CHAPTER THREE

NICHOLAS OF CUSA
AND FUNCTIONALIST ONTOLOGY

In Volume One of his Substanz, System, Struktur¹ Heinrich Rombach promotes the view that Nicholas of Cusa is "the Aristotle of modern thought."² This epithet seems fitting, thinks Rombach, because Nicholas is the initiator of functionalist ontology, in the modern sense of the word. According to Rombach, Nicholas not only propounds functionalism but also recognizes that in doing so he is propounding something new; nevertheless, Nicholas is said not to formulate an explicit concept thereof.³ Indeed, Nicholas, we are told, adheres to three different ontologies, without ever fully reconciling their differences: an ontology of substances, an ontology of functions, and an ontology of identity.⁴ The first of these considers objects not only as they present themselves to us in daily life but also as they are apprehended scientifically and philosophically within, say, the Aristotelian tradition. The second considers objects to be only moments of the whole and not to have any existence of their own—i.e., not to have any substantial existence. The third looks beyond substances and beyond moments-of-the-whole and attempts to grasp Being itself, wherein there is no plurality or differentiation whatsoever. These three ontologies, continues Rombach, cannot be derived from one another and do not lead into one another. Moreover, they are not supplementary to one another; for the first has nothing of value to offer to the second, and the second does not contribute anything to the third. Yet, all
three are operative in Nicholas's philosophy. And they include propositions which, if directly compared, are contradictory. However, thinks Rombach, if the ontologies are kept apart, their respective propositions may be regarded as mutually exclusive ways of referring to the same reality. For example, Nicholas states that things are different from God; but he also states that things are not different from God. Similarly, he teaches that the world is so radically separate from God that it is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself; but he also teaches that everything which is is God, that outside of God there is nothing.5

Nicholas’s lack of explicitness regarding these different ontologies seems to Rombach to explain why previous interpreters overlooked the functionalist dimension of Nicholas’s metaphysics.6 This is the dimension upon which Rombach concentrates. He also discusses the dimension of identity but leaves undeveloped the dimension of substance.

Section I, below, summarizes Rombach’s understanding of Nicholas’s ontology—concentrating, as does he, on functionalism; Section II then challenges this understanding; and Section III proceeds to offer an interpretive restatement of DI II, 4 and 5.

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1.1. Functionalism. Ontologically speaking, “functionalism” is a view that conveys a twofold idea: (1) negatively, that no finite thing is a substance, having some measure of relatively independent being; and (2) positively, that each finite thing is constituted only by its system of relationships to every other finite thing.7 In other words, each thing is only what it determines other things to be and what it is determined by them to be.8 Thus, each thing is identical with the whole; and no thing is itself.9 Moreover, no thing could exist alone; for a thing’s being consists in its being different from something else, so that its being is only its relationality.10 Expressed more paradoxically: each thing is the whole of what it is not—i.e., of what is other than it.11 But were there not anything other than it, it too would be nothing, for it would be only possibility.12 Since things are not substances,13 they do not have essences;14 or better, all essences are only the one and only essence of all things.15 Thus, whatever happens anywhere is a function of the whole,16 so that from a single fact the state of the world can in principle be read off. For example, if someone knew everything about the moon at the present moment, then he would also know everything about the state of the world at this moment. Or better, someone could not know the former without also knowing the latter, for everything which has hitherto occurred has contributed to the present state of the moon and expresses itself in and through the moon. Similarly, an observer with absolutely sharp discriminatory powers could infer the future state of the world from the present stage of the moon.17 In sum, not only does the state of the world express itself in and through the moon, but the moon is a state of the world as a whole. Whatever can be determined regarding the moon—its shape, its mass, its state of energy and of motion—is determined and determinable only through the whole of the system. And if the world-system is expressed in a determinate state, then only therein resides the precise definition of, say, the moon’s constitution. Therefore, the world is in the moon moon and in the sun sun.18

1.2. God and finite things in the world. Functionalism, as exhibited above, was initiated by Nicholas of Cusa in DI. But we need to go beyond DI to glimpse clearly what Nicholas regards as the basic ontological distinction between God and finite things. For this distinction occurs most vividly in the dialogues De Possest and De Li Non Alliud. In the latter we are reminded that each finite thing in the world is other than all others, that each manifests what it is by contrast with the others which it is not;19 its very
being is relationality. God, however, who is infinite, is incomparable with finite things. For example, He is not greater than they are or lesser than they are; nor is He other than they are. Since by virtue of transcending the entire domain of comparison with finite beings God cannot be other, Nicholas prefers, above all other names for God, the name "Not-other." In the former dialogue, i.e., De Possess, we are told that God is the actuality of all possibility, whereas in finite things actuality and possibility are always distinct. Now, precisely because God is actually all that which He can be, He cannot be other than He is, whereas a finite thing is never all that which it can be, and hence it can always be other than it actually is. This fundamental ontological distinction between God as non-aliud and the creation as aliud is already implicit in DL 1.3.

1.3. The world and finite things in the world. Nicholas refers to the world as a finite infinity. It is unlimited because it is without boundaries and because there is no point at which it necessarily comes to a spatial end; accordingly, it can always be thought to be greater. Yet, from the viewpoint of an absolute observer, the world is limited; indeed, it cannot outdistance the measure of its possibility, or matter, which is finite. So although with reference to God's power, which is infinite, the world can be thought to be greater than it is, nevertheless with reference to its resisting possibility, or matter, which is finite. Moreover, the world is not like a being; nor is it the mere sum of all beings. It has no location. It is not something that exists along side of beings or even above them; it is not anything which can enter into comparative relations with them. Instead, the world must be understood as, so to speak, "sitting" amid beings as the precise definition of their what and their that. For between the world and a being in the world there exists absolutely no difference, since a being is the contracted actualization of the world-system at a given point in this system. The individual thing is the whole because it brings to expression, in a determinate moment, the state of the whole world. Indeed, its content is the world: "In each creature the universe is that very creature . . . and each thing receives all things in such way that in that thing the universe is contractedly that thing . . . ." Thus, the universe is contracted quiddity, which is contracted in one way in the sun and in another way in the moon. Although the universe is not the sun and not the moon, nevertheless in the sun it is the sun, and in the moon it is the moon. Or, to generalize the point: "In a stone all things are stone; in a vegetative soul, vegetative soul; in life, life; in the senses, the senses; in sight, sight; in hearing, hearing; in imagination, imagination; in reason, reason; in intellect, intellect; in God, God." Accordingly, each thing is only the world itself—in a contracted manner.

Insofar as the world is the particular thing and the particular thing has as its essence nothing other than the world itself, everything is bound up with everything, each thing is contained in the other: quodlibet in quodlibet. What is present in each thing is not the plurality of things but the universe, which contains everything in an inseparable way and which is each thing. The universe is prior to the plurality of things: "omnia praecedet [sic] quodlibet, plura non praecedunt quodlibet." Therefore, in a strict and basic sense all things are the same: viz., the world. There is nothing new under the sun and nothing that is different from what exists elsewhere. All essences are only the one and only essence of all things: "omnes essentiae sunt ipsa omnium essentia." Fundamentally, then, all things contain the same thing and differ from one another only from the point of view of their relation to one another. In the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings: there is only the world as a single creature.

As a functionalist, Nicholas does not regard the universe as a cosmos. For cosmos has to do with an ordering of things which already exist in a relatively independent manner, so that they can be brought into harmony from out
of an initial chaos. Thus, cosmos and chaos are antithetical notions: the less chaos, the more cosmos; the less cosmos, the more chaos. But we have already seen that Nicholas's functionalist ontology is incompatible with the conception of substances—i.e., the conception of things which exist for themselves with relatively independent being and which admit of a subsequent global ordering. Nicholas does not teach that creation occurred successively—one thing after another and each thing for itself; instead, he teaches that everything was created at once. So, on Nicholas's functionalist view, the world both is and is not each individual thing. On the one hand, the world is the presupposition of individual things; and, on the other, the world is not possible without individual things and does not precede them. The conceptual antithesis to world is neither not-world nor chaos; rather, on functionalist theory, there is no conceptual antithesis to world.

1.4. God and the world. Nicholas's metaphysics is not pantheistic, for it posits the most radical distinction between God and the world: viz., that God exists of Himself and for Himself, whereas the world can never exist of and for itself. To be sure, God is everything in the world; but He is all things only through the mediation of the universe, says Nicholas. Only if God were said to be immediately identical with each respective thing would Nicholas be proposing a pantheistic doctrine. Viewed relationally, each thing is that which it itself is in contradistinction to all others. But when each thing is viewed as a representation of the whole world and as an embodiment of the one Divine Essence, then the Divine and Absolute Essence shows forth, and the inmost nucleus of the thing discloses itself as God Himself. Now, the relational aspect of a thing cannot be eliminated, because it is posited with the world itself. The relational aspect protects the individual and preserves its reality, even though the individual thing has the Divine Essence itself as its content. Rain remains rain and is, in all its particular features, just what it is for the maintenance of the earth and of life on the earth. It demonstrates its reality in the fruitfulness of the fields, in the thirst of creatures, in the power of rivers and streams—even though in the rain, viewed absolutely, God Himself is manifest in transcendence of the world.

Not only is God the content of the world, He is also—because of the fact that the world is the actual what of each thing—the inmost essence of each thing: omnium essentiarum simplicissima essentia. If we consider a being as it differs from other beings—i.e., consider it in its contracted and separate quiddity—we attain only its contracted essence, quiditas contracta. However, if we consider it in its absolute aspect—i.e., with reference to the oneness of all beings and to the unchangeable Essence—there springs forth the quiditas absoluta, which is identical with the Essence of God Himself. Now, the Absolute Essence is this thing much better than this thing is itself. God is this pond more than this pond is itself, as Cusa says. God is a thing "precisely," whereas this thing is only approximately itself—a disorderly copy of itself. Because God is the precise Essence of each thing, He is present in everything. He is the Heart of all things; He is the Element, and the final Oneness, of which everything consists. We must take this identity of the essences of God and creatures in a very narrow sense. It means not only that in creatures there is contained nothing other than God Himself but also that in God there is contained nothing other than what any given determinate being contains. The sun contains the entire essence of God. Cusa advances from the essential content of the sun to the essential content of God only because of the fact that he posits the sun's unchanged content absolutely instead of relatively. Since the content of the sun is everything—i.e., everything apart from any negation—we can also consider the sun in absolute isolation and, accordingly, without the viewpoint of relation; and in this way we have before us entitas absoluta, i.e., God.

So in Nicholas of Cusa we find a new—i.e., a
the doctrine of functionalism.

In this respect, then, Rombach mistranslates the sentence. But even worse, he appears to misinterpret what he has translated; for he seems to take "ipsa omnium essentia" to refer to the universe, when, in fact, it refers to God. 49 But perhaps worst of all, Rombach does not even have the Latin text right, since he has "sunt" instead of "sicur." When we look to see whether "sunt" is a simple misprint, we discover that it is not, that Rombach is following the reading in the Paris edition (1514) rather than the reading in the critical edition published by the Heidelberg Academy (Vol. I, 1932). Furthermore, Rombach does not even document the Latin citation; consequently, a reader must manage somehow or other to locate it for himself in Nicholas's texts. Nor does Rombach anywhere call attention to the fact that this reading differs from the reading in the critical edition. Finally, when we examine the Latin text and context, we recognize that the Paris edition's word "sunt" is not merely a less preferable reading but is, indeed, a mistaken one.

Let us take another example from the same page in Rombach (p. 165): "Das All ist frieher und eigentlicher und ursprünglicher als die Vielheit der Dinge: 'omnia praecedent [sic] quodlibet, plura non praecedent quodlibet.'" Once again, Rombach gives no documentation. But he is referring to DI 11,5 (117:15-17): "Si igitur omnia sunt in omnibus, omnia videntur quodlibet praecedere. Non igitur omnia sunt plura, quoniam pluralitas non praecedet quodlibet." Rombach has elided and revised Nicholas's text; yet, he does not indicate any elision or revision but prefers to convey the impression that he is quoting the Latin exactly. Moreover, his translation adds an idea not found in the Latin: viz., the idea that das All ist eigentlicher als die Vielheit der Dinge.

Other—less important—examples of Rombach's unreliability are his translation of "consequenter" and "ex consequenti" by "folgerichtig" and "mitfolgend," in a context where they should be translated by a temporal adverb. 50 Or again, the Latin text which he reproduces in footnote 21 on pp. 161-162 contains "que" instead of "quae" and is cited as DI 1, 2 instead of as II, 1.
All in all, Rombach's handling of Nicholas's texts is exceedingly loose. And this looseness goes a long way toward explaining how he could possibly "find" functionalism therein.

2.2. Other outright errors. On p. 152, note 5 Rombach attempts to justify his choice of "Not-other" as that characterization of God which is the most important one for Nicholas of Cusa: "If we prefer this characterization of God above all others, even though it was found by Cusa only late (1462), the reason is that it is the one which best characterizes his thought. 'Non reperitur in alio aliquo clarius, quam in non alius.' De ven. sap. ch. 14." But Rombach is engaging in special pleading. For in Nicholas's very last treatise, viz., De Apice Theoriae (1464), we find: "Videbis infra, posse ipsum, quo nihil potensius nec prius nec melius esse potest, longe aptius nominare illud sine quo nihil quicquam potest nec esse nec vivere nec intelligere quam posses aut alius quodcumque vocabulum. Sive enim nominari potest, utique posse ipsum, quo nihil perfectius esse potest, melius ipsum nominabit. Nec alius clarior, verius aut facilius nomen dabile credo." Here Nicholas makes it clear that, as a name for God, he now prefers "Possibility itself" to "Not-other."

On p. 172 Rombach maintains that, for Nicholas, all numbers are parts (Teile) of oneness. Yet, Rombach does not document this claim. Moreover, he could not document it even if he wanted to, for Nicholas nowhere advances it. Finally, even to suppose that Nicholas could consider numbers to be parts of oneness is to misconstrue completely the doctrines of enfolding and unfolding. Rombach's confusion about this topic underlies his concomitant confusion—which we shall examine later—concerning the topic of God and the world. For if God is to finite things as oneness is to numbers, and if numbers are parts of oneness, then things are parts of God.

On p. 172 Rombach also goes on to affirm, still in the name of Nicholas: "Now, insofar as everything is in God, God is—when considered in terms of everything—the Absolute Maximum (maximum absolutum). And insofar as (1) He is present in everything and (2) nothing can be so small that it would not contain Him as a whole, God is likewise the Minimum (minimum absolutum)." Once again, we may note that Rombach does not document this line of reasoning. And once again we may say that he could not document it even if he wanted to, for Nicholas nowhere reasons in this way. Except in a symbolic sense, Nicholas does not think that God can be comparatively considered in terms of anything—not even in terms of everything. Moreover, even if God were so measurable, or comparable, His being all things would not ipso facto suffice either for His being—or for our inferring—that He is Absolute Maximum (as contrasted with de facto maximum). Furthermore, Nicholas does not reason that God is Absolute Minimum as nothing can be so small that it would not contain Him. And, in any event, "contains" is the wrong word, since God is present in things in such way as not to be contained by them. Finally, even to suppose that Nicholas could reason in the foregoing manner is to misapprehend completely his understanding of Absolute Maximality and Absolute Minimality.

Elsewhere Rombach observes, with reference to Nicholas's concept of world:

God "harmonized the relations of the parts mutually and in every detail (ita proportionabiliter partium ad invicem proportionem constituit), [so] that everywhere the movement of the parts leads to the whole (ut in qualibet sit motus partium ad totum)" (DI II, 13).—This is perhaps the clearest definition of function in the Cusan texts.

But this is not a definition—and a fortiori not a definition of function.

A bit later (p. 210) Rombach interprets Nicholas's doctrine of explicatio (i.e., unfolding)—a doctrine which we have already seen Rombach not to comprehend—by affirming: "Through explication nothing is changed—or increased." This statement—at the very least—is mislead-
ing. For in the case of the world (though not in the case of numbers or of the infinite line) unfolding is the same thing as emanation, where emanation signifies creation but does not connote temporal stages. To view things as created is to view them as no longer enfolded in God—i.e., to view their ontological status as changed.

On p. 225 Rombach makes the astounding assertion that "the connection between functionalism and Christian theology is so fundamental that the one necessitates the other." But this statement is false both historically and conceptually.

2.3. Misapplications of Nicholas's texts. Just as Rombach is careless in his citing and translating of Nicholas's texts, so he is careless in his use of Nicholas's texts. For example, he appeals to De Li Non Aliud 10 to justify the following view, which he purports to find in DI: "Fundamentally, all things contain the same thing: only as they are considered in relation to one another are they different from one another. In the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings but only the world as a single creature" (p. 165). But in DI Nicholas nowhere teaches that in God's sight there is no plurality of creatures. Rombach seems to elicit this view solely from Di Li Non Aliud 10 (39:4-11), which is the only passage he refers to:

Therefore, when I look at things, beholding their essences: since things exist in accordance with their essences, then when I behold these essences through the understanding prior to [the things' existence], I maintain that they are different from one another. But when I view them above the understanding and prior to other, I do not see different essences but see no other than the simple Form of the essences which I am contemplating in these things. And I call this Form Not-other or the Essence of essences, since it is whatever is observed in all the essences.

But this passage does not make the points "elicited" by Rombach. First of all, it has nothing to do with whether or not God beholds the world as a multiplicity. Secondly, Nicholas is maintaining that as the essences exist in God they are God and therefore are not a plurality. Since he is talking about them insofar as they precede otherness, he is talking about them with reference to their state of enfoldedness, ontologically prior to their creation. Thirdly, the statement "Not-other is whatever is observed in all the essences" does not mean that fundamentally all things contain the same thing; in Nicholas's last sentence the Latin equivalent of the word "contain" does not at all appear. Rather, the statement is to be understood along the following lines: Not-other is whatever is observed in all the essences because it is the Cause of the essences' being what they are; thus, too, Not-other defines all things, since each thing is not other than itself, so that Not-other is in it. Fourthly, we should notice that even in De Li Non Aliud, which dates more than twenty years after DI, Nicholas is still talking about the essences of things. Now, Rombach contends that "for functionalism 'essence' is no longer a meaningful word" (p. 213). But instead of drawing the conclusion that Nicholas is not a functionalist, he prefers to allege that Nicholas did not fully work out his functionalism, that he had the idea of functionalism but not the concept, that he had three separate ontologies.

Similarly, Rombach's attempt to connect DI with De Possest leads him to misconstrue the latter. Let us reconsider the following statement of his:

We must take this identity of the essences of God and creatures in a very narrow sense. It means not only that in creatures there is contained nothing other than God Himself but also that in God there is contained nothing other than what any given determinate being contains. The sun contains the entire essence of God. Cusa advances from the essential content of the sun to the essential content of God only because of the fact that he posits the sun's unchanged content absolutely instead of relatively. Since the content of the sun is everything—i.e., everything apart from any negation—we can also consider the sun in absolute isolation and, accordingly, without the viewpoint of relation; and in this way we have before us entitas absoluta, i.e., God.

Rombach cites De Possest 68:11-23 as support for this statement. But, first of all, De Possest 68 does not teach
that God and creatures have an identical essence. Secondly, it does not teach that in God there is contained nothing other than what any given determinate being contains. Ignoring the invidious word “contained” (“enthalten”), we should recall that not only are all created things present in God but also are all creatable things. As Nicholas tells us, “God’s creative power is not exhausted in His creation.”

Thirdly, Nicholas nowhere says that in creatures there is contained nothing other than God Himself. Indeed, Nicholas never denies, not even in De Possest, that creatures have their own contracted essence. This essence is not God but is that which makes the sun the sun and the moon the moon, so that “the being of the sun is not the being of the moon.” When Nicholas says that God is at once and as a whole present in all things, he is not saying anything more than Anselm had much earlier said in Monologion 22 and De Veritate 13. Moreover, De Possest 68 should be read in conjunction with De Possest 11 and 12: Nicholas is not maintaining that every finite thing contains God as its “core” of being, so to speak; he is rather providing us with a strategy for seeing how it is that “the invisible things of Him, including His eternal power and divinity, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, by means of understanding created things.”

Suppose we say that God is sun. If, as is correct, we construe this [statement] as [a statement] about a sun which is actually all it is able to be, then we see clearly that this sun is not at all like the sensible sun. For while the sensible sun is in the East, it is not in any other part of the sky where it is able to be. [Moreover, none of the following statements are true of the sensible sun:] “It is maximal and minimal, alike, so that it is not able to be either greater or lesser”; “It is everywhere and anywhere, so that it is not able to be elsewhere than it is”; “It is all things, so that it is not able to be anything other than it is”—and so on. With all the other created things the case is similar. Hence it does not matter what name you give to God, provided that in the foregoing manner you mentally remove the limits with respect to its possible being.

So God is not the sensible sun; and the sensible sun is not, in its own, contracted being, God. Nor can we strip away the properties of the sun and find God lurking behind them, as it were—as if God were the sun’s essence and these properties were only accidents of God. We may indeed mentally strip away the sun’s determinations in order better to recognize why undifferentiated Being itself, which is God, cannot be conceived as it is. But Nicholas does not claim that God and finite beings are identical in essence, that God is “the ultimate Oneness of which everything consists.” Rather, God is the ultimate Power which creates and sustains the finite being of each finite thing. Through His Power God is present in each finite thing, as the power of a cause is present in what it effects and sustains.

2.4. Incoherence or prima facie incoherence. On p. 152 Rombach states that, for Nicholas, “nothing is everything; each thing manifests what it is in that it is not something else.” But on p. 214 we are told, with what presumably is supposed to have Nicholas’s endorsement, that “a thing is exactly identical with the whole. Nothing is itself; everything is the whole.” Perhaps there is some way to render these two passages compatible; but it is difficult to see how this can be done—given the occurrence, in the latter passage, of the words “exactly identical” (“genau identisch”). The difficulty is reinforced by a passage on p. 164 in which the word “keinerlei” appears: “Es besteht keinerlei Unterschied zwischen der Welt und einem Seienden in ihr”: “There exists no difference at all between the world and a being in the world.” Now, this is surely not Nicholas’s view. For Nicholas says explicitly—as Rombach himself recognizes—that the universe is neither the sun nor the moon. Nicholas does say, however, that in each thing the universe is this thing. And no doubt this statement is what is confusing Rombach, who seems generally confused about the doctrine of quodlibet in quolibet. Rombach should content himself with saying, as he does on p. 208: “... und so nimmt jedes alles auf, derart, dass das All in ihm jenes selbst in zusammengezogener Weise ist...” But, instead, he switches from saying that in each thing the universe is this
thing to saying that there is no difference between the universe and each thing in it. Nicholas himself, however, sees obvious differences. And hence he can write: "in each thing the universe is, contractedly, that which this thing is contractedly; and 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." 74

We have already noted the statement of Rombach's in which he attributes to Nicholas the view that "in the eyes of God, as Absolute Observer, there is no plurality of beings but only the world as a single creature." 75 But it is not clear how this statement, taken together with the claim that Nicholas is a functionalist, can cohere with the statement, on p. 228, which is presumably presenting an inherent feature of functionalism: "An Absolute Observer who stands outside the world and does not grasp the relations as individual relations but would like to look at the whole would not see anything. The world, for God, is not 'there'." 76

On p. 168 Rombach states: "To be sure, the world, with respect to its content, is God; but with respect to its form it is separated from God by an infinite gulf." 77 But on p. 224 we read that "within the world as envisioned functionally there is no other content than the world itself ...." 78 These statements seem prima facie unreconcilable. For if (1) Nicholas's functionalism teaches that the content of the world is God and (2) functionalism in general, and therefore Nicholas's functionalism in particular, teaches that the world has no other content than the world itself, then either functionalism is inconsistent or it regards the world itself as God. But Nicholas does not consider the world to be God, though he does say that in God all things are God. 79 Moreover, Nicholas does not affirm, tout court, that God is the world, though he does say, in one special sense or another, that God is all things. 80 Is Rombach prepared to maintain, then, that Nicholas's functionalism is radically inconsistent? Or does he mean to be making a distinction between Nicholas's functionalism and functionalism in general? And if the latter, then how could functionalism virtually be called Cusan ontology, as he states on p. 151?

2.5. Misapprehensions. Rombach's misconceptions and misstatements are legion. For example, he makes the following assertion: "Insofar as (1) the world is the individual and (2) the individual possesses, as its content, nothing other than the world itself, everything is connected with everything, i.e., each thing is contained in each. 'Quodlibet in quodlibet.'" 81 However, this is not an accurate account of the doctrine of quodlibet in quodlibet; for as Nicholas states this doctrine (viz., in DI II, 5), it has reference, necessarily, to God: "From Book One it is evident that God is in all things in such way that all things are in Him; and it is now evident that God is in all things through the mediation of the universe, as it were. Hence, it is evident that all is in all and each in each."

Rombach thinks that, for Nicholas, "Quiditas absoluta is a thing much better than this thing is itself. God is this pond more than this pond is itself .... God is a thing 'precisely,' whereas this thing is only approximately itself—a disorderly copy of itself." 82 Once again, however, Rombach does not document this claim. And, once again, we need not be surprised at the absence of documentation, since Nicholas nowhere makes the claim. In DI I, 16 he does state that God, as Infinite Essence, is the most congruent and most precise measure of all essences. But this statement neither means nor implies that God is a given thing more than this thing is itself. On the contrary, with regard to things in their unfolded state, God is not any of all things! 83 Moreover, the passage in DI I, 16 neither means nor implies that a thing is only approximately itself, that it is a copy of itself. Though Nicholas does teach that no thing is a perfect thing of its kind, he does not teach that a thing is a copy of itself.

According to Rombach, Nicholas claims that finite beings are God in nothing (Deus in nihilo), God as created (Deus creatus), God as restricted to a contingent condition (Deus occasionatus). 84 However, regarding the expressions
“Deus creatus” and “Deus occasionatus,” Rombach neglects Nicholas’s very important word “quasi” (“as if,” “as it were”). Moreover, Nicholas does not mean that a creature is God as created, God as restricted; he means that a creature is, as it were, a created god, a god manqué. Similarly, Nicholas does not say that finite beings are God as present in nothing. What he says is that “the plurality of things arises from the fact that God is present in nothing.” However, for a plurality to arise from the fact of God’s presence is not equivalent to that plurality’s being God—something which Nicholas does not maintain. Because of the foregoing misconstruals, Rombach’s further inference does not follow: “The possibility of the dispersion of primordial Oneness and Simplicity can only be understood if we conceive beings functionally. The fact that Cusa regarded this presupposition as a clarification of the relationship between identity and difference is to his enormous credit within intellectual history. It makes him the Father of the modern, scientific mode of thought.”

“Nothingness,” writes Rombach, “is the viewpoint under which the One Content branches out into a plurality. This plurality is correctly seen if the particulars are viewed in strictest connection with the whole (functionalisitc). It is seen falsely if solitary particulars are viewed as themselves, i.e., as respective beings (substantialism).” Yet, what reason does Rombach have for judging—on Nicholas’s behalf—that the one viewpoint is correct and the other incorrect? This particular judgment is here question-begging, since it is based on no textual support whatsoever but is the product of Rombach’s preconception.

Rombach indirectly boosts his functionalist interpretation by minimizing such texts as the following, which he does not even bother to cite: “Aristotle was right in dividing all the things in the world into substance and accident.” “Individuating principles cannot come together in one individual in such harmonious comparative relation as in another [individual]; thus, through itself each thing is one and is perfect in the way it can be.” Rather than taking such texts as decisive, Rombach takes them as evidence that Nicholas’s functionalism is incoherent: “In his [i.e., Nicholas’s] concept of function the viewpoint of substance still figures in.” According to Rombach, Nicholas’s ontology is even contradictory—unless we keep separate the substance dimension, the functionalist dimension, and the identity dimension, recognizing that these constitute different ontologies, which have nothing to do with one another. When we examine Rombach’s examples of statements which, if not kept separate, are contradictory, then we see just how incoherent are Rombach’s own ideas about Nicholas’s texts. On the one hand, functionalist ontology is said to posit a radical separation of the world from God, in that the world is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself. On the other hand, the ontology of identity posits an absolute identity of all beings, in that everything which is is God. Unfortunately for Rombach, Nicholas nowhere maintains that the world is caused from out of itself and must be explained from out of itself. Instead, he subscribes to the view that the world was created ex nihilo by God and that we cannot know the quiddity of the world unless we know the Divine Quiddity. Since Rombach once again cites no Cusan text, it is difficult to know what possible passage he might have in mind when he makes the foregoing assertion. Perhaps he is thinking of a passage in DI 11: “A created thing has from God the fact that it is one, distinct, and united to the universe . . . . However, it does not have from God (nor from any positive cause but [only] contingently) the fact that its oneness exists in plurality, its distinctness in confusion, and its union in discord.” But even this passage would not support his point.

Contrary to Rombach, Nicholas does not have three different ontologies; nor do these alleged ontologies give rise, systematically, to propositions that are contradictory. We have already seen a host of mistakes which Rombach
Nicholas of Cusa makes in “eliciting” functionalist ontology from Nicholas’s texts. Not the least of his mistakes is his misconstrual of the statement “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.” From this passage, together with Nicholas’s statement, in DI II, 5, that everything is in everything, Rombach “elicits” functionalism: (a) from any given fact in the whole world, the state of the world as a whole can be read off; (b) the individual is the whole; (c) nothing has its being in itself; (d) nothing about a thing is determined otherwise than through its ordering toward the framework; etc. But none of these tenets is either asserted or implied by Nicholas, whose statements do not resemble a through d and whose examples also are completely different. In DI II, 4 and 5 Nicholas offers two examples which are especially noteworthy. For they are offered in order to explain the sense of such statements as “in the moon the universe is the moon.” The first example is the following: “Universe bespeaks universality—i.e., a oneness of many things. Accordingly, just as humanity is neither Socrates nor Plato but in Socrates is Socrates and in Plato is Plato, so is the universe in relation to all things.” None of Rombach’s points, a through d, accord with this example. For instance, in a world consisting of Socrates and Plato, and their humanity, it would not be true that from a knowledge of Socrates, someone could, in principle, read off the entire truth about Plato—and, consequently, the entire truth about the world as a whole. Moreover, neither Socrates nor Plato is humanity—let alone being the whole world. And there is nothing in the example to suggest that Socrates and Plato do not exist in themselves. (In DI II, 6 we are told that universals exist only in particulars and that in a particular they are contractedly the particular.) Finally, Socrates’ being is independent of Plato’s, so that Socrates’ death need not diminish Plato’s being, though it may indeed modify it by inducing grief.

Nicholas’s second example is the following:

Since the eye cannot actually be the hands, the feet, and all the other members, it is content with being the eye; and the foot [is content with being] the foot. And all members contribute [something] to one another, so that each is (that which it is in the best way it can be). Neither the hand nor the foot is in the eye; but in the eye they are the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man. And in like manner, in the foot all the members [are the foot] insofar as the foot is immediately in the man. Thus, each member through each member is immediately in the man; and the man, or the whole, is in each member through each member, just as in the parts the whole is in each part through each part.

Just as the first example does not accord with Rombach’s points a through d, so this example also does not. For instance, it is not the case that from a knowledge of a man’s hands we can, in principle, arrive at a knowledge of his humanity—or even of every other organ in his body. (At least Nicholas, who is not a chiromancer, does not believe this.) Moreover, the hand is not the man, though it is the man’s hand. And there is nothing in the example to suggest (1) that the hand owes its being either to all the other organs or to the man or (2) that the man or the other organs owe their being to the hand. Finally, the man and the other organs can function without the hand, even though the perfection of the man depends upon his having two hands and even though the hand would not continue to be a hand apart from the body.

Though Nicholas teaches that the various functions of the body contribute to the man’s perfection, he does not teach functionalism. He does think that the whole is in the part. But in the part the whole is present not qua whole but qua that part; moreover, the whole is in the part only insofar as the part is immediately in the whole. Because the whole is present in the part in one way and the part is present in the whole in another way, the whole is not identical with the part, and the part is not identical with the whole. To say, as Nicholas does, that in the part the whole is the part is not at all tantamount to saying, simpliciter, that the whole is the part.
Nicholas’s motivation in propounding the view that in the sun the universe is the sun—that all things are in all things—arises in conjunction with his wanting to consider the universe as so perfect that no one of its parts “envies” another, so to speak. Each thing in the universe is content to be what it is; and no thing in the universe could be more perfect and still be that thing, for each thing (apart from its having been injured or damaged) is as perfect as it can be. Each thing, in its functioning, is of use to each other thing, even though it does not aim to be of such use.

Nicholas’s way of showing how it is that all things can be content to be what they are seems strange to the contemporary mind, which cannot easily remain sanguine about such claims as “In the eye the hand is the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man.” The reason for this contemporary sense of disquietude can be found in the triumph of empiricism: there is no observable difference between a hand in which all other things are present as the hand itself and a hand in which they are not present at all. Yet, Nicholas himself is not perturbed by the nonempirical character of his doctrine. For he is making a theologico-metaphysical point—a point which he does not suppose to be justifiable on an observational basis. Accordingly, when we interpret his doctrine of quodlibet in quolibet, we must recognize that it cannot be separated from his doctrine of God: he does not say merely that in the moon the universe is the moon; he says that in the moon the universe is the moon because (1) all things are in God through the “meditation” of the universe, as it were, and (2) through the “meditation” of the universe, as it were, God is in all things. To detach the doctrine of God and to press toward a philosophical functionalism, as Rombach’s interpretation does, is necessarily to distort the fact that Nicholas of Cusa’s philosophical roots are deeply and inextirpatably implanted in the medieval world.

We must remember that Nicholas’s example of the members of the body is an example in which the members are the parts and the man (not the body) is the whole. Now, by “the man” ("homo") Nicholas means the human nature, which consists of a body and a soul; he is not considering the man to be the mere sum of the bodily parts. Similarly, the whole of the universe is in one respect not the mere summation of its parts: viz., the respect that it, too, has a “soul,” so to speak. Moreover, the perfection of the universe so exceeds the perfection of each of the parts that no part could be more perfect independently of its ordering to the universe. The very distance between the stars has been so harmoniously fixed by the Creator that if these distances were altered, the stars—and, indeed, the universe itself—would no longer exist, since the cosmos would have become chaos. Rombach seems to think that Nicholas has no notion of cosmos. Yet, in De Possess 72 Nicholas accepts the name “cosmos” as appropriate for the world; and he seems to adopt the concept as well as the name. In DI, by contrast, he does not use the word “cosmos” but, instead, talks about the harmony of all things. This harmony is emphasized to such an extent that creation is regarded as instantaneous: there never was a time when all the elements of the universe did not exist.

There is little need to dwell upon Rombach’s many other misconceptions and inaccuracies. Perhaps a final example will suffice. On p. 169 he writes: “Above all, we must proceed on the basis of the consideration that in DI II, 4 Cusa desires to attain nothing other than clarity regarding the following: viz., that only as God is ‘mediated through the world’ is He one with things.” But in II, 4 Nicholas does not at all affirm that God is one with things through the mediation of the world. He does not even say that in the world (or in a given thing) God is one with the world (or one with that thing). What he says is

We can [now] understand the following: (1) how it is that God, who is most simple Oneness and exists in the one universe, is in all things as if subsequently and through the mediation of the universe, and (2) how it is that as if through the mediation of the one universe the plurality of things is in God.
And what he denies is that “God is in the sun sun and in the moon moon.” For it is rather the case that, in them, “He is that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference.”

2.6. Unclarities and imprecisions. From its very beginning Rombach’s interpretation of Nicholas of Cusa is imprecise. For in his opening paragraph on p. 150 he asserts:

It is scarcely possible to overestimate the importance of Cusa for the development of the modern scientific disciplines [Wissenschaft]... 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.¹¹³

Now, this statement certainly appears to be making a historical claim; for it talks about Cusa’s importance to the development of the modern scientific disciplines, about how his thought contains impulses for the metaphysics of Spinoza and of Leibniz, and about how it is fundamental for the Kantian turn in philosophy. Rombach seems to be doing more than merely suggesting that, say, from the viewpoint of the history of ideas, we can develop a narrative which conceptually links Nicholas with the modern period. Given any ordinary understanding of his words, he must be interpreted as asserting that certain developments within modern philosophy result, in part, from the influence of Nicholas’s thought. Yet, his footnote leads us to wonder what in the world he intends his point really to be. For in the note he acknowledges that Nicholas had almost no historical influence at all: “After Giordano Bruno, and with Bruno, Cusa was forgotten. The rediscovery of him depends on the rediscovery of Bruno. F. H. Jacobi presents an excerpt of Bruno’s De la causa as an appendix to his book on Spinoza. Also Hamann, Schelling, and Goethe know only Bruno. Even Hegel knows nothing of Cusa. The first one who mentions his name is the outsider B. Clemens (Giordano Bruno und Nicolaus von Cusa. Eine philosophische Abhandlung. First published in parts in 1844).”¹¹⁶

Turning to another topic, we find a series of unclarities in Rombach’s interpretation of Nicholas’s doctrine of world. First of all, the following idea is unclear: “Precisely because (1) the world nowhere has a necessary boundary and (2) in its own way it extends ad infinitum, it must at some point experience its factual limitation as a restriction from outside.”¹¹⁷ That is, it is not clear why the world has to experience any factual limitation at all—let alone from outside. Indeed, talk about the world’s experiencing limitation is bizarre. Furthermore, Nicholas nowhere so much as hints along these lines. Secondly, the following statement on Rombach’s p. 161 is misleading: “The infinity of the world is identical with its finitude; thus, Cusa can speak of the finita infinitas of the world.”¹¹⁸ The word “identical” is objectionable because, for Nicholas, the world is infinite in one respect and finite in another. Thirdly, the following sentence is cryptic: “To be sure, the universe, by its very essence, extends—on all sides and in every respect—ad infinitum. Nevertheless, this extending stops de facto at a determinate place, with the result that the world does not fulfill its own infinity.”¹¹⁹ The problem here is to give a sense to the universe’s having an infinity which could or could not be fulfilled. This entire mode of discourse seems totally foreign to Nicholas’s texts.

A major difficulty with Rombach’s whole approach stems from the fact that no effort is made to distinguish, for the reader, the times when something is being ascribed to Nicholas and the times when only the logic of functionalism is being worked out, independently of anything Nicholas himself says. For instance, how much of the long discussion about world is really being attributed to Nicholas? And, likewise, how much in the section on cosmos? Or what about the section entitled “Auflosung der Ontologie überhaupt”?

Let us take a final example of an imprecision. On p. 173
Rombach declares, on behalf of Nicholas: “A thing could not exist alone; it could not constitute itself. It needs passage through otherness in order to come to itself.” Taken in an ordinary way, this statement implies that, on Nicholas's view, the universe could not consist of one object only (e.g., a star), which would obtain “passage through otherness” by virtue of the fact that its parts were other than one another. If this is what Rombach has in mind, then he owes us some documentation of the point, which, prima facie, is foreign to Nicholas's ideas. Of course, Rombach might be using the word “thing” in a special philosophical way, so that his point could be construed as: ‘It is not possible, on Nicholas's view, that there be a universe consisting of an absolutely simple object, i.e., an object having no parts; for God alone is Absolute Simplicity.’ If this is his point, then it does accord with Nicholas's texts. But to obtain this understanding of Rombach's words we would have to strain the ordinary meaning of the German language.

2. 7. Lack of adequate documentation. We have already noticed many instances of Rombach's inadequate documentation. Perhaps two further typical examples will suffice for now. On p. 179 we are told that Nicholas, in his notes, seems to anticipate the Copernican system; but we are not given the reference to which note and to where it is published, if at all. Secondly, Rombach mentions, on p. 169, John Wenck of Herrenberg's complaints against Nicholas; but no reference to Wenck or his work is furnished.

In last analysis, Rombach has not showed that Nicholas of Cusa operates with three autonomous ontologies, one of which is functionalism. Rather, through his unrigorous handling of Nicholas's texts, his convoluted interweaving of what is and what is not Nicholas's doctrine, and his pervasive incoherence and imprecision, he has presented us with an exegetical hodge-podge. This jumbled interpretation obscures the true thought of the Renaissance figure Nicholas of Cusa, while at the same time betraying Rombach's own unfamiliarity with the twentieth-century science of hermeneutics.

III

Now that the defects of Rombach's account have been uncovered, a concluding—textually oriented—interpretive résumé of DJ II, 4 and 5 can be presented. But beforehand let us take note of some passages, in II, 4 and 5, which, by posing special exegetical pitfalls, render these two chapters more difficult to understand than almost any other pericope in the Cusan corpus.

3. 1. Special exegetical difficulties. 3. 1. 1. An initial problem is that of knowing how to construe the phrase “id quod sunt omnia” in the clause (1) “Quae absolute est id quod sunt omnia . . .” and in the clause (2) “mundus . . . existens contracte id quod sunt omnia . . . .” Is the phrase tantamount, in its context, to “essentia”?—so that what is meant is, respectively, “Absolute Maximality is, absolutely, the Essence of all things” and “The world . . . is, contractedly, the essence of all things.” This reading seems to make perfectly good sense. But when we compare the latter sentence with the sentence “Universum . . . in ipsis est id quod sunt contracte,” we begin to have doubts about whether the phrase “id quod sunt” does refer to essence. Yet, if in the first two sentences “id quod sunt omnia” is not tantamount to “essentia,” then how else should these sentences be interpreted?—especially sentence 1.

3. 1. 2. A further difficulty arises with regard to the punctuation of II, 4 (113: 4-16). There is a significant difference between Wilpert's punctuation in the Latin-German edition (1967) and Klibansky's in Volume One of the Opera Omnia (1932). Moreover, even where Wilpert and Klibansky agree, there are doubts about whether their agreed-upon punctuation is fully acceptable. Is there a clearly best way to punctuate this passage?
3.1.3. In II, 4 we have to make a number of crucial judgments about whether or not a word or a phrase which is not actually present is meant to be understood. For example, how are the following four sentences to be interpreted?: (1) “Cum quodlibet non possit esse actu omnia, cum sit contractum, contrahit omnia, ut sint ipsum.”\(^ {126}\) (2) “Unde omnia sine pluralitate praecesserunt quodlibet ordine naturae.”\(^ {127}\) (3) “Non sunt igitur plura in quodlibet actu, sed omnia sine pluralitate sunt id ipsum.”\(^ {128}\) (4) “Deus autem est in sole sol et in luna luna, sed id quod est sol et luna sine pluralitate et diversitate.”\(^ {129}\) In each of these sentences, what (if anything) needs to be supplied by a translator or an interpreter, on the grounds that it is tacitly present?\(^ {130}\)

3.1.4. In the sentence “Non est ergo aliud dicere ‘quodlibet esse in quolibet’ quam deum per omnium esse in omnibus et omnia per omnia esse in deo”\(^ {131}\) does “omnia” sometimes mean universum and sometimes mean, as at II, 4 (116: 16), omnia particularia? That is, is the sentence equivalent to?: “Non est ergo aliud dicere ‘quodlibet esse in quolibet’ quam deum per universum esse in omnibus particularibus et omnia particularia per universum esse in deo.”\(^ {132}\) If so, then just where else can we—should we—make such substitutions? For instance, is “Deus est absque diversitate in omnibus, quia quodlibet in quodlibet, et omnia in deo, quia omnia in omnibus”\(^ {133}\) equivalent to?: “Deus est absque diversitate in omnibus, quia quodlibet in quodlibet, et omnia in deo, quia quodlibet in quodlibet.” Moreover, to just what extent is Nicholas’s choice of “universum,” “omnia,” and “quodlibet” governed by the desire to avoid repetition, for stylistic reasons?\(^ {134}\)

3.1.5. How is the following sentence to be construed?: “Deus, cum sit immensus, non est nec in sole nec in luna, licet in illis sit id quod sunt absolute . . . .”\(^ {135}\) Does it mean “. . . although in them He is that which they are absolutely” or “. . . although in them He is, absolutely, that which they are”?\(^ {136}\)

3.1.6. In II, 5 (117: 15-16) is “videntur,” in the sentence “omnia videntur quodlibet praecedere” to be taken as “are seen” or as “seem”?\(^ {137}\)

3.1.7. What is meant by?: “In each thing all things are tranquil, since one degree [of contractedness] could not exist without another . . . .”\(^ {138}\) Does it imply functionalism, or does it bespeak something else? For example, does it indicate?: (1) that there must be degrees of contractedness, since no two things can be in any respect exactly alike and (2) that each thing’s degree of perfection contributes to another’s, so that without this interrelationship there would not be a cosmos.\(^ {139}\)

3.1.8. How, if at all, can we render consistent the statement that “each actually existing thing is immediately in God, as is also the universe”\(^ {140}\) and the statement that “the plurality of things is in God as if through the mediation of the one universe”?\(^ {141}\)

3.1.9. What is the sense of “Everything which exists actually, exists in God, since He is the actuality of all things”?\(^ {142}\) Does “exists in God” here mean the same thing as “is enfolded in God”? Or is it rather the case that there are two senses in which a thing exists in God?: viz., it exists, in God as enfolded in God ontologically prior to its creation; and even in its created (i.e., unfolded) state it also exists in God. And is it this latter sense which also accords with the later statement, in III, 4?: viz., “All things are in God according to themselves with a [respective] difference of degree.”\(^ {143}\)

Given all the foregoing complicated exegetical issues, we need not be surprised that Rombach, who pays so little attention to what Nicholas says, should have strayed so far from what Nicholas means. The following interpretive résumé of DI II, 4 and 5—expanded by reference to other passages in DI and spoken as if by Nicholas himself—cannot compete with the bold inventiveness of Rombach’s speculations. Nevertheless, it does purport to excel in accuracy.
3.2. Interpretive résumé of DI II, 4 and 5. We have previously seen that everything is either God, who is Absolute Maximum, or the universe, which is a contracted maximum that derives from God. Now, because the contracted maximum owes all that it is to the Absolute Maximum, it is conformed to the Absolute Maximum as much as possible. Therefore, if we know that something befits the Absolute Maximum in an absolute way, we can in many instances rightly infer that it befits the contracted maximum in a contracted way. Such parallels between God and the world may be called likenesses, provided we are not thereby misled into believing that they disclose to us either God as He is in Himself or the universe as it is in itself. Here are examples of some likenesses: (1) God is Absolute Maximum and Absolute Oneness; the universe is a contracted maximum and a contracted oneness; (2) the Absolute Maximum precedes and unites absolute opposites, viz., contradictories; the contracted maximum precedes and unites contracted opposites, viz., contraries; (3) the Absolute Maximum is, absolutely, the Essence of all finite things; the contracted maximum is, contractedly, the essence of all finite things; (4) in the Absolute Maximum all things are, without any plurality or difference at all, the Absolute Maximum (just as in an infinite line all geometrical figures are the line itself—i.e., the line is all these figures); in the contracted maximum all things are, without “plurality” or “difference,” the contracted maximum (just as in a contracted maximum line all geometrical figures are this line—i.e., the line is, contractedly, all these figures).

Each of these likenesses needs to be explained more fully. But beforehand let it be perfectly clear that what is contracted falls infinitely short of what is Absolute. A contracted infinity is infinitely distant from Absolute Infinity. Indeed, the expression “contracted infinity” is used principally to indicate that the universe, which is contracted, is not limited by anything that is external to it and that demarcates it. Though in this sense the universe is “not limited”—i.e., is “unlimited,” or “infinite”—it is nonetheless actually finite, in the sense that it has a determinate measure (known to God alone). In other words, the universe is finite but unbounded; and as such, it can be called a finite infinity. Yet, if we like, the universe can also be said to be neither finite nor infinite—if what we mean to deny is (a) that it is limited by something other than itself and (b) that it is unlimited in such way that there cannot possibly be anything greater than it. (See DI II, 1.) Thus, the expressions “contracted infinity” and “finite infinity” are modi loquendi which accentuate a given parallelism between God and the world; in their contexts they are unmisleading. Examples of other such expressions are “contracted indistinction,” “contracted simplicity,” “contracted oneness.” Given this initial reminder, we may now proceed with examining more fully the foregoing four parallelisms.

3.2.1. God is Absolute Maximum in that He is all that which can possibly be. And He is Absolute Oneness in that there is absolutely no plurality or composition in Him. Accordingly, He is One in a way which exceeds our comprehension. For He is One in a way in which not contrasted with not-one. In other words, He is Oneness to which neither otherness nor plurality nor multiplicity is opposed. But we cannot conceive of what such a oneness would be like, since our reason cannot transcend contradictories. Accordingly, “oneness” in any sense in which we can understand its signification is infinitely distant from signifying God’s Oneness as it is in itself.

By comparison, the universe is a contracted maximum in that it is as great as it can be and in that all actually existing finite things exist within it. Though God could not have created this universe (with its attendant possibility, or matter) to be greater or more perfect than it is, He could have created a greater and more perfect universe than this one. Since the universe is a contracted oneness, it is not in every respect oneness; i.e., it is not Absolute Oneness. Accordingly, it can be either affirmed or denied to be oneness,
depending upon the respect—just as it can be either affirmed or denied to be infinite, depending upon the sense of the term. We can, for instance, deny that the universe qua created being is one, since it falls short of Oneness; on the other hand, we can also deny that it is many, since it derives from Oneness. By contrast, we can affirm that the universe is one, since it is a maximum unity; and we can affirm that it is many, since its unity is contracted and, therefore, necessarily plural.

3.2.2. Just as the Absolute Maximum precedes the distinction between oneness and not-oneness, so it precedes all contradictories. An equivalent way of expressing this point would be to say that the Absolute Maximum is not a being but is undifferentiated Being itself. Accordingly, the Absolute Maximum does not admit of comparison with beings. It is not different from them; nor is it other than what they are, for it is not another being. Undifferentiated Being itself is not opposed to not-being but rather precedes the very distinction between being and not-being. Though we call the Absolute Maximum Being, just as we call it Oneness, we are unable to conceive of Absolute Being, just as we are unable to conceive of Absolute Oneness. Furthermore, to say that it precedes contradictories is tantamount to saying that it unites them. For it unites them by being, transcendentally and undifferentiatedly, that from which they derive, so that they are united as in their Cause, which precedes them ontologically, not chronologically.

By comparison, the contracted maximum precedes and unites contraries. Here the word “contraries” refers to contracted opposites, which is what substances are; they are opposites in the reduced sense that they are other than one another. The universe, then, is a oneness of many substances, each of which has its own essence, or quiddity. This oneness-in-plurality is such that the oneness precedes the plurality, though the way in which the universe precedes its parts is different from the way in which God precedes the universe, for the universe is not undifferentiated Being itself. To be sure, all the different parts of the universe were created by God at once, so that the universe did not temporally precede its parts, which are constitutive of it, and so that one part did not temporally precede the other. Nevertheless, just as God ontologically precedes the universe, so the universe seems to precede its parts as if ontologically. For the universe sprang into existence from God’s design; and so, we may consider it to precede its parts, just as in a craftsman’s design the whole precedes the part. For example, a carpenter first decides what to construct—e.g., a house or a chest or a chair. And then he decides about the design of the parts.

Another way of seeing that the universe “precedes” its parts is along the following lines: In general, what is more perfect is ontologically prior to what is less perfect. Now, a whole is that perfection to which each of the parts contributes; as such, it is more perfect than any subset of its parts. In this respect, then, the universe—which is the whole of finite being—is most perfect. Thus, the universe precedes—ontologically, as it were—each individual being. But that which precedes the plurality of all things cannot itself be a plurality. Accordingly, we may infer that the universe, which is present in each thing, is present not as a plurality but as a oneness.

3.2.3. The Absolute Maximum is, absolutely, the Essence of all finite things—or better, it is the Essence of the essence of each finite thing. For example, God is not the sun’s contracted essence. But He is that from which the sun’s contracted being and essence derive. Thus, the sun would not exist if God did not exist; and the sun would not be what it is, if God were not what He is. (The case is similar with the moon and all other finite beings.) In this way, then, God may be called “Essence,” even though what He is can never be known by us, since He is not Essence in any respect resembled by the finite essences with which we are in some sense acquainted. Now, God is present in all things as an original is present in a mirror image of itself and as
the abstract is present in the concrete. But just as the original qua itself is not present in the mirror image of itself, so God qua Himself is not present in the sun, whose own contracted being and essence are only the reflection of Absolute Being and Essence. Accordingly, Absolute Being and Essence—i.e., God—is the Power that sustains the being and essence of each finite thing, since without Him they would be nothing, though without them He would remain His ever-immutable self. To say that Absolute Being is present absolutely in all contracted beings means that it is present in such a way as to be unaffected by the mutability of these objects—just as an original is unaffected by changes in the images of itself.

By comparison, the contracted maximum is, contractedly, the essence of all finite things. Now, just as God, who is Absolute Essence, is not an individual thing’s essence but that thing has its own essence, so the universe, which is contracted essence, is not an individual thing’s essence. For example, the universe is not the essence of the sun, for the universe is not the sun. To be sure, the universe qua oneness does have an essence,\(^153\) since it is a determinate being that has a determinate measure known to God alone, as was said.\(^154\) (Similarly, the universe has a shape and a movement, which are known only to God.)\(^155\) But the universe qua plurality is a plurality of many essences, or quiddities. Since, in a manner of speaking, the universe precedes its parts, we may say, in another manner of speaking, that the essence of the universe is contracted in one way in the sun, in another way in the moon, etc. But this should not be taken to mean that each thing’s essence is, in some way, one and the same as the essence of the universe; it is, rather, a way of saying that the universe is in some sense present in its parts. That is, since the essence of a thing is none other than that thing,\(^156\) we may say, if we like, that the essence of the universe is contractedly present in the essence of the sun and in the essence of the moon; or we may say, simply, that the universe is contractedly present in the sun and in the moon. For example, in the sun the universe is the sun, and in the moon it is the moon—just as in Socrates humanity is Socrates, and in Plato it is Plato. What this means will be explained in Section 3.2.5.

3.2.4 As enfolded in the Absolute Maximum all things are the Absolute Maximum. That they are there enfolded means that they exist there ontologically prior to their creation (in something like the way that an effect exists in its cause and—as it exists in its cause—is the cause). They do not exist as their finite selves. Therefore, in speaking of all things as they are enfolded in God, we are not speaking of them as a plurality but as identically one with God Himself.\(^157\) Now, not everything that is enfolded in God is unfolded from God, i.e., created by God; for God is able to create many more things than He did create. But everything that is unfolded from God and that exists actually as its own finite self is also eternally enfolded in God, who is Infinite Actuality.\(^158\) Thus, both the universe and all the actually existing things in it exist immediately and eternally in God, just as they also exist as unfolded from God.

In the contracted maximum all things are the contracted maximum, insofar as the contracted maximum is viewed as constituting a single reality. Of course, the sun (or the moon) is not actually the universe, even as the universe is not actually the sun (or the moon). Yet, just as there is an extended sense in which in the sun the universe is the sun, so there is also an extended sense in which in the universe the sun is the universe.\(^159\) Let us now turn to investigating these two senses.

3.2.5 We may express the foregoing point by saying that (1) through all things (viz., the universe) God is in all things (i.e., all individual things) and (2) through all things (viz., the universe) all things (i.e., all individual things) are in God. So since all actually existing things are immediately present in God, and since God is present in all actually existing things, it follows that all things are present in all things, that each thing is present in each thing. Consider an
illustration of the sense in which this latter statement is true. All the members of the human body are immediately present in the man (i.e., in the humanity); and the man is present wholly in each member; thus, each member is present in each member. Of course, this does not mean that the eye is actually the hand (or that the hand is actually the eye). Nor does it mean that in the hand the eye is actually the eye (or that in the eye the hand is actually the hand). Rather, in the hand the eye is the hand insofar as the hand is immediately in the man (and in the eye the hand is the eye insofar as the eye is immediately in the man). Since all the members are immediately in the man, all the members are in each member, because the man (i.e., the humanity) is wholly in each member. Yet, each member is in each member as that member and not as itself. Let us now liken the man, i.e., the contracted humanity, to the universe; and let us go one step further and liken absolute humanity to God. (Of course, humanity does not exist as absolute, i.e., as uncontracted to some individual or other; but we may assume for the moment that it does.) Now, absolute humanity would be uncontractedly present in the contracted humanity; and through the contracted humanity it would be present "subsequently," as it were, in each member of the body, which is immediately present in the contracted humanity. In a similar way, (1) God is present uncontractedly and, as it were, "antecedently" in the universe; and through the universe, He is present "subsequently," as it were, in the universe's every part, which is present immediately in the universe. Because God is present uncontractedly, He is not in the sun sun and in the moon moon—as the universe is in the sun sun and in the moon moon; instead, He is present in the sun and in the moon as that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference. For, ultimately speaking, God is, without plurality, all that is; for He is Being itself. Moreover, (2) just as in the hand the eye is the hand insofar as the hand is immediately in the contracted humanity, so in the moon the sun is the moon insofar as the moon is imme-

To be sure, the sun, the moon, and each actually existing thing are immediately present both in the universe and in God, though they may also be said to be present in God as if by means of the universe, which seems to precede them.

So each actually existing thing is tranquil because in it, as unfolded from God, all things are it and because it, as enfolded in God, is God. Now, all finite things exist with a certain gradation, i.e., with a certain degree of contracted perfection, since only God is altogether Absolute. Moreover, no two things can have the same degree; for no two things are so similar that between them a higher degree of similarity is not possible. Now, each thing (insofar as it is undeformed) exists in as perfect a way as it possibly can; and one thing is of benefit to another. Furthermore, one degree could not exist without another, since of all existing things, none can escape being different from another. So each thing is content to be itself and to have the perfection and the degree of contraction which belong to it.