved exhorts us, in his first letter, chapter 4. not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits [in order to determine] whether they are from God. And he adds the reason why this is necessary: “because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”¹³ Of which prophets the apostle, in II Corinthians 11, says, speaking more specifically: “[they are] false apostles, deceitful workmen, who transform themselves into apostles of Christ.”¹⁴ Among whose number is, perhaps, this man of learned ignorance, who under the guise of religion cunningly deceives those not yet having trained senses. For the teachings of the Waldensians, Eckhartians, and Wycliffians have long shown from what spirit this learned ignorance proceeds.

In Mark 1 we are commanded by the Savior to believe the Gospel,¹⁵ for it is the indissoluble word of God (John 10: “Scripture cannot be broken”).¹⁶ In Galatians 1 the apostle gives Scriptural teaching precedence over an angelic proclamation: “Although we or an angel from heaven preach to you anything other than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”¹⁷ Now, the Gospel says in I Corinthians 13 that we understand through a mirror [and] in a symbolism.¹⁸ How, then, in this life would we incomprehensibly apprehend what is incomprehensible? For in this life—in which, according to Boethius,¹⁹ “everything which is received is received in accordance with the mode of the receiver”—it is impossible for man to comprehend in any other way than comprehensibly and in terms of an image. For [as we learn] from *De Anima* III the image is to the intellect that which color is to sight.²⁰ Now, it is evident that without the objectively activating light of color, sight cannot see anything; therefore, neither does it happen that we understand without an image. Accordingly, Holy Scripture has taught us through symbolisms that which is divinely inspired and revealed—also [doing so] conformably to the usual manner of our natural conception.

But in order to escape all calling into question of his arguments, this author of *Learned Ignorance* resorts to the following strategem: viz., [he asserts] that in incomprehensibly embracing such deep and incomprehensible matters, *the whole effort of our human intelligence elevates itself unto that Simplicity where contradictories coincide.*²¹ And he says that the conception of his first book labors with this [task]. He calls this Simplicity *God*—not understanding that which the verse stated: viz., “that I am God,” with whom no created thing coincides and with whom nothing from the nature of anything is mingled. Now, if the aforesaid teacher of learned ignorance wants in this way to prevent all opposition, then there will be no contradiction there. And who will refute him, since in that case no inference could be established? For there would be no inconsistency between an antecedent and a consequent opposite to it. What, then, would become of the inferences of our Savior’s prophets, evangelists, and apostles by which our faith is seen to be in no small measure confirmed against the infidels? Moreover, such teaching as this author’s destroys the fundamental principle of all knowledge: viz., the principle that it is impossible both to be and not to be the same thing,²² [as we read] in *Metaphysics* IV. But this man cares little for the sayings of Aristotle. For he says that he *always sets out from [one and] the same foundation*

and that he *has elicited, beyond the usual approach of the philosophers, [teachings which will seem] unusual to many*. Wherefore, [allegedly], the Lord Jesus has been magnified in his understanding and affection through an increase of his faith.²³

Now, he says that his own foundation is the following [principle]: viz., *that with regard to the most simple and most abstract understanding all things are one*;²⁴ wherefore, it is necessary that *there* all things lose all differentiation. I have collected into theses and corollaries, because of the better possibility of their being remembered, the points elicited by him on the basis of this foundation. I will deal with them in sequence in what follows; but beforehand I will explain why I attached the title *Unknown Learning* to this writing.

Now, if we attend to our natural manner of learning, I agree in the first place with [what] the aforesaid author of *Learned Ignorance* [stated], in his prefatory explanation, with regard to the sensible aspect of the desire for knowing—viz., in the following passage: *just as a preceding unpleasant sensation in the opening of the stomach stimulates the nature for being restored, so wonder stimulates the desire-for-knowing which is naturally bestowed upon all human beings*.²⁵ For thus it is written in *Metaphysics* I: “All human beings by nature desire to know.”²⁶ And again: “Because of their wondering the ancients began to philosophize.”²⁷ And I agree again with the oft-mentioned author of *Learned Ignorance* on the following point: [viz.,] that with regard to such a natural inclination for knowing, it is necessary that we open up a mode of scientific inquiry, or investigation, in order that [this inclination] may be put to use (so that it not be in vain but may attain rest in that object which is desired by the propensity of its own nature).²⁸ This [model is the following: *All those who make an investigation judge the uncertain proportionally—i.e., by means of a comparison with (or a relation, or proportion, to)*²⁹ *what is taken to be (praesuppositi sive propositi) certain*.³⁰ For this is the function of logic, which, as a mode of knowing, is said in *Metaphysics* II to direct and teach the mind to come, by means of inference, from the known to attaining a knowledge of the unknown.³¹ Hence, all rational inquiry is comparative (*comparativa seu collativa*) and uses the means of comparative relation. Thus, each thing to be sought, pursued, or investigated comes to be judged and known from a proportional, or a comparative, reduction of what is uncertain, unknown, or unapprehended (which is being inquired about) to something taken to be certain, known, manifest, and apprehended, so that it becomes known

23 and is manifested.³² Hence, the beginning (*inchoatio sive inceptio aut initium*) of a rational inference is from what is known; and the end and goal is the manifesting of what is unknown. Therefore, in the title of his book he includes each of the two bounds of the inquiry, or inference: viz., “*docta*,” i.e., “what is known,” and “*ignorantia*,” i. e., “what is unknown.” I have done a similar thing in my book’s title, which is “*ignota*,” viz., the *terminus ad quem* of this same intellectual investigation, and “*litteratura*,” viz., its *terminus a quo*.

This title has not been newly devised by me. Rather, it was enunciated formerly by the divinely inspired holy prophets; for in Isaiah 29 [it is said that] “a sealed book will be given to one who does not know letters;”³³ and in Psalms 70 David states that he does “not know learning” but nevertheless “will enter into the powers of the Lord” and “will be mindful of God’s justice alone.”³⁴ For by the testimony of Isaiah this unknown learning—[an unknowing] which repels human teachings—causes wisdom to perish from the “wise” and will conceal understanding from the “prudent”³⁵ whose works are in the dark (Isaiah here beautifully said, “whose works are in the dark”³⁶). For what is done badly in the arts is not the fault of the art, which is light and knows no defect; rather, it is the fault of the man who acts badly, whose conduct is not in light but in darkness.³⁷

From these initial observations, then, the aforementioned author of *Learned Ignorance* is sufficiently shown to have a zeal [*emulatio sive zelus*] for knowing; but [the discussion] which follows will show that [this zeal is] not according to knowledge.³⁸

Indeed, he says that knowing is not-knowing,³⁹ although possession and privation are distinguished [by him]. In fact, in the *terminus ad quem*, in which there is rest, privation was banished; for the advent of privation was inconsistent with possession.

He says further: *Only in the most learned ignorance (doctissima ignorantia) do we see most simple Being itself which is the Essence of all things.*⁴⁰ *Wherefore, on the basis of what has previously been established: acquired knowledge (docta notitia) includes comparative relation, and consequently [it includes] number and finitude. But these have no place in most simple Being itself—because, as infinite, it escapes and transcends all comparative relation.*⁴¹ *For since most simple Being itself cannot be comparatively greater and lesser; it is beyond all that we can conceive.*⁴² *And so, since a transference is made from what is finite to what is most infinite and most independent of all figure,*⁴³ *our ignorance will incomprehensibly teach [us]*⁴⁴ *about*

24 *this thing. [For our ignorance] will leave behind sensible things,⁴⁵ which [this infinite thing] transcends, and will readily and incomprehensibly ascend unto the inapprehensible truth.⁴⁶*

I answer him by reference to Wisdom 13: “By the greatness of the beauty of creation the Creator can be knowably seen.”⁴⁷ Delighted with the beauty of creatures, David says in Psalms 91 that he sings “because You have given me, O Lord, a delight in Your work.”⁴⁸ David does not here exclude or disdain [God’s] work, or creation; and in the last Psalm he commands [us] to praise the Lord in His holy places.⁴⁹ So, then, the author of *Learned Ignorance*, entering into intense darkness and leaving behind all the beauty and comeliness of creatures, vanishes amid thoughts. Still being a pilgrim, and hence not being able to see God as He is, he does not at all glorify God. Rather, going about in his own darkness, he leaves behind and leaves aside the peak-of-divine-praise to which all psalmody is brought. Who among the faithful does not know that this is unbelieving and most impious? A meagerness of instruction in logic has led him to this error. In his own ignorance he thought that by way of logic he had received an adequate and precise comparative relation to God—[a relation which] would be a means for pursuing and knowing God.

I come now—through theses⁵⁰ and corollaries—more specially to his statements.

First thesis: *All things coincide with God.⁵¹ This is evident because He is the Absolute Maximum, which cannot be comparatively greater and lesser.⁵² Therefore, nothing is opposed to Him.⁵³ Consequently, God—on account of an absence of division—is the totality of things, as Hermes Trismegistus says.⁵⁴ Hence, too, no name can properly befit Him, because of the absence of a distinct bestowal; for the bestowal of a name is based upon the determinate quality of that upon which the name is bestowed.⁵⁵*

25 This thesis is alluded to by Meister Eckhart in the vernacular book which he wrote for the queen of Hungary, sister of the dukes of Austria—[a book] which begins: “*Benedictus Deus et pater Domini nostri Ihesu Christi.*”⁵⁶ [Here Eckhart] says: “A man ought to be very attentive to (1) despoiling and divesting himself of his own image and [of the image] of each creature, and to (2) knowing no father except God alone. [For] then there will be nothing which can sadden or disturb him—not God, not a creature, not any created thing or any uncreated thing. [For] his whole being, living, apprehending, knowing,

and loving will be *from God, in God, and God.*⁵⁷ And in his sermons he [says]: “In the soul there is a certain citadel which sometimes I have called the guardian of the soul, sometimes the spark [of the soul]. It is very simple—as God is one and simple. It is so simple and so beyond every measure that God cannot view [it] according to measure and personal properties. And if it were to behold God, then this would be evident: viz., that He [is beyond] all His divine names and personal properties, because He is without measure and property. Now, insofar as God is one and simple and without measure and property, insofar as He is neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit, He can enter into this one thing which I am calling the citadel.”⁵⁸

See what great evils swarm and abound in such very simple learned ignorance and such very abstract understanding. Wherefore, John, bishop of Strasburg, on the sabbath before the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year of our Lord 1317, conducted a trial against the Beghards and the sisters in his own city, who were claiming (1) that God is, formally, whatever is and (2) that they were God—not being distinct [from Him] in nature.

Moreover, there cannot be any proof of the adduced thesis. For proof of the thesis would completely abolish [the doctrine of] the Blessed Trinity, since according to this author of *Learned Ignorance* there is neither distinction nor opposition of relations in the Absolute Maximum, which is God. Thus, the persons would not differ in their divine properties; and, consequently, in this learned ignorance there would be not only a confusion of the divine persons but also an essential union of all things with God. This [consequence] is patently opposed not only to orthodox faith but also to the [author] himself, who later in his book tries to prove the Blessed Trinity by means of likenesses—which, however, his learned ignorance has separated [from God] and left behind. And if in this way there is a separation of all things from God—as he affirms in view of his most learned ignorance of the most simple Being [and] Essence of all things—how is it that in this first thesis he connects all things with God through coinciding?

26 The first corollary of this first thesis: *By means of*⁵⁹ *Absolute Maximality all things are that which they are, because Absolute Maximality is Absolute Being, in whose absence there cannot be anything.*⁶⁰

Eckhart, in his work on Genesis and Exodus, alludes to this [point] in the following way: “Being is God. For if it were other than God:

either God would not exist, or else if He did exist, He would exist from something other [than Himself].”⁶¹ And he adds: “The Beginning wherein God created heaven and earth is the primary and simple *now* of eternity—i.e., altogether the same *now* wherein God dwells from eternity and in which there is, was, and eternally will be the emanation of His persons. Hence, when I was once asked why God did not create the world earlier, I replied: because He was unable to, since before there was a world, *earlier* neither could be nor was. How was He able to create earlier, since He created the world in the same immediate *now* in which He was dwelling?”⁶²

Let those who err give heed to Wisdom 11: “You have ordered all things in measure and number and weight. For great power has always belonged to You alone; and who shall resist the strength of Your arm? For the whole world before You is as the least grain of the balance and as a drop of the morning dew . . . which falls upon the earth.”⁶³ Therefore, this corollary would destroy the individual existence of things within their own genus. These things are sustained by the power of God (as the apostle says in Hebrews 1: “upholding all things by the word of His power”),⁶⁴ in order that they not pass away into nothing. Now, if they are sustained by God, then surely they are not God (i.e., not Absolute Maximality) but are something and not nothing and are distinct from God, their creator.

The second corollary of this first thesis of the same learned ignorance: *This Absolute Maximality contains all things in itself, and it is present in all things because it encompasses all things by its totality.*⁶⁵ *By comparison, nature, which is contracted, is the ‘unfolding’⁶⁶ (so to speak) of everything which occurs through motion.*

Those who universalize maintain—on account of the simplicity of the Universal Nature which they posit in reality—that in such a precise Abstraction [i.e., in Absolute Maximality] all things are essentially divine. But this [view] is inconsistent with the divine simplicity. And it introduces real composition into God from creatures—something which we should shudder to say, since the eternal, infinite Perfection which God is does not have anything whereby it increases or decreases. For just as God does not decrease through an emanation, so He does not essentially superabound through a return, or reduction, of creatures to Himself.

The second thesis of the same doctrine of ignorance: *The precise truth is incomprehensible; for since it is infinite, it lacks comparative relation to what is presupposed as certain—[presupposed] in order to*

arrive at what is uncertain. Now, what is infinite is—insofar as it is infinite—unknown.⁶⁷

[This thesis is] especially surprising, since [the author] earlier⁶⁸ said that most simple Being itself, which is the Essence of all things, is seen in most learned ignorance—by which ignorance incomprehensible things are grasped incomprehensibly. Since the same most simple Being itself is seen to be precise Truth, how is it both incomprehensible and incomprehensibly graspable? Now, the basis for this thesis would abolish our knowledge of God. Therefore, let there be understood to be, in the sciences, the following double mode of determining: viz., (1) the mode of composition (i.e., descending from first things to last things by combining the second with the first, [the third with the second], and so forth), and (2) the mode of analysis (i.e., resolving what is caused into first causes, and resolving what is composite into what is simple). Now, the supreme and most simple Cause is God. Given that creatures are God's effect and that an effect bears the likeness of its cause, then, as is taught in Book One of the *Sentences*:⁶⁹ God is knowable in a vestige and in an image, becoming known by a mark of likeness of creatures [to Him]; for through Scripture God is described for us by the likenesses of creatures [to Him]—[described] as besuits our understanding, [described] in the way in which He can be understood on [this pilgrim's] pathway. Hence, the precise truth—by virtue of its being precise—bears a relation and a proportion to other, non-precise truths Oust as Absolute Maximality does to those maximalities which are concrete in their relations). Nor is it necessary to have, in the case of a cognitive intermediary [i.e., of an image or a likeness], a precise comparative relation, because that would be an identity rather than a likeness.

28 The first corollary of this second thesis: *There cannot be found two or more things which are so similar and equal that they could not be progressively more similar ad infinitum.*⁷⁰ *This is obvious from the degrees of equality in terms of which one thing is more equal to a second thing than to a third, in accordance with generic, specific, spatial, causal, and temporal agreement and difference among similar things. [Consider] the example of an [inscribed] polygon in relation to an [inscribing] circle.*⁷¹

This corollary destroys the status of causes and the distinction of beings within their own genus. According to the *Categories*, equality is based on quantity, and similarity on quality.⁷² Now there is seen to be both quantity of mass, or magnitude, and quantity of power; and

powers are finite, according to Book One of *On the Heavens*.⁷³ Likewise, each of the categories [is limited] by its own respective most general bound and its own respective most specific bound (as Porphyry teaches).⁷⁴ Therefore, how can [the man of learned ignorance] affirm that one thing is, *ad infinitum*, [progressively] more similar or more equal [to another]? For even [degrees of similarity and equality] are distinguished in relation to a maximum and a minimum, according to Book One of the *Physics*.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, from a comparison of any given thing with any other thing, an important foundation is provided for representational [*intentionalis*] memory, about which there is discussion elsewhere.⁷⁶

The second corollary of the same second thesis: *A finite intellect cannot by means of likenesses precisely attain the truth about things, because there always remains a difference between the measure and the measured—no matter how equal they are.*⁷⁷

It is clear, for Aristotle, (1) that the things which we know are the smallest parts of the things which we do not know, and (2) that our intellect discerns by means of an image and a likeness, and (3) that the equality and the likeness cannot be made an identity, but (4) that, nevertheless, the difference which remains in the things which are compared with one another does not destroy knowledge.⁷⁸ This means that through a likeness the intellect cannot precisely and wholly attain to the truth. And what is it to say this, other than (1) to acknowledge that [the intellect] understands the truth mediately rather than immediately—[an admission] which is suitable to philosophy and theology—and (2) to acknowledge the weakness of our cognitive power?

The third thesis of [this] same doctrine of ignorance: *The quiddity of things, which is the truth of beings, is unattainable in its purity.*⁷⁹ *For the understanding can always be purified and refined ad infinitum.*⁸⁰ I have just finished saying⁸¹ that our intellect conceives the truth of things by means of an image and a likeness (for the possible intellect, according to *De Anima* III, is the place of intelligible species);⁸² and earlier I stated, by means of what was then said, that to see a thing in its purity and as it is pertains not to this life but to the heavenly life.⁸³ But this man of learned ignorance aims to understand a thing in its purity—[to understand it] by way of this same learned ignorance and apart from all likeness.⁸⁴ Notwithstanding, the quiddity, or truth, of things is intelligible even now. For since that-which-a-thing-is is the object of the intellect (according to *De Anima*

III),⁸⁵ there is a natural movement of the intellect unto it. But if it were unattainable, then this intellectual movement would be without a *terminus ad quem*. Consequently, there would be no end of the motion; and hence the motion would be infinite and in vain. This would be to destroy the intellect's proper operation.

Moreover, the reason in support of the thesis cannot be accepted. For the understanding will not be able to be altogether separated from a component of the material determination of knowledge (according to Book One of *Posterior Analytics*)—viz., from the following determination: that there is a cause of the knowledge.⁸⁶

The first corollary of this third thesis: *In the unqualifiedly Maximum not only does the Minimum coincide [with the Maximum] but also all contradictories whatsoever are harmoniously combined, connected, and united.*⁸⁷ *This point is obvious. [For] since [the Maximum] is all that which can be (i.e., is actually all possible things), it is, in complete actuality, whatever is; and in this [actualized Maximum] there are not degrees of comparatively greater or lesser, nor is there opposition.*⁸⁸

O how far the poison of error and falsehood is here disseminated! For this corollary destroys all scientific procedure and all inference—destroying, as well, all opposition and the law of contradiction. Hence, [it destroys] Aristotle's entire doctrine; for the basis of every doctrine has been destroyed. [I spoke] about this point above.)⁸⁹ Nor is what is taken as the reason in support of [the thesis] valid: viz., that God is whatever is. For if God were whatever is, then neither heaven nor earth nor the other creatures would by His creating have proceeded from nothing into existence; but in Genesis the Lawgiver Moses teaches a view opposite to this [inference].

The second corollary of the same third thesis: *It is not, as well as is, all that which is conceived to be.*⁹⁰ *This is evident since the Absolute Maximum is a given thing in such way that it is all things; and it is also no thing.*⁹¹

To be sure, this corollary destroys [the doctrine] that God exists. For since God is conceived, [it follows that] He is not, as well as is. Moreover, in the supporting reason he teaches that God is a creature. Accordingly, this teacher of learned ignorance fails to be still and (in accordance with the commandment of the previously cited verse) to see what God says: viz., "that I am God." On the contrary, he is more foolish than formerly were the Beghards of Strasburg, who were condemned by their bishop. They used to say (1) that they were God and

were not distinct [from Him] in nature, (2) that all the divine perfections were in them, and (3) that they were eternal and [were dwelling] in eternity. They also used to affirm (4) that they had created all things, (5) that they were more than God, and (6) that they needed no one (neither God nor any deity), saying: “If you wish to worship God, worship me.”

The fourth thesis of the same learned ignorance: *That spiritual matters (which are unattainable by us in themselves) can be investigated symbolically has the following basis: viz., that all things bear a certain comparative relation to one another ([a relation which is], nonetheless, hidden from us and incomprehensible to us), so that from out of all things there arises one universe, and in [this] one maximum all things are this one. For the likeness of the original is the same—in oneness of nature—as the original.*⁹²

O how great a weakness of intellect it is to assert that all things are one and that all things are essentially divine, and not to be able to distinguish an image from the original of which it is the image! Indeed, since the image is an approximate likeness of the original and does not come close to being an identity: it is not the same—in oneness of nature—as the original. Thus, the Lollards of Strasburg, who were condemned, used to say that a man can be united to God in such way that his ability both to will and to do everything is the same as God’s. Indeed, Eckhart says in his sermons: “The Father begets His Son in me”; and “I am there that same Son, not another Son.”⁹³ All of these [teachings] are so to be abominated that a faithful intellect will shun dealing with them except for defending its professed faith.

First corollary of the fourth thesis: *When we set out to investigate the unqualifiedly Maximum symbolically, we must leap beyond simple likeness.*⁹⁴ *This is evident because the Maximum cannot be any of the things which we either know or conceive, for it is undifferentiated and precise.*⁹⁵

This corollary aims to understand God without a likeness and nevertheless (according to the supporting reason) does not aim to understand God. But this involves a contradiction. Accordingly the face-to-face vision of God—which vision he seems to mean by “leaping beyond likeness”—is reserved for the future state, [as we learn from] I John 3: Then “we shall see Him as He is.”⁹⁶

The second corollary of the same fourth thesis: *Our ignorance will teach [us],⁹⁷ incomprehensibly, how we are supposed to think more correctly and truly about the Most High as we grope by means of a*

symbolism.⁹⁸ This is evident from the fact that ignorance is altogether independent of all figure and likewise transcends the forms (rationes) of finite and relational things.⁹⁹

31 How, I ask, can ignorance teach, since teaching is a positive act of instruction? Nor is the supporting reason valid, since to be freed of all form (*forma*) does not befit ignorance, which never had a form from which to be freed. Therefore, this corollary destroys all knowledge by exalting our ignorance above all knowledge.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, not even the supporting reason which he offers in chapter two of Book One is valid: viz., that *not-knowing is knowing, since Socrates seemed to himself to know nothing except that he did not know and also since every inquiry utilizes, for a knowledge of what is unknown, a comparative relation to what is known.*¹⁰¹ For even the Teacher of the Gentiles—who judged himself to know nothing among the Corinthians¹⁰² except Jesus Christ and Him crucified—did not deny other knowledge, in which he abounded. Instead, he offered the Corinthians the unknown learning of the sealed book, which is Christ Jesus.¹⁰³ Indeed, Socrates, in stating that he knew that he knew nothing, affirmed that he had knowledge. He denied that he had complete knowledge (i.e., he admitted that he had partial knowledge)—thereby implying that he desired to know what he did not yet know but was still ignorant of. For “he who increases (*apponit*) knowledge also increases sorrow,¹⁰⁴ Ecclesiastes 1. (Or as the common translation has it: “he who adds (*addit*) knowledge also adds sorrow”). For knowledge, acquired, causes a desire for greater knowledge, according to the passage in Ecclesiasticus 24: “those who eat of me shall still hunger.”¹⁰⁵ How, then, could knowledge, which expels ignorance, arise from ignorance? For a privation is productive of evil, according to *Physics* I.¹⁰⁶ From these considerations it is clear how much poisoning of knowledge and of practices has been introduced by this very abstract understanding (called *learned ignorance* or, in the vernacular, *living in detachment*),¹⁰⁷ in which there is a fading away of the senses and in which the glorifying of God is neglected. [This is the glorification] by which God is exalted among the heathen and on earth, according to the verse taken [as our text]: “Be still and see that I am God.”¹⁰⁸ And there follows: “I will be exalted among the heathen, and I will be exalted on earth.”¹⁰⁹

The fifth thesis of the same learned ignorance: *Whatever is possible, this the Maximum is actually and maximally. [I do] not [mean]*

that it is from what is possible but rather that it is [what-is-possible] maximally.¹¹⁰ This [fact] is evident from a comparative relation: viz., that an infinite line, [though a triangle], is not a triangle as [a triangle] is educed from a finite [line]; rather, [the infinite line] is actually an infinite triangle, which is identical with the [infinite] line. Hence, [by, comparison], absolute possibility is, in the Maximum, not other
 32 than actually the Maximum.¹¹¹ He says, further, that all humanly apprehensible theology is elicited from this very great principle.¹¹²

This thesis subverts every mode of theologizing which has been handed down to us throughout the entire Bible. For it says that from this principle (viz., that the Maximum is actually and maximally whatever is possible—from which principle it follows that being is the Maximum) there is elicited all humanly apprehensible theology. To support this principle, he has made many false assumptions, because no line is infinite, no triangle is a line, and possibility is not actuality. Therefore, it is not surprising if he infers false [conclusions] from false [premises]—given that, according to Book One of the *Physics*,¹¹³ when one unacceptable point is granted, many others follow. Hence, from such statements of his it would follow that not only creatures which exist but also creatures which are possible would be God—[a conclusion which is] contrary to the verse taken [as our text]: “Be still and see that I am God.”¹¹⁴

What else does this author of learned ignorance do, then, except lead men away from worship of God and from sincere and fitting devotion by saying¹¹⁵ that he has been called and has been inflamed, even in faith, through a greater burning. Wanting to present such an aforementioned mode of theologizing, he exceedingly alienates men from the true mode of theologizing. Now, if Holy Scripture’s mode of theologizing—a mode handed down from God—were set aside, would not the testimony given by the Savior about Himself in John 5 be nullified?: “Search the Scriptures. In them you think you have eternal life; and they are what give testimony of me.”¹¹⁶ Are we not exhorted in I Peter 2 to desire the milk of Scripture for the increase of our salvation?¹¹⁷ Indeed, to those begotten in Christ this milk is so essential for salvation that the neglect of it leads to faithlessness. As the Savior says in Matthew 22: “You err, not knowing either the Scriptures or the power of God.”¹¹⁸ For if Holy Scripture is disregarded and if the powerful weakness of Christ is not regarded, then with respect to evident matters a man busies himself with images in which there is error, [as we see from] Galatians 5, where the apostle mentions here-

sies (*sectae*)—which in Greek are called *haereses*—as being among the works of the flesh which are to be detested.¹¹⁹ For through the opposite [activity]—i.e., by our attending to the reading of Holy Scripture—(1) there is begotten a wisdom which dispels foolish images from these [men], and (2) the whole church is strengthened by Christ’s weakness, which is God’s strength and is stronger than all men,¹²⁰ and (3) there arises a new life in Christ, of whom ([according to] John 1) Moses wrote in the law and the prophets.¹²¹

33 The first corollary of the same fifth thesis: *The Maximum is not this thing and is not any other thing; rather, it is all things and not any of all the things.*¹²² *This is evident because the Maximum is the being of all things.*¹²³

This corollary—viz., that the Absolute Maximum is all things and is not any of all the things—involves a contradiction. For any of all the things is something, since nothing neither composes nor constitutes a creature, which has been brought forth by means of creation, and since (according to John 1)¹²⁴ all things have been made by the Word, without which there is nothing.

The second corollary of the same [fifth thesis]: *In learned ignorance elegance of words is deemed folly, and wisdom is deemed ignorance,*¹²⁵ *because these bear a connecting but limited comparative relation [to each other].*¹²⁶

Behold a confused man, walking about in darkness, who by means of a perverse comparative relation by which he was supposed to ascend unto understanding walks the pathway to foolishness and to foolish ignorance!

The third corollary: *There is not found to be any other precise measure of every essence than the Essence of the unqualifiedly Maximum.*¹²⁷ *This is evident because all other [measures] can be more precise and more absolute.*¹²⁸

See where his own abstract knowledge leads this author of learned ignorance! For if God (as he supposes the essence of the unqualifiedly Maximum to be) is the precise measure of every essence, then how will it be the case that He exceeds, incomparably, every essence? And how will the following [doctrine from] *Metaphysics X* remain standing?: “In each genus a first thing is the measure (*metrum et mensura*) of the subsequent things of that genus; hence, in each genus there is a proper and precise measure.”¹²⁹

The sixth thesis of the same learned ignorance: *In order that, in God, the trinity and the oneness may be more clearly conceived to be*

the same thing, or that the distinction [may be more clearly conceived to be] not other than the indistinction, the following is necessary: to embrace, in a simple concept, contradictories (as far as possible) and to precede them and [embrace them as] one in their own very simple Beginning, viz., the unqualifiedly Maximum.¹³⁰ This is evident because in this [Beginning] distinction and indistinction are not other [than each other], but indistinction is distinction, and plurality is oneness¹³¹—just as Parmenides said that God is He for whom to be anything which is is to be everything which is.¹³²

34 By this thesis the author shows clearly that he is a man of learned ignorance. For just as a feigned holiness is a double abomination (since it is the feigning of what does not exist), so this learned ignorance (which is a feigned existence of knowledge, i.e., is a non-existing knowledge) has a false appearance of knowledge, and therewith a lack of knowledge.¹³³ And so, this learned ignorance of his will be a double ignorance, or twofold unknowing, which I shall thus attempt (as best I can) to hedge and surround with reasons to the contrary—lest (considering the verse in Ecclesiasticus 36: “Where there is no hedge, the possession will be despoiled”)¹³⁴ in accordance with his inordinate desires for knowing he deceive the world. For if this thesis of his is not enclosed by sound doctrines, it will eliminate distinction in God and will abolish the trinity (which, anyhow, he tries to show to be identical to the oneness). For plurality arises from distinction; and all things are identical in God if no opposition of relation opposes [this identity].

His supporting reason for this thesis is especially lame: viz., that God is He for whom to be anything which is is to be everything which is. For according to the author [of the *Book*] of *Causes*,¹³⁵ the First Cause, too, is present in any given thing—in addition to the presence of what is mingled with this thing. Perhaps various undigested perusals of ancient books have deceived this learned-ignorant author.

The first corollary of the same sixth thesis: *In such an unqualifiedly maximum the angles or the triangles cannot be numbered through one, two, three.*¹³⁶ *For each angle or triangle is in each other angle or triangle (as the Son says, “I am in the Father and the Father in me”). And they all are one maximum—through which maximum we get beyond all opposition.*¹³⁷

To one who knows philosophy, it is evident that when a triangle is said to be in a quadrangle, or the sensitive to be in the intellectual, the mode of being is other than when the Son is said to be in the Fa-

ther. Therefore, take counsel of the apostle: “do not be led away by various and strange doctrines” (Hebrews 13).¹³⁸ And the reason is added: “For it is best to establish the heart with grace, lest it wander about in accordance with its adulterous lusts for diverse doctrines.”

The second corollary of the same [sixth thesis]: *In the oneness of the Trinity the identity is so great that it precedes even all relative oppositions.*¹³⁹ *This is evident because in the Trinity, other and different are not opposed to identity. For since the Maximum is of infinite oneness, all the things which befit it are it without difference and otherness.*¹⁴⁰ Hence, it is not Father, not Son, and not Holy Spirit. For it is only infinity—not [an infinity] which begets or is begotten or proceeds.¹⁴¹

He speaks expressly against the Athanasian Creed, in which the following is said: “In this Trinity there is nothing earlier or later.” Moreover, he abolishes [the view that] the Trinity is essentially God *ab aeterno*.

The third corollary of the same [sixth thesis]: *Because God is the enfolding of all things, even of contradictories, then since nothing can escape His foresight, all things related to God’s foresight are necessary.*¹⁴² *This is evident because in God all things are God, who is Absolute Necessity. And so, it is necessary that God foresaw what He foresaw. For if unfolding is posited, enfolding is posited.*¹⁴³ *Now, in His simplicity God enfolds the totality of things. Hence, even the name “tetragrammaton” (i.e., from four letters, viz., Yod, Heh, Vav, and Heh—which name befits God according to His own essence) signifies [God] as One-and-all, or All-in-one.*¹⁴⁴ *By comparison, the now enfolds time; and time is an ordered [series of] now[s]. And rest is a oneness which enfolds motion; and motion is the unfolding of rest, or rest ordered serially.*¹⁴⁵ *Similarly, for the Father to beget the Son was [for Him] to create all things in the Word.*¹⁴⁶

This corollary is pernicious, because it eliminates the contingency of future events—contrary to the Philosopher in *De Interpretatione* 9.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, it deifies all things, annihilates all things, supposes that annihilation is deification, and maintains that to generate the Son and to create creatures are the same.

Seventh thesis: *The creation always existed, from the time it was able to exist; for the creation is God’s being.*¹⁴⁸ *Who, indeed, can understand that God is the Form of being and nevertheless is not mingled with the creation*¹⁴⁹ *but is one enfolding of all things?*¹⁵⁰ *For God is the enfolding of all things in that all things are in Him; and*

*He is the unfolding of all things in that He is in all things*¹⁵¹—just as, by way of illustration, number is the unfolding of oneness, and just as a point is the perfection of magnitudes, identity, the enfolding of difference, equality [the enfolding] of inequality, and simplicity, [the enfolding] of divisions.¹⁵²

36 This thesis destroys [the status of] the creation; for a condition of the creation is that the creation has not always existed. Moreover, since God Himself always exists, how can the creation be God's being? For although the First Good is desired formally (*exemplariter*) in every good, nevertheless the First Good is not augmented from creatures. As David says to the Lord: "You have no need of my goods."¹⁵³ For as "all the rivers flow into the sea, and, yet, the sea does not overflow" (Ecclesiastes 1),¹⁵⁴ so nothing from creatures adds to the divine perfection.

A corollary of the same [seventh] thesis: *The plurality of things arises from the fact that God is present in nothing.*¹⁵⁵ *This is evident because take away God from the creation and nothing remains*¹⁵⁶—just as when a single face [which appears] in different mirrors is removed, none of the images remain.¹⁵⁷

This corollary deprives God of His own being—since, in nothing, being is nothing.¹⁵⁸

The second corollary: *The Absolute Quiddity of the sun is not other than the Absolute Quiddity of the moon.*¹⁵⁹ *This is evident because it is God Himself who is the Absolute Being and Absolute Quiddity of all things.*¹⁶⁰

This corollary is most abominable because it both confounds the quiddities of things and declares that God is the Quiddity of all things.

The third corollary: *Although the universe is neither the sun nor the moon, nevertheless in the sun it is the sun and in the moon it is the moon.*¹⁶¹ *This is evident because "universe" bespeaks a oneness of many things; hence, in the many the universe is these many.*¹⁶²

This corollary is incompatible with every philosophy.

Eighth thesis: *In the universe each thing is the universe; nonetheless, the universe is in each thing in one way, and each thing is in the universe in another way.*¹⁶³ *This is evident because in each thing the universe is that which this thing is contractedly.*¹⁶⁴ *For in each creature the universe is this creature, just as in Socrates humanity is Socrates.*¹⁶⁵

This thesis not only expressly contradicts the third corollary of

thesis 7 but also implies a contradiction, since an integral part is not the whole. As for his example that the greatest contracted line is contractedly all figures: he does not know what he is talking about. For he is adducing the mathematical entities of his very abstract understanding—[mathematical entities] made concrete by means of images.

The first corollary of the same eighth thesis: *The world-soul is the unfolding of the Divine Mind.*¹⁶⁶ *This is evident because all things—which in God are one Exemplar—are, in the world-soul, many distinct [exemplars].*¹⁶⁷ *Consequently, God is the center point, as it were, and the world-soul is the circle, so to speak.*¹⁶⁸

37 Notice that he introduces an essential complexity into the soul. But the philosophers are of quite differing opinions regarding the soul.

Second corollary: *Absolute Motion is rest and is God, because Absolute Motion enfolds all motions, which rest unfolds,*¹⁶⁹ *as a circle [unfolds] a center.*¹⁷⁰

This corollary does away with [the doctrine of] the First Mover—contrary to [the view of] the Philosopher in Book 8 of the *Physics*.¹⁷¹

Ninth thesis: *God is the center of the world, of the earth, of all spheres, and of all things in the world; likewise, He is also the infinite circumference [of all things].*¹⁷² *This is evident because God alone is Infinite Equality.*¹⁷³ [The author] adds that *the earth is a noble star greater than the moon.*¹⁷⁴

This thesis contradicts our knowledge of the heavens. Nor has the added comment ever before been heard.

First corollary: *God is Absolute Brightness, in whose blazing splendor all existing things endeavor, as best they can, to participate. [This Brightness] is contracted materially in all stars and immaterially in the life of things which are alive with an intellectual life.*¹⁷⁵ *This is evident because “God is light, in whom there is no darkness.”*¹⁷⁶

This corollary detracts from the divine majesty. And in the supporting reason we see clearly that the author of *Learned Ignorance* accepts a likeness for a reality.

Second corollary: *The absolutely Maximum is actually and absolutely all possible things, and for this reason it is absolutely and maximally infinite; similarly, the maximum which is contracted to a genus and a species is actually [all] possible perfection in accordance with the given contraction.*¹⁷⁷ *An example is [the example] of a maximum line, with which a point coincides.*¹⁷⁸ *And so, God is the contracted maximum as well as the Absolute Maximum; and He enfolds creatures of all perfections.*¹⁷⁹

This corollary makes possibility and actuality identical—contrary to the Philosopher, in *Metaphysics IX*.¹⁸⁰

Third corollary: *The contracted maximum, which enfolds in itself the entire perfection of that contraction's nature, adds nothing to Absolute Maximality.*¹⁸¹ *This is evident because Absolute Maximality is not other or different, since it is all things.*¹⁸²

38 This corollary makes the creature equal to the Creator.

Fourth corollary: *Jesus embraces all creatures.*¹⁸³ *This is evident because Jesus is the maximum human being—in whom, because He is God, all things exist. He enfolds the living as well as the dead, just as corporeal light is the basis (hypostasis) of all colors.*¹⁸⁴

Here I could use [against] this author of learned ignorance the words of Blessed John in Revelation 3: “You are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel you to buy gold, fire tried, in order that the shame of your nakedness may not appear. Anoint your eyes with eyesalve, in order that you may see.”¹⁸⁵ For he lacks eyesalve, since he does not understand Christ’s humanity, which is the salve of our eyes for seeing the glory of God—as states the Hammer of Heretics, Blessed Augustine, when he deals with the following verse in John 1: “The Word was made flesh, and we beheld His glory.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, by its cunning craft this corollary exceedingly dishonors Jesus by universalizing Him.

Tenth thesis: *God—in equality of being all things and without any change in Himself—exists in oneness with the humanity of the maximum [man], Jesus.*¹⁸⁷ *This is evident for the following reason: since God is of supreme equality and simplicity, then qua present in all things, God is not in them according to degrees—as if communicating Himself by degrees and by parts. But since none of these things can exist without [its respective] difference of degree, all things are in God according to themselves with a [respective] difference of degree. Therefore, even the maximum human being, Jesus, can exist in God only maximally.*¹⁸⁸

This abominable thesis asserts an equality-of-being between divinity and humanity. It also maintains that God is not simple but composite, because of the difference in degree of all the things which exist in Him distinctly and with some degree.

First corollary: *Since the humanity of Christ is maximum, it so encompasses the complete possibility of the species that it is equality-of-being for each man. [It is] such [equality-of-being] that it is most specially united to each man, and Christ Himself is this very man by*

*means of a most perfect union—each’s numerical distinctness being preserved.*¹⁸⁹ *This is evident for the following reason: the maximality of human nature causes those who are one with Jesus to have merited whatever He has merited by His suffering; and yet, the difference in degree of merit is preserved, in accordance with the different degree of each [man’s] union with Christ through faith formed by love.*¹⁹⁰

39 How great the poisonousness of this corollary! For it destroys [the doctrine of] the individuality of Christ’s humanity—i.e., [it teaches] that Christ was not an individual man but was universal man. It calls His humanity God—not on the basis of the hypostatic union but on the basis of a very abstract understanding. And it assumes that the being of Christ is the being of each man. From the fact that the human species as a whole [is each man], it assumes that Christ too is each man; and thus each man would be Christ. And what is the most dangerous thing of all: it ascribes Christ’s merit to the maximality of human nature (Christ Himself not freely justifying us, who are the enemy of grace).¹⁹¹ And as much as it can it stifles the justice of Christ. It is not able to say with the prophet: “Because I do not know learning, I will enter into the powers of the Lord; I will be mindful of Your justice alone.”¹⁹² For it ascribes no merit to the justice-of-Christ, from whence comes our every merit. And, furthermore, it states that we have merited what Christ merited. And then it appends [the statement] about love, so that it adds to its iniquity by means of a certain apparent color of religious faith. For the following differ greatly from one another: (1) the specific union of human nature, (2) the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine nature in Christ, and (3) the affectional (*affectualis sive caritativa*) union of the mind with God. About this latter union the apostle in I Corinthians 6 [says]: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”¹⁹³ Being ignorant of this difference of unions, the author of learned ignorance does not prove anything. And thus he so impiously confuses the order not only of natural things but also of the things of grace. For he is ignorant of nature; and he turns from grace unto the counsel of the wicked.

Second corollary: *As united with the divinity, the humanity of Jesus is fully absolute.*¹⁹⁴ *This is evident because in this regard [Jesus’s humanity] was free from time and was beyond time and was incorruptible absolutely and was the temporally contracted truth of the body. [His humanity was] “a sign, an image, and a shadow,” as it were, of the supra-temporal truth of the body. When this humanity was*

*removed through death, Jesus remained—in the resurrection—in a supra-temporal body. And His humanity was inseparably rooted on high in the divine incorruptibility.*¹⁹⁵

40 This corollary is altogether noxious in itself because it destroys [the doctrine of] the true humanity of Christ. For if in accordance with His humanity the man Christ had a soul and human flesh (as the Athanasian Creed states), then how can the humanity of Christ be fully absolute? Nor does the supporting reason remain standing, because the humanity-of-Christ which was assumed by the Word was not free from time. For (by the testimony of the apostle) “when the fullness of time was come,”¹⁹⁶ Christ was sent. Therefore, His humanity was not free from time. Nor was it above time and incorruptible absolutely; for in that case Christ would not have been truly dead. Moreover, in such a supporting reason [this author] denies the truth of Christ’s body¹⁹⁷ and denies the resurrection of His body—[denies them] by universalizing Christ’s humanity. (This universalization was fallaciously suggested to him by his own abstract understanding.) In this way he deprives us of the freely given benefits of Christ which are most graciously exhibited to us in Christ’s temporal humanity.

Third corollary: *Christ and all men have the same humanity, though the numerical distinctness of the individuals remains unconfused.*¹⁹⁸ *This is evident because there is only one indivisible humanity, which is the specific essence of all human beings. Hence, the humanity of all the human beings who—whether temporally before or after Christ—either have existed or will exist has, in Christ, put on immortality, so that after their resurrection they also will be eternally incorruptible.*¹⁹⁹

A remarkable corollary! The first part of it identifies all men individually and implies a universal, real thing multiplied with identity. But this [doctrine] is erroneous because only to the Divine Nature is it befitting to be multiplied hypostatically, or personally, in identity of nature.²⁰⁰ However, the second part of [this] same corollary contradicts the first; i.e., [the corollary teaches] that the humanity of Christ and of all human beings is the same and yet is numerically and unconfusedly distinct.

Fourth corollary: *Each of the blessed having the truth-of-his-own-being preserved, exists in Christ Jesus as Christ; and through Christ [each exists] in God as God.*²⁰¹ *This is evident because “church” speaks a oneness of many [members]—each of whom has his personal truth preserved without confusion of natures or of degrees.*²⁰² *More-*

over, the ecclesiastical union coincides on high with the hypostatic union of the natures in Christ. Furthermore, this latter union coincides with the Absolute Union, which is God.²⁰³ For Christ is faith and love.²⁰⁴ In His faith all true faith is included, and in His love all true love is included—though distinctions of degree always remain.²⁰⁵

41 This corollary assumes (1) that each blessed one is Christ and God and (2) that faith and love are Christ. Moreover, by distinguishing different things in terms of degree, it continually confuses them. Thus, by distinguishing, he confounds—as is typical of someone of learned ignorance. He shows that he does not know anything at all about the different unions of things. Moreover, he speaks most deviantly about the church; and he substantially transforms into the nature of Christ the virtues (in particular, faith and love), which are accidents of the first species of quality.

I do not know whether in my whole lifetime I have ever seen a writer as heinous as this one when it comes to the issue of the divinity and the trinity of the Persons, the issue of the universe of things, the issue of the incarnation of Christ, the issue of the theological virtues, and the issue of the church. Now, whoever says²⁰⁶ that from this learned ignorance he himself is more intensely inflamed with desires is presumably speaking about the infernal inflammation of the indomitable, unbridled tongue and of vain religion—about which James 3 [speaks].²⁰⁷ With all your might flee from him, venerable Father, lest your senses (being seduced by this pseudo-apostle and deceptive writer who transforms himself into an apostle of Christ—seduced as by the cunning Serpent) be corrupted and fall away from the purity and simplicity of faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁰⁸ To His honor and glory I decided thus to write this *Unknown Learning* for your Devout Religiosity. Together with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit He lives as eternally blessed. Amen.²⁰⁹

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae</i>
<i>DI</i>	<i>De Docta Ignorantia</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>De Possesit</i> (text edited by J. Hopkins in <i>PNC</i>)
<i>IL</i>	<i>De Ignota Litteratura</i>
<i>MFCG</i>	<i>Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft</i> (ed. Rudolf Haubst)
<i>NA</i>	<i>De Li Non Aliud</i> (text edited by J. Hopkins in his <i>Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud</i> . Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed. 1987)
<i>NC</i>	<i>Nicolò da Cusa</i> . Florence: Sansoni, 1962. (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Magisterio dell'Università di Padova)
<i>NK</i>	<i>Nikolaus von Kues. Einführung in sein philosophisches Denken</i> . Ed. Klaus Jacobi. Munich: K. Alber, 1979
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J-P. Migne
<i>PNC</i>	J. Hopkins. <i>A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa</i> . Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed. 1986
<i>SHAW</i>	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse</i> . Heidelberg: C. Winter
<i>M</i>	Codex Latinus 190, Mainz, Stadtbibliothek
<i>T</i>	Codex Latinus 228/1467, Trier, Stadtbibliothek
<i>v</i>	E. Vansteenberghe, ed. <i>Le "De Ignota Litteratura" de Jean Wenck de Herrenberg contre Nicolas de Cuse</i> [Vol. 8, Heft 6 (1910) of <i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters</i>]. Münster: Aschendorff, 1912

PRAENOTANDA

1. The English translation of *IL* was made from the new edition of the Latin text, appended to the present volume. The translation of *Ap.* was made from *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, Vol. II, edited by Raymond Klibansky (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1932). A number of references in the notes have also been adapted from this volume.
2. All references to Nicholas's works are to the Latin texts—specifically to the following texts in the following editions:
 - A. Heidelberg Academy Edition: *De Coniecturis*, *De Deo Abscondito*, *De Quaerendo Deum*, *De Filiatione Dei*, *De Dato Patris Luminum*, *Apolo-gia Doctae Ignorantiae*, *Idiota* (1983 edition) *de Sapientia*, *de Mente*, *de Staticis Experimentis*, *De Pace Fidei*, *De Venatione Sapientiae*.
 - B. Heidelberg Academy Editions as found in the Latin-German edition of Felix Meiner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia*, *De Beryllo*.
 - C. Banning Press Editions: *De Visione Dei*, *De Possest*, *De Li Non Aliud*.
 - D. Strasburg Edition as reprinted by W. de Gruyter: all remaining Cusanus works, unless specified explicitly as Paris Edition.

For some treatises the reference indicates book and chapter; for others, margin number and line; for still others, page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. For example, “*DI* II, 6 (125:19-20)” indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19 and 20.

3. The margin numbers appearing in the translation of *Ap.* correspond to the page-numbers in Vol. II of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*. And the margin numbers in the translation of *IL* correspond to the margin numbers in the new edition of the Latin text; they also correspond to the page numbers in the earlier edition published by E. Vansteenberghe. Insofar as possible the line lengths have also been made to correspond, so that all references to page and line of Vansteenberghe's edition can be treated as references to section and line of the new edition.
4. References to Aristotle's works include, in parentheses, the standard Bekker numbers as indicated in the Loeb Library editions of the Greek texts. However, since the Loeb Library volumes have more lines per Bekker page than do the Bekker texts themselves, an improvisation was necessary in citing. Accordingly, a reference such as “*De Anima* 2 (423^a23-24.2)” is meant to indicate not only lines 23 and 24 in the Loeb version but also the two lines following line 24 (both of which precede line 25 as marked in the Loeb margin).
5. Any Latin words inserted into the English translations for purposes of clarification are placed in parentheses—except that nouns whose case has been changed to the nominative are bracketed.
6. References to the Psalms are to the Douay version (and, in parentheses, to the King James' version).
7. In the Latin text of *IL*, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (except for prop-

er names) are editorialized. In particular, the references to Scripture are editorialized.

NOTES

1. This work was composed sometime during 1442-1443. See Rudolf Haubst, *Studien zu Nikolaus von Kues und Johannes Wenck* [Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, 38 (1955)], p. 99.

2. John of Gelnhausen was a member of the Council of Basel, as was John Wenck.

3. Ps. 70:16 (71:16). The Douay and the King James versions are quite different here.

4. Rom. 10: 3.

5. Luke 10:35.

6. Ecclesiasticus 24:3 1.

7. Ps. 45:11 (46: 10).

8. Ps. 45:10 (46:9).

9. Matt. 20:6.

10. Rom. 1:2 1.

11. Wenck's text has "*humanitus*", Nicholas's "*humaniter*".

12. See Nicholas's *Letter to Cardinal Julian* [DI III (263:7-9)].

13. I John 4: 1.

14. II Cor. 11: 13.

15. Mark 1: 15.

16. John 10:35.

17. Gal. 1: 8.

18. I Cor. 13:12.

19. Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* V, 4 has "Omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui uim sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem" (H.F. Stewart-E.K. Rand edition). N.B. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, 75, 5. Cf. *Liber de Causis*, end of section 9 (p. 174 of Bardenhewer's edition, cited fully in n. 135 below).

20. Aristotle, *De Anima* III, 2 (425 b 19-26).

21. *Letter to Cardinal Julian* [DI III (264:1-3)].

22. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 4 (1006^b19f.). Cf. IV, 3 (1005^b19-20).

23. This sentence and the previous one are cited from *Letter to Cardinal Julian* [DI III (264:4-9)]. Wenck writes "*incrementum*", but the better mss. of Nicholas's text have "*crementum*".

24. DI I, 10 (27:11-15).

25. DI I, Prologue (1: 19-23).

26. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, opening sentence.

27. *Ibid.*, I, 2 (982^b12-14).

28. DI I, 1 (2:3-9).

29. See n. 6 of the notes to Book One of *DI*, in my *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance*.

30. DI I, 1 (2:16-17).

31. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 9 (992 b 31-32).

32. These two sentences are a paraphrase of *DI I*, 1 (2:17-21).
33. Isa. 29:12. Cf. verse 11.
34. Ps. 70:15-16 (71:15-16). See the comment in n. 3 above.
35. Isa. 29:14.
36. Isa. 29:15.
37. Eph. 5:8.
38. Rom. 10:2.
39. See the title of *DI I*, 1.
40. *DI I*, 17 (51:7-9).
41. *DI I*, 1 (3:2-6); II, 2 (102:4-5).
42. *DI I*, 4 (11:7-9). Cf. I, 3 (9:5-7).
43. Cf. *DI I*, 12 (33:14-15).
44. *DI I*, 13 (33:16). Cf. the title of *DI I*, 4.
45. *DI I*, 2 (8:5-7).
46. *DI I*, 4 (11:4-7).
47. Wisd. 13:5.
48. Ps. 91:5 (92:4).
49. Ps. 150:1 (150:1).
50. A *conclusio* is a thesis which has a *probatio* (supporting reason) and, possibly, a *correlarium*. The *probatio* usually begins with the word “*patet*”. In Wenck’s citations from Nicholas’s text I have italicized the words “this is evident,” even though “*patet*” is Wenck’s word more than it is Nicholas’s.
51. Nicholas nowhere says this. In *Ap.* he repudiates it. But note such passages as *DI I*, 4 (12:4-7), which undoubtedly confused Wenck.
52. *DI I*, 4 (11:7-8, 12:12).
53. *DI I*, 2 (5:8,11).
54. *DI I*, 24 (74:10-75:2). where Nicholas alludes to Pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus’s *Asclepius* 20 [*Corpus Hermeticum*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Société d’Edition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1945), p. 321, especially lines 7-9 of the Latin text, ed. A. D. Nock]. Also note Proposition 13 of his *Book of Twenty-four Philosophers* [Clemens Baeurnker, ed., “Das pseudo-hermetische ‘Buch der vierundzwanzig Meister’ (Liber XXIV philosophorum). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Neupythagoreismus und Neuplatonismus im Mittelalter,” in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, 25 (1928), 194-214].
55. *DI I*, 24 (75:2-5; 74:8-12).
56. *Das Buch der göttlichen Tröstung*, written either (as Wenck believes) for Elsbeth, wife of King Albert of Hungary, or for Agnes, their daughter. The Latin words with which the work begins are taken from II Cor. 1:3. For the German text see *Meister Eckharts Buch der göttlichen Tröstung und von dem edlen Menschen (liber Benedictus)*, ed. Philipp Strauch [in *Kleine Texte für theologische und philologische Vorlesungen und Übungen*, ed. Hans Lietzmann (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber’s, 1910), No. 55]. For an English version see “The Book of Comfort” in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper and Row Torchbooks, 1941), pp. 43-73.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 9, lines 14-19 (English translation, pp. 45-46).
58. *Eine lateinische Rechtfertigungsschrift des Meister Eckhart*, ed. A. Daniels [*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, 23 (1923)], p. 33, lines

27-37. See Meister Eckhart. *Die deutschen Werke*, Vol. I: *Meister Eckharts Predigten*. Ed. and trans. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958). Sermon 2: "Intravit Jesus in quoddam castellum, etc." (Luke 10:38), section 5, pp. 44-45 = *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, *op. cit.*, p. 211).

59. Wenck's text has "maximitate absoluta" (26:1-2). Nicholas's recapitulation has "in maximitate absoluta" (*Ap.* 25:14).

60. *DI I*, 2 (6:1-2); *I*, 6 (15: 12-13, 17-18).

61. See Meister Eckhart. *Die lateinischen Werke*, Vol. I: *Prologi. Expositio Libri Genesis. Liber Parabolarum Genesis*. Ed. and trans. Konrad Weiss (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1964), p. 38 [*Prologus Generalis*].

62. *Ibid.*, p. 50 [*Expositio libri Genesis*, cap. 1, v. 1].

63. *Wisd.* 11:21-23. Where I have used ellipses, Wenck has inserted the parenthetical clause: " 'antelucanus' is a single word which means 'before existing light'; for *lucanus* is the morning brightness."

64. *Heb.* 1: 3.

65. *DI I*, 2 (6:6-8).

66., *DI II*, 10 (153:1-4), to which Wenck is alluding, has "enfolding" ("compliatio") instead of "unfolding" ("explicatio"). See the comment in n. 97 below.

67. *DI I*, 1 (2:16-17; 3:2-3); *I*, 3 (title). Cf. Aristotle, *Physics I*, 4 (187^b9-13).

68. See *DI I*, 17 (51: 7-9) and *I*. 4 (title). By "earlier" Wenck indicates that he has earlier alluded to these passages. See n. 40 and n. 44 above.

69. Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Book I, Distinctio 3 (*PL* 192:529-530).

70. *DI I*, 3 (9:14-15).

71. *DI I*, 3 (9:10-13; 10:9-13).

72. Aristotle, *Categories* 6 (6^a28-36); 8 (11^a17-18).

73. Aristotle, *De Caelo*. Cf. *I*, 6 (274^a19.2); *I*, 7 (275^b 22-24); *I*, 12 (283^a 7-9.1).

74. Cf. Boethius, *Commentaria in Porphyrium a se translatum* (*PL* 64:101-102).

75. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics X*, 4-5 (e.g., 1055^a4.2 & 1056^a14.2), not *Physics I*.

76. For the list and location of Wenck's unpublished mss. see Klaus D. Kuhnekath, *Die Philosophie des Johannes Wenck von Herrenberg im Vergleich zu den Lehren des Nikolaus von Kues* (Cologne: University of Cologne Ph.D. dissertation ,1975).

77. *DI I*, 3 (10:1-2; 9:16-17).

78. See, e. g., *De Anima III*, 7 (431^a17-18) and *III*, 4 (429^a15-18).

79. *DI I*, 3 (10:18-19).

80. *DI I*, 3 (10:6-8).

81. Two paragraphs earlier.

82. Aristotle, *De Anima III*, 4 (429^a27-30).

83. At 21:9 Wenck cites *I Cor.* 13:12, a verse which indicates that a purer knowledge is reserved for the future state. See also 24:9-10 and 27:20-23.

84. See the first corollary of thesis four. Also see Wenck's citation at 23:26 - 24:2.

85. Aristotle, *De Anima III*, 4 (429^a15-17).

86. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics I*, 2 (71^b9.1 - 15, 30-32).

87. *DI I*, 4 (12:18-25).

88. *DI I*, 4 (11:13-15; 12:1-5).

89. At the beginning of *IL* 22. See n. 22 above.

90. *DI I*, 4 (12:7-8).
91. *DI I*, 4 (12:10-11).
92. *DI I*, 11 (30:7-17). Wenck's words "...cum similitudo exemplaris sit hoc ipsum quod exemplar in unitate naturae" misconstrue Nicholas's text. Wenck fails to recognize that Nicholas's expression "Maximal Image" refers not to the universe (which Nicholas calls a *maximum* and which he alludes to at the outset of *DI I*, 11) but to the Son of God, who is the Image of the Father, according to Scripture (Col. 1:15).
93. Meister Eckhart. *Die deutschen Werke*. Vol. I: *Meister Eckharts Predigten*. Ed. and trans. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958). Sermon 6: "*Iusti vivent in aeternum*" (Wisd. 5:16), pp. 109-110 (=Meister Eckhart: *A Modern Translation*, *op. cit.*, p. 181).
94. *DI I*, 12 (33:6-7).
95. *DI I*, 12 (33:4-6). Regarding the inference that God is undifferentiated and precise, see such passages as I, 4 (12:4-7); I, 16 (45: 16-17).
96. I John 3:2.
97. Wenck writes: "*Nostra ignorantia incomprehensibiliter docebit*" But *DI I*, 12 (33:16) has: "... *nostra ignorantia incomprehensibiliter docebitur*" This misconstrual is so gross as to suggest that Wenck is working with a copy of *DI* which is here inaccurate.
98. *DI I*, 12 (33:16-18).
99. *DI I*, 12 (33:14-15). Wenck here betrays a total misunderstanding of Nicholas's text. See n. 97 above.
100. Here, as at 34:2, Wenck uses "*doctrina*" and "*scientia*" interchangeably.
101. *DI I*, 1 (4:3-4; 2:16-18).
102. I Cor. 2:2.
103. Isa. 29:11-12. Cf. Wenck's use of these verses in discussing his title (*IL* 23:10).
104. Ecclesiastes 1: 18.
105. Ecclesiasticus 24:29..
106. Aristotle., *Physics* I. 9 (192^a17-19).
107. "*Abgescheiden leben.*" See Eduard Schaefer. *Meister Eckeharts Traktat "von Abegescheidenheit."* *Untersuchung und Textneuausgabe* [Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1955 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Saarland)]. Also see *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-91. At *Ap.* 31:15 Nicholas replaces "*abgescheiden leben*" by "*abstracta vita*".
108. Ps. 45:11 (46: 10).
109. *Ibid.*
110. *DI I*, 16 (42:8-10).
111. *DI I*, 16 (42:11-14).
112. *DI I*, 16 (43:6-7).
113. Aristotle, *Physics* I, 2 (185^a12-13).
114. Ps. 45:11 (46: 10).
115. See the reference given in n. 23 above.
116. John 5:39.
117. I Pet 2:2.
118. Matt. 22:29.

119. Gal. 5:20.
 120. I Cor. 1:25.
 121. John 1:45.
 122. *DI I*, 16 (43:13-16).
 123. *DI I*, 17 (51:7-8). Cf. *I*, 23 (73:3).
 124. John 1:3.
 125. *DI I*, 16 (44:7-8). Nicholas is citing Moses Maimonides' view, with which he here agrees.
 126. Wenck seems to have invented this *probatio*.
 127. *DI I*, 16 (46:10-12).
 128. *DI I*, 16 (46:12-13).
 129. Aristotle, *Metaphysics X*, 1 (1052^b18-19). Cf. *DI II*, 17 (47:12-14). 130.
DI I, 19 (57:11-20).
 131. *DI I*, 19 (57:16-17 & 21
 132. *DI I* 23 (71:1-3).
 133. See n. 100 above.
 134. Ecclesiasticus 36:27.
 135. *Liber de Causis*, section 19. 1 [*Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift Ueber das reine Gute bekannt unter dem Namen Liber de causis*, ed. Otto Bardenhewer (Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1882), p. 18 1, lines 7-8. Reprinted Frankfurt: Minerva GmbH, n.d.]
 136. *DI I*, 19 (58:3-4). Wenck's text reads "*anguli aut trianguli*", though Nicholas writes "*anguli trianguli*". Wenck's extract is garbled; for according to Nicholas's account, the angles are in the maximum triangle. not in the unqualifiedly Maximum. Wenck here confuses Nicholas's mathematical illustration with the claims about the unqualifiedly Maximum.
 137. *DI I*, 19 (58:4-5. 6-8). 1, 16 (43:3-4).
 138. Heb. 13:9.
 139. *DI I*, 21 (63:10-11).
 140. *DI I*, 21 (63:11-14).
 141. *DI I*, 26 (87:7-11).
 142. *DI I*, 22 (67:6-9. 69:1-3).
 143. *DI I*. 22 (69:3-4. 7, 10-11).
 144. *DI I*, 24 (75:4-10).
 145. *DI II*, 3 (106:1-5).
 146. *DI I*. 24 (80:17-18).
 147. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 9 (19^a29.3 -32).
 148. *DI II*, 2 (101:12-13, 6-7).
 149. *DI II*, 2 (102:1-2).
 150. *DI II*, 3 (107:1).
 151. *DI II*, 3 (107:11-12).
 152. *DI II*, 3 (108: 1-2. 107:6-. 106:11-12).
 153. Ps. 15:2 (16-2).
 154. Ecclesiastes 1:7.
 155. *DI II*, 3 (110:11 - 12).
 156. *DI II*, 3 (110:12-13).
 157. Cf. *DI II*, 3 (110:12-13) with 11, 3 (111:15-22).

158. I.e., to-be-in-no-respect is to-be-nothing.
159. *DI* II, 4 (115:5-6).
160. *DI* II, 4 (115:6-7).
161. *DI* II, 4 (115:13-14).
162. *DI* II, 4 (115:16-17, 116:21).
163. *DI* II, 5 (118: 15-17).
164. *DI* II, 5 (118:14-15).
165. *DI* II, 4 (115:17-19).
166. *DI* II, 9 (143:6-7). Nicholas attributes this view to the Platonists. Wenck has no good reason for believing that Nicholas endorses it.
167. *DI* II, 9 (143:7-8).
168. *DI* II, 9 (145:13-14).
169. I.e., all motions, which are the unfolding of rest. *DI* II, 10 (155:3-4). II, 3 (106:2-3).
170. I.e., as a circle is the unfolding of a center. *DI* II, 9 (145:14).
171. Aristotle. *Physics* VIII, 10 (267^a22 - 267^b2).
172. *DI* II, 11 (157:23-26). Cusa's text reads: "*Qui est simul omnium circumferentia infinita.*"
173. *DI* II, 11 (157:22-23).
174. *DI* II, 12 (166:1. 167:8-9).
175. *DI* II, 13, (177:10-17).
176. *DI* II, 13 (177:11). 1 John 1:5.
177. *DI* III, 2 (190:9-13).
178. *DI* III, 2 (191:1-3).
179. *DI* III, 2 (192:6-7, 191:13-14).
180. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX. E.g., IX. 3 (1047^a19f.).
181. *DI* III, 2 (191:8-11, 194:5-6).
182. *DI* III, 2 (193:2-3).
183. *DI* III, 9 (233:11-12).
184. *DI* III, 9 (233:12-13. 17-18).
185. Rev. 3:17-18.
186. John 1:14. See Augustine *On the Gospel of John* 2.16 (*PL* 35:1395).
187. *DI* III, 4 (204:20-22). Whereas Werick's text has "*cum humanitate Ihesu maximi*", Nicholas's has "*cum humanitate Jesu maxima*".
188. This summary of the *probatio* distorts Nicholas's reasoning. *DI* III, 4 (204:13-19 & 22-23).
189. *DI* III, 6 (219:2-8).
190. *DI* III, 6 (219:10-14).
191. Cf. Rom. 5:10. Phil. 3:18.
192. Ps. 70:15-16 (71:15-16). See the comment in n. 3 above.
193. I Cor. 6:17.
194. *DI* III, 7 (225:13-14).
195. *DI* III 7 (225:20-21: 226:2-4. 8-13).
196. Gal. 4:4.
197. I.e., denies that Christ had a real body.
198. *DI* III, 8 (227:15-16).
199. *DI* III, 8 (227:12-13. 17-22).

200. I.e., to be more than one person, each having one and the same nature.
201. *DI* III, 12 (260: 12-14).
202. *DI* III, 12 (261:1-3).
203. *DI* III, 12 (262:4-7).
204. *DI* III, 12 (257:9-10).
205. *DI* III, 12 (254:20-22).
206. *Letter to Cardinal Julian* [*DI* III (264:7-9)].
207. James 3:6.
208. II Cor. 11:3 &13.
209. The *explicit* reads: "And this is the end to what was written cursorily at Heidelberg." I opt for the transcription "*cursorie*" (rather than "*cursoriae*"): and I take it to mean "cursorily" rather than to be an allusion to the cursory lessons at the University of Heidelberg. Cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Mente* 7 (106:15-16): "*Haec autem nunc sic dixerim cursorie et rustice.*" Cf. *ibid.*, 15 (160: 1): "*Haec sic cursim dicta ab idiota grate recipito.*"