

**ON LEARNED IGNORANCE**  
**(De Docta Ignorantia)**

by

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA**

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## BOOK I

1

### *Prologue*

[Nicholas of Cusa] to his own venerable teacher, the divinely beloved and most reverend father, Lord Julian,<sup>1</sup> most worthy cardinal of the holy Apostolic See.

Your very great and indeed very proven Genius will rightly wonder what to make of the following fact: viz., that when, quite imprudently, I endeavor to publish my foreigner's-foolishness, I select you as a judge. [You will wonder about my treating you] as if you retained some leisure (you, who by virtue of your cardinal's duties at the Holy See are extremely busy with especially important public affairs) and as if, given your most thorough knowledge of all the Latin writers who have hitherto become illustrious (and [your] recent [knowledge] of the Greek writers as well), you could be drawn by the novelty of its title to this presumably very foolish production of mine—I, whose quality of intellect has long been very well known to you. This wondering shall, I hope, induce your knowledge-hungry mind to take a look. [You will wonder] not because you think that something previously unknown might be presented here; rather, [you will marvel] at the boldness by which I was led to deal with learned ignorance. For the naturalists state that a certain unpleasant sensation in the opening of the stomach precedes the appetite in order that, having been stimulated in this way, the nature (which endeavors to preserve itself) will replenish itself. By comparison, I consider *wondering* (on whose account there is philosophizing)<sup>2</sup> to precede the desire-for-knowing in order that the intellect (whose understanding is its being) will perfect itself by the study of truth.<sup>3</sup> Unusual things, even if they be monstrous, are accustomed to move us. For this reason, O unparalleled Teacher, deem, according to your kindness, that something worthwhile lies hidden herein; and in regard to divine matters receive from a German a mode of reasoning such as the following—a mode which great labor has rendered very pleasing to me.

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*Chapter One:* How it is that knowing is not-knowing.

We see that by the gift of God there is present in all things a natural

desire to exist in the best<sup>4</sup> manner in which the condition of each thing's nature permits this. And [we see that all things] act toward this end and have instruments adapted thereto. They have an innate sense of judgment which serves the purpose of knowing. [They have this] in order that their desire not be in vain but be able to attain rest in that [respective] object which is desired by the propensity of each thing's own nature. But if perchance affairs turn out otherwise, this [outcome] must happen by accident-as when sickness misleads taste or an opinion misleads reason. Wherefore, we say that a sound, free intellect knows to be true that which is apprehended by its affectionate embrace. (The intellect insatiably desires to attain unto the true through scrutinizing all things by means of its innate faculty of inference.) Now, that from which no sound mind can withhold assent is, we have no doubt, most true. However, all those who make an investigation judge the uncertain proportionally, by means of a comparison with what is taken to be certain.<sup>5</sup>

- 3 Therefore, every inquiry is comparative and uses the means of comparative relation.<sup>6</sup> Now, when, the things investigated are able to be compared by means of a close proportional tracing back to what is taken to be [certain], our judgment apprehends easily; but when we need many intermediate steps, difficulty arises and hard work is required. These points are recognized in mathematics, where the earlier propositions are quite easily traced back to the first and most evident principles but where later propositions [are traced back] with more difficulty because [they are traced back] only through the mediation of the earlier ones. Therefore, every inquiry proceeds by means of a comparative relation, whether an easy or a difficult one. Hence, the infinite, qua infinite, is unknown; for it escapes all comparative relation.<sup>7</sup> But since *comparative relation* indicates an agreement in some one respect and, at the same time, indicates an otherness, it cannot be understood independently of number. Accordingly, number encompasses all things related comparatively. Therefore, number, which is a necessary condition of comparative relation, is present not only in quantity but also in all things which in any manner whatsoever can agree or differ either substantially or accidentally. Perhaps for this reason Pythagoras deemed all things to be constituted and understood through the power of numbers.
- 4 Both the precise combinations in corporeal things and the congruent relating of known to unknown surpass human reason-to such

an extent that Socrates seemed to himself to know nothing except that he did not know. And the very wise Solomon maintained that all things are difficult and unexplainable in words.<sup>8</sup> And a certain other man of divine spirit says that wisdom and the seat of understanding are hidden from the eyes of all the living.<sup>9</sup> Even the very profound Aristotle, in his *First Philosophy*, asserts that in things most obvious by nature such difficulty occurs for us as for a night owl which is trying to look at the sun.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, if the foregoing points are true, then since the desire in us is not in vain, assuredly we desire to know that we do not know. If we can fully attain unto this [knowledge of our ignorance], we will attain unto learned ignorance. For a man—even one very well versed in learning—will attain unto nothing more perfect than to be found to be most learned in the ignorance which is distinctively his. The more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be. Unto this end I have undertaken the task of writing a few things about learned ignorance.

5 *Chapter Two: Preliminary clarification  
of what will follow.*

Since I am going to discuss the maximum learning of ignorance, I must deal with the nature of Maximality.<sup>11</sup> Now, I give the name “Maximum” to that than which there cannot be anything greater. But fullness befits what is one. Thus, oneness—which is also being—coincides with Maximality. But if such oneness is altogether free from all relation and contraction, obviously nothing is opposed to it, since it is Absolute Maximality. Thus, the Maximum is the Absolute One which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum (for it is the Maximum); and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise coincides with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things. And because it is absolute, it is, actually, every possible being; it contracts nothing from things, all of which [derive] from it. In the first book I shall strive to investigate incomprehensibly above human reason—this Maximum, which the faith of all nations indubitably believes to be God. [I shall investigate] with the guidance of Him “who alone dwells in inaccessible light.”<sup>12</sup>

- 6 Secondly, just as Absolute Maximality is Absolute Being, through which all things are that which they are, so from Absolute Being there exists a universal oneness of being which is spoken of as “a maximum deriving from the Absolute [Maximum]”—existing from it con-

tractedly and as a universe. This maximum's oneness is contracted in plurality, and it cannot exist without plurality. Indeed, in its universal oneness this maximum encompasses all things, so that all the things which derive from the Absolute [Maximum] are in this maximum and this maximum is in all [these] things. Nevertheless, it does not exist independently of the plurality in which it is present, for it does not exist without contraction, from which it cannot be freed. In the second book I will add a few points about this maximum, viz., the universe.

7 Thirdly, a maximum of a third sort will thereafter be exhibited. For since the universe exists-in-plurality only contractedly, we shall seek among the many things the one maximum in which the universe actually exists most greatly and most perfectly as in its goal. Now, such [a maximum] is united with the Absolute [Maximum], which is the universal end; [it is united] because it is a most perfect goal, which surpasses our every capability. Hence, I shall add some points about this maximum, which is both contracted and absolute and which we name *Jesus*, blessed forever. [I shall add these points] according as Jesus Himself will provide inspiration.

8 However, someone who desires to grasp the meaning must elevate his intellect above the import of the words rather than insisting upon the proper significations of words which cannot be properly adapted to such great intellectual mysteries. Moreover, it is necessary to use guiding illustrations in a transcendent way and to leave behind perceptible things, so that the reader may readily ascend unto simple intellectuality. I have endeavored, for the purpose of investigating this pathway, to explain [matters] to those of ordinary intelligence as clearly as I could. Avoiding all roughness of style,<sup>13</sup> I show at the outset that learned ignorance has its basis in the fact that the precise truth is inapprehensible.<sup>14</sup>

9 *Chapter Three: The precise truth is incomprehensible.*<sup>15</sup>

It is self-evident that there is no comparative relation of the infinite to the finite.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is most clear that where we find comparative degrees of greatness, we do not arrive at the unqualifiedly Maximum; for things which are comparatively greater and lesser are finite; but, necessarily, such a Maximum is infinite. Therefore, if anything is posited which is not the unqualifiedly Maximum, it is evident that

something greater can be posited. And since we find degrees of equality (so that 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), obviously we cannot find two or more things which are so similar and equal that they could not be progressively more similar *ad infinitum*.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.<sup>18</sup>

- 10** Therefore, it is not the case that by means of likenesses a finite intellect can precisely attain the truth about things. For truth is not something more or something less but is something indivisible. Whatever is not truth cannot measure truth precisely. (By comparison, a non-circle [cannot measure] a circle, whose being is something indivisible.) Hence, the intellect, which is not truth, never comprehends truth so precisely that truth cannot be comprehended infinitely more precisely. For the intellect is to truth as [an inscribed] polygon is to [the inscribing] circle.<sup>19</sup> The more angles the inscribed polygon has the more similar it is to the circle. However, even if the number of its angles is increased *ad infinitum*, the polygon never becomes equal [to the circle] unless it is resolved into an identity with the circle. Hence, regarding truth, it is evident that we do not know anything other than the following: viz., that we know truth not to be precisely comprehensible as it is. For truth may be likened unto the most absolute necessity (which cannot be either something more or something less than it is), and our intellect may be likened unto possibility. Therefore, the quiddity of things,<sup>20</sup> which is the truth of beings, is unattainable in its purity; though it is sought by all philosophers, it is found by no one as it is. And the more deeply we are instructed in this ignorance, the closer we approach to truth.

- 11** *Chapter Four: The Absolute Maximum, with which the Minimum coincides, is understood incomprehensibly.*

Since the unqualifiedly and absolutely Maximum (than which there cannot be a greater) is greater than we can comprehend (because it is Infinite Truth), we attain unto it in no other way than incomprehensibly. For since it is not of the nature of those things which can be comparatively greater and lesser, it is beyond all that we can conceive. For whatsoever things are apprehended by the senses, by reason, or by



intellect differ both within themselves and in relation to one another—[differ] in such way that there is no precise equality among them. Therefore, Maximum Equality, which is neither *other* than<sup>21</sup> nor different from anything, surpasses all understanding. Hence, since the absolutely Maximum *is* all that which can be,<sup>22</sup> it is *altogether* actual. And just as there cannot be a greater, so for the same reason there cannot be a lesser, since it is all that which can be. But the Minimum is that than which there cannot be a lesser. And since the Maximum is also such, it is evident that the Minimum coincides with the Maximum. The foregoing [point] will become clearer to you if you contract maximum and minimum to quantity. For maximum quantity is maximally large; and minimum quantity is maximally small. Therefore, if you free *maximum* and *minimum* from *quantity*—by mentally removing large and small—you will see clearly that maximum and minimum coincide.<sup>23</sup> For *maximum* is a superlative just as *minimum* is a superlative. Therefore, it is not the case that absolute quantity is maximum quantity rather than minimum quantity; for in it the minimum is the maximum coincidingly.

- 12 Therefore, opposing features belong only to those things which can be comparatively greater and lesser; they befit these things in different ways; [but they do] not at all [befit] the absolutely Maximum, since it is beyond all opposition. Therefore, because the absolutely Maximum is absolutely and actually all things which *can* be (and is so free of all opposition that the Minimum coincides with it), it is beyond both all affirmation and all negation. And it is not, as well as is, all that which is conceived to be; and it is, as well as is not, all that which is conceived not to be. But it is a given thing in such way that it is all things; and it is all things in such way that it is no thing; and it is maximally a given thing in such way that it is it minimally. For example, to say “God, who is Absolute Maximality, is light” is [to say] no other than “God is maximally light in such way that He is minimally light.” For Absolute Maximality could not be actually all possible things unless it were infinite and were the boundary of all things and were unable to be bounded by any of these things—as, by the graciousness of God, I will explain in subsequent sections. However, the [absolutely Maximum] transcends all our understanding. For our intellect cannot, by means of reasoning,<sup>24</sup> combine contradictories in their Beginning, since we proceed by means of what nature makes evident to us. Our reason falls far short of this infinite power and is unable to connect contradictories, which are infinitely distant. Therefore,

we see incomprehensibly, beyond all rational inference, that Absolute Maximality (to which nothing is opposed and with which the Minimum coincides) is infinite. But “maximum” and “minimum,” as used in this [first] book, are transcendent terms of absolute signification, so that in their absolute simplicity they encompass—beyond all contraction to quantity of mass or quantity of power—all things.

**13**      *Chapter Five: The Maximum is one.*

From these [considerations] it is most clearly evident that the absolutely Maximum is both incomprehensibly understandable and unnameably nameable. (I will later present a fuller version of this doctrine.)<sup>25</sup> Anything than which a greater or a lesser cannot be posited cannot be named. For by the movement of our reason names are assigned to things which, in terms of comparative relation, can be comparatively greater or lesser. And since all things exist in the best way they are able to exist, there cannot be a plurality of beings independently of number. For if number is removed, the distinctness, order, comparative relation, and harmony of things cease; and the very plurality of beings ceases. But if number itself were infinite—in which case it would be actually maximal and the minimum would coincide with it—all of these would likewise cease, since to be infinite number and to be minimally number [i.e., not at all to be number] amount to the same thing. Therefore, if in ascending the scale of numbers we actually arrive at a maximum number, since number is finite, still we do not come to a maximum number than which there can be no greater number; for such a number would be infinite. Therefore, it is evident that the ascending number-scale is actually finite,<sup>26</sup> and that the [arrived at maximum number] would be in potentiality relative to another [greater] number. But if on the descending scale a similar thing held true of number, so that for any actually posited small number a smaller number were always positible by subtraction just as on the ascending scale a larger number [is always positible] by addition, [then the outcome] would still be the same [as in the case where number were infinite]. For there would be no distinction of things; nor would any order or any plurality or any degrees of comparatively greater and lesser be found among numbers; indeed there would not be number.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in numbering, it is necessary to come to a minimum than which there cannot be a lesser, viz., oneness. And since there cannot be anything lesser than oneness,<sup>28</sup> oneness will be an unqualifiedly

minimum, which, by virtue of the considerations just presented, coincides with the maximum.

- 14** However, oneness cannot be number; for number, which can be comparatively greater, cannot at all be either an unqualifiedly minimum or an unqualifiedly maximum. Rather, oneness is the beginning of all number<sup>29</sup> because it is the minimum; and it is the end of all number, because it is the maximum. Therefore, [by comparison] Absolute Oneness, to which nothing is opposed, is Absolute Maximality, which is the Blessed God. Since this Oneness is maximal, it cannot be multiple (for it is all that which can be). Therefore, it cannot become number.

See that by means of number we have been led to understanding (1) that “Absolute Oneness” quite closely befits the unnameable God and (2) that God is so one that He is, actually, everything which is - possible. Accordingly, Absolute Oneness cannot be comparatively greater or lesser; nor can it be multiple. Thus, Deity is Infinite Oneness. Therefore, he who said “Hear, O Israel, your God is one”<sup>30</sup> and “Your Father and Teacher in Heaven is one”<sup>31</sup> could not have spoken more truly. And whoever would say that there are many gods would deny, most falsely, the existence not only of God but also of all the things of the universe—as will be shown in what follows. For the pluralities of things, which descend from Infinite Oneness, are related to Infinite Oneness [in such way] that they cannot exist independently of it (just as number, which is an entity-of-reason produced by our [power of] relational discrimination, necessarily presupposes oneness as such a beginning of number that without this beginning there could not possibly be number). For how could they exist independently of being? Absolute Oneness is being, as we shall see later.<sup>32</sup>

- 15** *Chapter Six: The Maximum is Absolute Necessity.*

In the preceding<sup>33</sup> I indicated that everything except the one unqualifiedly Maximum is—in contrast to it—limited and bounded. Now, what is finite and bounded has a beginning point and an end point. And we cannot make the following claim: viz., that “one given finite thing is greater than another given finite thing, [the series of finite things] always proceeding in this way unto infinity.” (For there cannot actually be an infinite progression of things which are comparatively greater and lesser, since in that case the Maximum would be of the nature of finite things). Accordingly, it follows that the actually

Maximum is the Beginning and the End of all finite things. Moreover, nothing could exist if the unqualifiedly Maximum did not exist. For since everything non-maximal is finite, it is also originated. But, necessarily, it will exist from another. Otherwise—i.e., if it existed from itself—it would have existed when it did not exist. Now, as is obviously the rule, it is not possible to proceed to infinity in beginnings and causes. So it will be the case that the unqualifiedly Maximum exists, without which nothing can exist.

- 16** Furthermore, let us contract maximum to being,<sup>34</sup> and let us say: it is not the case that anything is opposed to maximum being; hence, neither not-being nor minimally being [are opposed to it]. How, then—since minimally being is maximally being—could we rightly think that the Maximum is able not to exist?<sup>35</sup> Moreover, we cannot rightly think that something exists in the absence of being. But Absolute Being cannot be other than the absolutely Maximum. Hence, we cannot rightly think that something exists in the absence of the [absolutely] Maximum.

Moreover, the greatest truth is the absolutely Maximum. Therefore, (1) it is most greatly true either that the unqualifiedly Maximum exists or that it does not exist, or (2) [it is most greatly true that it] both exists and does not exist, or (3) [it is most greatly true that it] neither exists nor does not exist. Now, no more [alternatives] can be either asserted or thought. No matter which one of them you say to be most greatly true, my point is made. For I have the greatest truth, which is the unqualifiedly Maximum.

- 17** Wherefore, although it is evident through the aforesaid that the name “being” (or any other name) is not a precise name for the Maximum (which is beyond every name),<sup>36</sup> nevertheless it is necessary that being befit it maximally (but in a way not nameable by the name “maximum”) and above all nameable being.

By such considerations, as well as by an infinity of similar ones, learned ignorance sees most clearly from the aforesaid that the unqualifiedly Maximum exists necessarily, so that it is Absolute Necessity. But I indicated<sup>37</sup> that the unqualifiedly Maximum cannot exist except as one. Therefore, it is most true that the Maximum exists as one.

- 18** *Chapter Seven: The trine and one Eternity.*

There has never been a nation which did not worship God and did not

believe Him to be the absolutely Maximum. We find that Marcus Varro, in his book *Antiquities* noted that the Sissennii worshiped Oneness as the Maximum.<sup>38</sup> But Pythagoras, a very famous man of undeniable authority in his own time, taught that this Oneness is trine.<sup>39</sup> As we investigate the truth about this [matter] and elevate our intellects more highly, let us assert (in accordance with the aforesaid): No one doubts that that which precedes all otherness is eternal. For otherness is identical with mutability. Now, everything which naturally precedes mutability is immutable and, hence, eternal. But otherness consists of one thing and another. Hence, otherness is subsequent to oneness, just as is number. Therefore, oneness is by nature prior to otherness; and since oneness naturally precedes otherness, it is eternal.

**19** Moreover, every inequality is composed of an equal and a greater. Therefore, inequality is by nature subsequent to equality—something which can be proven very cogently by means of analysis. For every inequality is analyzable into an equality. For the equal is in between the greater and the lesser. So if you remove that [portion] which is greater, there will be an equal. But if there is a lesser, remove from the other that [portion] which is greater, and an equal will result. And you can continue to do this until, in the process of removing, you come to things simple.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, then, every inequality is, by removing, analyzable into an equality. Therefore, equality naturally precedes inequality.

But inequality and otherness are by nature concomitant. For wherever there is inequality there is, necessarily, otherness—and conversely. For between two things there will at least be otherness;<sup>41</sup> now, the fact that they are two will mean that one of them is a duplicate,<sup>42</sup> therefore, there will be inequality.

Hence, otherness and inequality will, by nature, be concomitant—especially since the number two is the first otherness and the first inequality. Now, I have already proved that by nature equality precedes inequality. Hence, [it] also [precedes] otherness. Therefore, equality is eternal.

**20** Moreover, if there are two causes one of which is by nature prior to the other, the effect of the prior [cause] will be by nature prior to [the effect] of the subsequent [cause]. Now, oneness (*unitas*) is both union<sup>43</sup> and a cause of union; for the reason things are said to be in union is that they are united (*unita*) together.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the number two is both separation and a cause of separation; for two is the first

separation. Therefore, if oneness is a cause of union and if the number two is [a cause] of separation, then just as oneness is by nature prior to two, so union is by nature prior to separation. But separation and otherness are by nature concomitant. Hence, union is eternal (Oust as is oneness), since it is prior to otherness.

- 21** Thus, I have proved that oneness is eternal, equality eternal, and union also eternal. But there cannot be more than one eternal thing. For if there were more than one eternal thing, then since oneness precedes all plurality, something [viz., oneness] would by nature be prior to eternity—an impossibility. Furthermore, if there were more than one eternal thing, the one eternal thing would lack the other eternal things; and so, none of them would be perfect. Thus, something would be eternal which would not be eternal, because it would not be perfect. Since this is not possible, there cannot be more than one eternal thing. But since oneness is eternal, equality eternal, and union also eternal: oneness, equality, and union are one.<sup>45</sup> And this is that trine Oneness which Pythagoras, the first philosopher of all and the glory of Italy and of Greece, affirmed to be worthy of worship.

But let me add, still more explicitly, some further points about the generation of equality from oneness.

- 22** *Chapter Eight: Eternal generation.*

Let me now show very briefly that equality of oneness is begotten from oneness but that union proceeds from oneness and from equality of oneness. “*Unitas*” is the equivalent of “*on-tas*,” so to speak (from the Greek word “*on*,” which is rendered in Latin as “*ens*”); and *unitas* [oneness] is *entitas* [being], as it were.

For indeed, God is the being of things; for He is the Form of being<sup>46</sup> and, hence, is also being. Now, equality of oneness is equality of being, as it were (i.e., equality of existing (*essendi sive existendi*)). But equality of existing [i.e., of being] is the fact that in a thing there is neither too much nor too little—nothing beyond [measure], nothing below [measure]. For if in a thing there were present too much, [that thing] would be monstrous; and if there were present too little, [that thing] would not even exist.

- 23** When we pay attention to what generation is, we view clearly the generation of equality from oneness. For generation is the repetition

of oneness or the multiplication of the same nature as it proceeds from a father to a son. This latter generation is found only in transient things. However, the generation of oneness from oneness is one repetition of oneness—i.e., is oneness once [i.e., oneness times one]. But if I multiply oneness two times or three times, and so on, oneness will beget from itself another—e. g., the number two or the number three or some other number. But oneness once repeated [i.e., oneness times one] begets only equality of oneness; this [repeating] can only be understood as oneness begetting oneness. And this generation is eternal.

**24**      *Chapter Nine: The eternal procession of union.*

Just as generation of oneness from oneness is one repetition of oneness, so the procession from both is oneness of the repetition of this oneness—or (if you prefer the expression) is oneness of oneness and of the equality of this oneness. However, “procession” signifies an “extension,” as it were, from one thing to another—just as in the case where two things are equal,<sup>47</sup> a certain equality (which conjoins and unites them in a certain way) is extended, as it were, from the one to the other. Therefore, union is rightly said to proceed from oneness and from equality of oneness. For union is not merely of one [of these]; rather it proceeds from oneness to equality of oneness<sup>48</sup> and from equality of oneness to oneness. Therefore [union] is rightly said to proceed from both, since it is extended, as it were, from the one to the other.

**25**      But we do not say that union is *begotten* from oneness or from equality of oneness, since union is not from oneness either through repetition or through multiplication. And although equality of oneness is begotten from oneness and although union proceeds from both [of these], nevertheless oneness, equality of oneness, and the union proceeding from both are one and the same thing—as if we were to speak of [one and] the same thing as *this, it, the same*.<sup>49</sup> The fact of our saying “it” is related to a first thing; but our saying “the same” unites and conjoins the related thing to the first thing. Assume, then, that from the pronoun “it” there were formed the word “itness,” so that we could speak of oneness, itness, and sameness: itness would bear a relation to oneness, but sameness would designate the union of itness and oneness. [In this case, the names “Oneness,” “Itness,” and “Sameness”] would nearly enough befit the Trinity.

26 As for our most holy teachers having called Oneness *Father*, Equality *Son*, and Union *Holy Spirit*: they have done so because of a certain likeness to these transient things.<sup>50</sup> For in a father and a son there is a common nature which is one, so that with regard to this nature the son is equal to the father; for humanity is not present more greatly or less greatly in the son than in the father. And between a father and a son there is a certain union. For a natural love unites the one with the other, and does so because of the similarity of the same nature which is in them and which passes down from the father to the son. Wherefore, a father loves his son more than [he loves] someone else who agrees with him in humanity. Because of such a likeness—though it is a very remote likeness—Oneness is called Father, Equality is called Son, and Union is called Love or Holy Spirit. [Yet they are given these names] only in relation to creatures, as I shall show more clearly hereafter,<sup>51</sup> when the time comes. And, in my judgment, this is a very clear investigation (in accord with the Pythagorean investigation) of the ever adorable Trinity in oneness and Oneness in trinity.

27 *Chapter Ten: An understanding of trinity in oneness transcends all things.*

Let us now inquire about what Martian is getting at when he says<sup>52</sup> that Philosophy, desiring to ascend unto a knowledge of this Trinity, left behind circles and spheres.

In the preceding [passages] I have shown the sole and very simple Maximum. And [I have shown]<sup>53</sup> that [the following] are not this Maximum: the most perfect corporeal figure (viz., the sphere), the most perfect surface figure (viz., the circle), the most perfect rectilinear figure (viz., the triangle), the most perfect figure of simple straightness (viz., the line). Rather, the Maximum itself is beyond all these things. Consequently, we must leave behind the things which, together with their material associations, are attained through the senses, through the imagination, or through reason-[leave them behind] so that we may arrive at the most simple and most abstract understanding,<sup>54</sup> where all things are one, where a line is a triangle, a circle, and a sphere, where oneness is threeness (and conversely), where accident is substance, where body is mind (*spiritus*), where motion is rest, and other such things. Now, there is understanding when (1) anything whatsoever in the One is understood to be the One, and the One [is un-



derstood to be] all things, and, consequently, (2) anything whatsoever in the One [is understood to be] all things. And you have not rightly left behind the sphere, the circle, and the like, unless you understand that maximal Oneness is necessarily, trine—since maximal Oneness cannot at all be rightly understood unless it is understood to be trine.

**28** To use examples suitable to the foregoing [point]: We see that oneness of understanding is not anything other than that which understands, that which is understandable, and the act of understanding. So suppose you want to transfer your reflection from that which understands to the Maximum and to say that the Maximum is, most greatly, that which understands; but suppose you do not add that the Maximum is also, most greatly, that which is understandable,<sup>55</sup> together with being the greatest actual understanding. In that case, you do not rightly conceive of the greatest and most perfect Oneness. For if Oneness is the greatest and most perfect understanding (which without these three mutual relations cannot be either understanding or the most perfect understanding), then whoever does not attain to the trinity of this Oneness does not rightly conceive of oneness. For oneness is only threeness, since oneness indicates indivision, distinctness, and union. Indeed, indivision is from oneness—as are also distinctness and union (*unio sive conexio*). Hence, the greatest Oneness is not other than indivision, distinctness, and union. Since it is indivision, it is eternity and without beginning. (The eternal is not divided by anything.) Since it is distinctness, it is from immutable eternity. And since it is union (*conexio sive unio*), it proceeds from both [indivision and distinctness].

**29** Moreover, when I say “Oneness is maximal,” I indicate threeness. For when I say “oneness,” I indicate a beginning without a beginning; when I say “maximal,” I indicate a beginning from a beginning; when I conjoin and unite these two through the word “is,” I indicate a procession from both. Therefore, if from earlier<sup>56</sup> [considerations] I have proven very clearly that the One is maximal: since the Minimum, the Maximum, and their Union are one (so that Oneness is minimal Oneness, maximal Oneness, and their Union), then it is evident that Philosophy (which endeavors to comprehend, by a very simple understanding, that the maximal Oneness is only trine) must leave behind all things imaginable and rational.<sup>57</sup> However, you are wondering about what I said: viz., that if anyone desires to apprehend the Maximum by means of a simple understanding, he must pass beyond the

differences and varieties of things and beyond all mathematical figures. (For I said that in the Maximum a line is a surface, a circle, and a sphere. )<sup>58</sup> Hence, so that your understanding may be sharpened, I will try to convey you more readily, and by sure guidance, toward seeing these necessary and very true points. They will suitably lead you (provided you rise from the sign upward to the truth, by understanding [the meaning of] words symbolically) unto wondrous delight. For you will proceed on this pathway by means of learned ignorance, so that you will be able to see (to the extent granted to an ardent [seeker who is] elevated in accordance with the powers of human intelligence)<sup>59</sup> the one and incomprehensible Maximum, the ever-blessed one and trine God.

**30**        *Chapter Eleven: Mathematics assists us very greatly in apprehending various divine [truths].*

All our wisest and most divine teachers agree that visible things are truly images of invisible things and that from created things the Creator can be knowably seen as in a mirror and a symbolism.<sup>60</sup> But the fact that spiritual matters (which are unattainable by us in themselves) are investigated *symbolically* has its basis in what was said earlier. For all things have 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. And although every image seems to be like its exemplar, nevertheless except for the Maximal Image (which is, in oneness of nature, the very thing which its Exemplar is) no image is so similar or equal to its exemplar that it cannot be infinitely more similar and equal. (These [doctrines] have already been made known from the preceding [remarks]).<sup>61</sup>

**31**        Now, when we conduct an inquiry on the basis of an image, it is necessary that there be no doubt regarding the image, by means of whose symbolical comparative relation we are investigating what is unknown. For the pathway to the uncertain can be only through what is presupposed and certain.<sup>62</sup> But all perceptible things are in a state of continual instability because of the material possibility abounding in them. In our considering of objects, we see that those which are more abstract than perceptible things,<sup>63</sup> viz., mathematical, (not that they are altogether free of material associations, without which they cannot be imagined, and not that they are at all subject to the possi-

bility of changing) are very fixed and are very certain to us. Therefore, in mathematics the wise wisely sought illustrations of things that were to be searched out by the intellect.<sup>64</sup> And none of the ancients who are esteemed as great approached difficult matters by any other likeness than mathematics. Thus, Boethius,<sup>65</sup> the most learned of the Romans, affirmed that anyone who altogether lacked skill in mathematics could not attain a knowledge of divine matters.

32 Did not Pythagoras, the first philosopher both in name and in fact, consider all investigation of truth to be by means of numbers? The Platonists and also our leading [thinkers] followed him to such an extent that our Augustine,<sup>66</sup> and after him Boethius,<sup>67</sup> affirmed that, assuredly, in the mind of the Creator number was the principal exemplar of the things to be created. How was Aristotle<sup>68</sup> (who by refuting his predecessors wanted to appear as someone without parallel) able in the *Metaphysics* to teach us about the difference of species otherwise than by comparing the species to numbers? And when, regarding natural forms, he wanted to teach how the one form is in the other, he resorted of necessity to mathematical forms, saying: “Just as a triangle is in a quadrangle, so the lower [form] is in the higher [form].”<sup>69</sup> I will not mention innumerable other similar examples of his. Also, when the Platonist Aurelius Augustine<sup>70</sup> made an investigation regarding the quantity of the soul and its immortality, and regarding other very deep matters, he had recourse to mathematics as an aid. This pathway seemed to please our Boethius<sup>71</sup> to such an extent that he repeatedly asserted that every true doctrine is contained in [the notions of] multitude and magnitude. And to speak more concisely, if you wish: was not the opinion of the Epicureans about atoms and the void—an opinion which] denies God and is at variance with all truth—destroyed by the Pythagoreans and the Peripatetics only through mathematical demonstration?<sup>72</sup> [I mean the demonstration] that the existence of indivisible and simple atoms—something which Epicurus took as his starting point—is not possible.

Proceeding on this pathway of the ancients, I concur with them and say that since the pathway for approaching divine matters is opened to us only through symbols, we can make quite suitable use of mathematical signs because of their incorruptible certainty.

33 *Chapter Twelve: The way in which mathematical signs ought to be used in our undertaking.*

But since from the preceding [points] it is evident that the unqualifiedly Maximum cannot be any of the things which we either know or conceive: when we set out to investigate the Maximum symbolically, we must leap beyond simple likeness. For since all mathematical are finite and otherwise could not even be imagined: if we want to use finite things as a way for ascending to the unqualifiedly Maximum, we must first consider finite mathematical figures together with their characteristics and relations. Next, [we must] apply these relations, in a transformed way, to corresponding infinite mathematical figures. Thirdly, [we must] thereafter in a still more highly transformed way, apply the relations of these infinite figures to the simple Infinite, which is altogether independent even of all figure. At this point our ignorance will be taught incomprehensibly how we are to think more correctly and truly about the Most High as we grope by means of a symbolism.

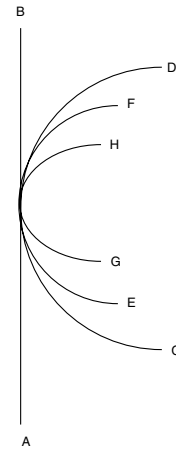
- 34 Operating in this way, then, and beginning under the guidance of the maximum Truth, I affirm what the holy men and the most exalted intellects who applied themselves to figures have stated in various ways. The most devout Anselm<sup>73</sup> compared the maximum Truth to infinite rectitude. (Let me, following him, have recourse to the figure of rectitude, which I picture as a straight line.) Others who are very talented compared, to the Super-blessed Trinity, a triangle consisting of three equal right angles.<sup>74</sup> Since, necessarily, such a triangle has infinite sides, as will be shown, it can be called an infinite triangle. (These men I will also follow.) Others who have attempted to befigure infinite oneness have spoken of God as an infinite circle.<sup>75</sup> But those who considered the most actual existence of God affirmed that He is an infinite sphere, as it were.<sup>76</sup> I will show that all of these [men] have rightly conceived of the Maximum and that the opinion of them all is a single opinion.

- 35 *Chapter Thirteen: The characteristics of a maximum, infinite line.*

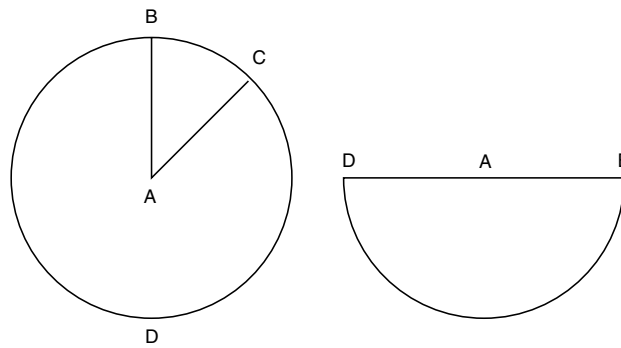
I maintain, therefore, that if there were an infinite line, it would be a straight line, a triangle, a circle, and a sphere. And likewise if there were an infinite sphere, it would be a circle, a triangle, and a line. And the same thing must be said about an infinite triangle and an infinite circle.

First of all, it is evident that an infinite line would be a straight

line: The diameter of a circle is a straight line, and the circumference is a curved line which is greater than the diameter. So if the curved line becomes less curved in proportion to the increased circumference of the circle, then the circumference of the maximum circle, which cannot be greater, is minimally curved and therefore maximally straight. Hence, the minimum coincides with the maximum—to such an extent that we can visually recognize that it is necessary for the maximum line to be maximally straight and minimally curved. Not even a scruple of doubt about this can remain when we see in the figure here at the side that arc CD of the larger circle is less curved than arc EF of the smaller circle, and that arc EF is less curved than arc GH of the still smaller circle. Hence, the straight line AB will be the arc of the maximum circle, which cannot be greater. And thus we see that a maximum, infinite line is, necessarily, the straightest; and to it no curvature is opposed. Indeed, in the maximum line curvature is straightness. And this is the first thing [which was] to be proved.



36 Secondly, I said that an infinite line is a maximum triangle, a maximum circle, and a [maximum] sphere. In order to demonstrate this, we must in the case of finite lines see what is present in the potency of a finite line. And that which we are examining will become clearer to us on the basis of the fact that an infinite line is, actually, whatever is present in the potency of a finite line. To begin with, we know that a line finite in length can be longer and straighter; and I have just proved that the maximum line is the longest and straightest. Next, if while point A remains fixed, line AB is rotated until B comes to C, a triangle is formed. And if the rotation is continued until



B returns to where it began, a circle is formed. Furthermore, if, while A remains fixed, B is rotated until it comes to the place opposite to where it began, viz., to D, then from lines AB and AD one continuous line is produced and a semicircle is described. And if while the diameter BD remains fixed the semicircle is rotated, a sphere is formed.<sup>77</sup> And the sphere is the termination of the potency of the line. The sphere exists in complete actuality since it is not in potency with respect to any further derivable figure. Therefore, if these figures are present in the potency of a finite line and if an infinite line is actually all the things with respect to which a finite line is in potency, then it follows that an infinite line is a triangle, a circle, and a sphere. Q.E.D.

And because, presumably, you would like to see more clearly how it is that the infinite is actually those things which are present in the potency of the finite, I will now make you very certain thereof.

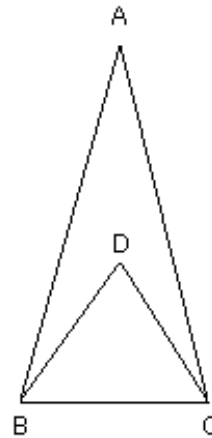
**37**      *Chapter Fourteen: An infinite line is a triangle.*

Since in the case of quantitative things a line and a triangle differ incomparably, the imagination, which does not transcend the genus of perceptible things, does not apprehend that the former can be the latter. However, this [apprehending] will be easy for the intellect. It is already evident<sup>78</sup> that there can be only one maximum and infinite thing. Moreover, since any two sides of any triangle cannot, if conjoined, be shorter than the third: it is evident that in the case of a triangle whose one side is infinite, the other two sides are not shorter [i.e., are together infinite]. And because each part of what is infinite is infinite: for any triangle whose one side is infinite, the other sides must also be infinite. And since there cannot be more than one infinite thing, you understand transcendently that an infinite triangle cannot be composed of a plurality of lines, even though it is the greatest and truest triangle, incomposite and most simple. And because it is the truest triangle—something which it cannot be without three lines—it will be necessary that the one infinite line be three lines and that the three lines be one most simple line. And similarly regarding the angles; for there will be only one infinite angle; and this angle is three angles, and the three angles are one angle. Nor will this maximum triangle be composed of sides and angles; rather, the infinite line and the [infinite] angle are one and the same thing, so that the line is the angle, because the triangle is the line.

38 Furthermore, you can be helped to understand the foregoing if you ascend from a quantitative triangle to a non-quantitative triangle. Clearly, every quantitative triangle has three angles equal to two right angles. And so, the larger the one angle is, the smaller are the other two. Now, any one angle can be increased almost but (in accordance with our first premise) not completely up to the size of two right angles. Nevertheless, let us hypothesize that it is increased completely up to the size of two right angles while the triangle remains [nonetheless a triangle]. In that case, it will be obvious that the triangle has one angle which is three angles and that the three angles are one.

39 In like manner, you can see that a triangle is a line. For any two sides of a quantitative triangle are, if conjoined, as much longer than the third side as the angle which they form is smaller than two right angles. For example, because the angle BAC is much smaller than two right angles, the lines BA and AC, if conjoined, are much longer than BC. Hence, the larger the angle, e.g., BDC, the less the lines BD and DC exceed the line BC, and the smaller is the surface. Therefore, if, by hypothesis, an angle could be two right angles, the whole triangle would be resolved into a simple line.

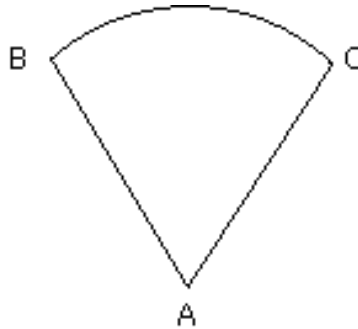
Hence, by means of this hypothesis, which cannot hold true for quantitative things, you can be helped in ascending to non-quantitative things; that which is impossible for quantitative things, you see to be altogether necessary for non-quantitative things. Hereby it is evident that an infinite line is a maximum triangle. Q. E. D.



40 *Chapter Fifteen:* The maximum triangle is a circle and a sphere.

Next, we shall see more clearly that a triangle is a circle. Let us postulate the triangle ABC, formed by rotating the line AB—A remaining stationary—until B comes to C. There is no doubt that if line AB were infinite and B were rotated until it came all the way back to the starting point, a maximum circle would be formed, of which BC would be a portion. Now, because BC is a portion of an infinite arc, BC is a straight line.<sup>79</sup> And since every part of what is infinite is infinite, BC is not shorter than the whole arc of infinite circumference.

Hence, BC will be not only a portion but the most complete circumference. Therefore, it is necessary that the triangle ABC be a maximum circle. And because the circumference BC is a straight line, it is not greater than the infinite line AB;<sup>80</sup> for there is nothing greater than what is infinite. Nor are there two lines, because there cannot be two infinite things. Therefore, the infinite line, which is a triangle, is also a circle. And [this is] what was proposed [for proof].



- 41 Moreover, that an infinite line is a sphere becomes very obvious in the following way: The line AB is the circumference of the maximum circle—indeed, it *is* the [maximum] circle, as was just proved.<sup>81</sup> And, in the triangle ABC, AB was brought from B to C, as was previously stated. But BC is an infinite line, as was also just proved. Hence, AB [which is the maximum circle] reached C by a complete coming around upon itself.<sup>82</sup> And since this is the case, it follows of necessity that from such a coming around of a circle upon itself a sphere is originated. And given that we previously proved that ABC is a circle, a triangle, and a line, we have now proved that it is also a sphere. And these are [the results] we set out to find.

- 42 *Chapter Sixteen:* In a symbolic way the Maximum is to all things as a maximum line is to [all] lines.

Now that we have seen how it is that an infinite line is actually and infinitely all that which is in the possibility of a finite line: we likewise have a symbolism for seeing how it is that, in the case of the simple Maximum, this Maximum is actually and maximally all that which is in the possibility of Absolute Simplicity. For 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. By comparison, a triangle is educed from a line; but 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 tri-



angle, which is identical with the [infinite] line. Moreover, absolute possibility is, in the Maximum, not other than actually the Maximum—just as an infinite line is actually a sphere. The situation is otherwise in the case of what is non-maximum. For in that case the possibility is not the actuality—even as a finite line is not a triangle.

43 Hence, we notice here an important speculative consideration which, from the foregoing, can be inferred about the Maximum: viz., that the Maximum is such that in it the Minimum is the Maximum, and thus the Maximum infinitely and in every respect transcends all opposition. From this principle there can be elicited about the Maximum as many negative truths as can be written or read; indeed, all humanly apprehensible theology is elicited from this very great principle. Accordingly, the greatest seeker of God, Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>83</sup> declares in his *Mystical Theology* that most blessed Bartholomew marvelously understood theology, having called it the greatest and the least. For whoever understands this [point] understands all things; he transcends all created understanding. For God, who is this Maximum, “is not thing and is not any *other* thing; He is not *here* and is not *there*,” as the same Dionysius says regarding the divine names; for just as He is all things, so He is not any of all the things.<sup>84</sup> For, as Dionysius concludes at the end of *The Mystical Theology*: “above all affirmation God is the perfect and unique Cause of all things; and the excellence of Him who is unqualifiedly free from all things and is beyond all things is above the negation of all things.”<sup>85</sup> Hence, he concludes in his *Letter to Gaius* that God is known above every mind and all intelligence.<sup>86</sup>

44 And in harmony with this [verdict] Rabbi Solomon states that all the wise agreed that the sciences do not apprehend the Creator. Only He Himself apprehends what He is; our apprehension of Him is a defective approximation of His apprehension.<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, Rabbi Solomon elsewhere says by way of conclusion: “Praised be the Creator! When His existence (*essentia*) is apprehended, the inquiry of the sciences is cut short, wisdom is reckoned as ignorance, and elegance of words as fatuity.” And this is that learned ignorance which we are investigating. Dionysius [himself] endeavored to show in many ways that God can be found only through learned ignorance—[found] by no other principle, it seems to me, than the aforesaid.

45 Therefore, let our speculative consideration (which we elicit from the fact that infinite curvature is infinite straightness) be applied sym-

bologically to the Maximum as regards the Maximum's most simple and most infinite Essence: [We see] (1) that this Essence is the most simple Essence of all essences; (2a) that in this Essence all the essences of past, present, and future things are—ever and eternally—actually this Essence; and so, [it is] all essences, even as it is the Essence of all [essences]; (2b) that the Essence of all [essences] is each essence in such way that it is all of them together and none of them in particular; (3) that as an infinite line is the most congruent measure of all lines, so the Maximum Essence is likewise the most congruent measure of all essences. For, necessarily, the Maximum, to which the Minimum is not opposed, is the most congruent measure of all things; [it is] not a greater [measure than anything], because it is the Minimum; nor [is it] a lesser [measure than anything], because it is the Maximum. But everything measurable falls between the maximum and the minimum. Therefore, the Infinite Essence is the most congruent and most precise measure of all essences.<sup>88</sup>

- 46 Furthermore, so that you may see this [point] more clearly, consider [the following]: If an infinite line were constituted by an infinite number of one-foot sections and if another infinite line were constituted by an infinite number of two-foot sections, these lines would nevertheless have to be equal, since the infinite is not greater than the infinite. Therefore, just as in an infinite line one foot is not shorter than two feet, so it is not the case that an infinite line exceeds the length of one foot more than it exceeds the length of two feet. Rather, since any part of the infinite is infinite, one foot of an infinite line is convertible with the whole infinite line, just as are two feet. Similarly, since in the Maximum Essence every essence is the Maximum Essence, the Maximum is none other than the most congruent measure of all essences. Nor is there found to be any other precise measure of every essence than that Essence; for all others fall short and can be more precise, as was shown very clearly earlier.<sup>89</sup>

- 47 *Chapter Seventeen: Very deep doctrines from the same [symbolism of an infinite line].*

Still more on the same topic: A finite line is divisible, and an infinite line is indivisible; for the infinite, in which the maximum coincides with the minimum, has no parts. However, a finite line is not divisible to the point that it is no longer a line, because in the case of mag-

nitude we do not arrive at a minimum than which there cannot be a lesser-as was indicated earlier.<sup>90</sup> Hence, a finite line is indivisible in its essence [*ratio*]; a line of one foot is not less a line than is a line of one cubit. It follows, then, that an infinite line is the essence of a finite line. Similarly, the unqualifiedly Maximum is the Essence of all things. But the essence is the measure. Hence, Aristotle<sup>91</sup> rightly says in the *Metaphysics* that the First is the measure [*metrum et mensura*] of all things because it is the Essence of all things.

48 Furthermore: Just as an infinite line, which is the essence of a finite line, is indivisible and hence immutable and eternal, so also the Essence of all things, viz., Blessed God, is eternal and immutable. And herein is disclosed an understanding of the great Dionysius, who says that the Essence [*essentia*] of things is incorruptible,<sup>92</sup> and of others who have said that the Essence [*ratio*] of things is eternal. For example, [let me mention] the divine Plato, who, as Chalcidius reports,<sup>93</sup> stated in the *Phaedo* that, as it exists in itself, there is one Form or Idea of all things but [that] with respect to things, which are plural, there seems to be a plurality of forms. For example, when I consider a two-foot line, a three-foot line, and so on, two things appear: (1) the line's essence, which is one and equal in each and every line and (2) the difference which there is between a line of two feet and a line of three feet. And so, the essence of a two-foot line and the essence of a three-foot line seem to be different. However, it is obvious that in an infinite line a line of two feet and a line of three feet do not differ. Now, an infinite line is the essence of a finite line. Hence, there is one essence of both lines; and the difference between the things, or the lines, does not result from a difference of the essence, which is one, but results accidentally, because the lines do not participate equally in the essence. Hence, there is only one essence of all lines, and it is participated in in different ways.

49 But as for there being differences of participation: this occurs because (as we proved earlier)<sup>94</sup> there cannot be two things which are exactly similar and which, consequently, participate precisely and equally in one essence. For only the Maximum, which is Infinite Essence, can participate with supreme equality in essence.<sup>95</sup> Just as there is only one Maximum Oneness, so there can be only one Equality of Oneness. Because it is Maximum Equality, it is the Essence of all things. By comparison, there is only one infinite line, which is the essence of all finite lines; and because of the fact that a finite line necessarily falls short of

an infinite line, it cannot be the essence of itself, even as it cannot be both finite and infinite. Hence, just as no two finite lines can be precisely equal (since only the Maximum is precise Equality, which is Maximum Equality), so also there are not found to be two lines which participate equally in the one essence of all [lines].

**50** Moreover, in a line of two feet an infinite line is neither longer nor shorter than the two-foot line, as was stated earlier.<sup>96</sup> And similarly regarding lines of three feet and more. Now, since an infinite line is indivisible and one, it is present as a whole in each finite line. But it is not present as a whole in each finite line according to participation and limitation; otherwise, when it was present as a whole in a line of two feet, it could not be present in a line of three feet, since a line of two feet is not a line of three feet. Therefore, it is present as a whole in each line in such way that it is not present in any line insofar as one line is distinct from the others through limitation. Therefore, the infinite line is present as a whole in each line in such way that each line is present in it. Now, this [point] must be considered in both its aspects; for then we will see clearly how it is that the Maximum is in each thing and in no thing. This [symbolism of a line] symbolizes none other than the Maximum, since by similar reasoning the Maximum is [seen to be] in each thing, even as each thing [is seen to be] in it; moreover, [this symbolism] displays the reason that the Maximum exists in itself. Accordingly, the fact that the Maximum is the measure [*metrum et mensura*] of all things is not other than the fact that the unqualifiedly Maximum exists in itself—i.e., that the Maximum is the Maximum. Therefore, no thing exists in itself except the Maximum; and everything exists in itself insofar as it exists in its Essence [*ratio*], because its Essence (*ratio*) is the Maximum.

**51** From these [considerations] the intellect can be helped; and by the illustration of an infinite line, the intellect can in sacred ignorance very greatly advance beyond all understanding and toward the unqualifiedly Maximum. For here we have now seen clearly how we can arrive at God through removing the participation of beings. For all beings participate in Being. Therefore, if from all beings participation is removed, there remains most simple Being itself, which is the Essence (*essentia*) of all things. And we see such Being only in most learned ignorance; for when I remove from my mind all the things which participate in Being, it seems that nothing remains. Hence, the great

Dionysius says<sup>97</sup> that our understanding of God draws near to nothing rather than to something. But sacred ignorance teaches me that that which seems to the intellect to be nothing is the incomprehensible Maximum.

- 52            *Chapter Eighteen:* From the same [symbolism]  
we are led to an understanding  
of the participation in being.

Furthermore, our insatiable intellect, stimulated by the aforesaid, carefully and with very great delight inquires into how it can behold more clearly this participation in the one Maximum. And being once again aided by the illustration of an infinite straight line, it remarks: A curve, which admits of more or less, cannot be a maximum or a minimum. Nor is a curve, qua curve,

anything—since it is a deficiency of what is straight. Therefore, the being which is in a curve derives from participation in straightness, since a curve, considered maximally and minimally, is only something straight. Therefore, the less a curve is a curve (e.g., the circumference of a quite large circle), the more it participates in straightness. [I do] not [mean] that it takes a part of it, because infinite straightness is not partible. Now, the longer a straight finite line is, the more it seems to participate in the infinity of an infinite, maximum line.

A finite straight line, insofar as it is straight (minimal curvature is a reduction to that which is straight) participates in the infinite line according to a more simple participation, and a curve [participates in the infinite line] not [according to] a simple and immediate participation but rather [according to] a mediate and remote participation; for [it participates] through the medium of the straightness in which it participates. (Similarly, some beings—viz., simple finite substances—participate more immediately in Maximum Being, which exists in itself. And other beings—viz., accidents—participate in [Maximum] Being not through themselves but through the medium of substances.) Hence—the difference in participation notwithstanding—the straight is the measure of itself and of the not-straight, as states Aristotle.<sup>98</sup> Just as an infinite line [is the measure] of a straight line and of a curved line, so the Maximum [is the measure] of all things which participate [in it], no matter how differently.

- 53            In this [illustration] is disclosed an understanding of the statement

that substance does not admit of more or less. This statement is true—even as [it is true that] a finite straight line, insofar as it is straight, does not admit of more and less. But because [it is] finite, one [straight] line is—through a difference of participation in the infinite line—longer or shorter in relation to another; no two [finite lines] are ever found to be equal. But a curve admits of more and less, according as it participates in straightness. Consequently, as being something straight through participated straightness, the curve admits of more and less. By analogous reasoning: accidents are more excellent in proportion to their participation in substance; and, further, the more they participate in a more excellent substance, the still more excellent they are.

Moreover, through this [illustration] we see how it is that there can be only beings which participate in the being of the First either through themselves or through other than themselves—just as there are only lines, either straight or curved. Wherefore, Aristotle <sup>99</sup> was right in dividing all the things in the world into substance and accident.

- 54 There is, then, one most congruent measure of substance and of accident—viz., the most simple Maximum. Although the Maximum is neither substance nor accident, nevertheless from the foregoing we see clearly that it receives the name of those things which participate in it immediately, viz., substances, rather than [the name] of accidents. Hence, the very great Dionysius <sup>100</sup> calls it more -than- substance, or supersubstantial, rather than superaccidental. Since to say “supersubstantial” is to say more than [to say] “superaccidental,” the former is more fittingly predicated of the Maximum. Now, we say *supersubstantial*—i.e., not substantial but above substance (for the substantial is lower than it). And so, “supersubstantial” is a negation, quite truly befitting the Maximum, as I shall later teach regarding the names of God.<sup>101</sup>

On the basis of the foregoing considerations someone could make an extensive inquiry regarding the difference between, and the excellence of, accidents and substances. But this is not the place for dealing with these matters.

- 55 *Chapter Nineteen: The likening of an infinite triangle to maximum trinity.*

Regarding what was stated and shown, viz., that a maximum line is a maximum triangle: let us now become instructed in ignorance. We have seen <sup>102</sup> that a maximum line is an [infinite] triangle; and because

[this] line is most simple, it will be something most simple and three. Every angle of the triangle will be the line, since the triangle as a whole is the line. Hence, the infinite line is three. But there cannot be more than one infinite thing. Therefore, this trinity is oneness.

Moreover, as is shown in geometry: the angle opposite the longer side is the larger. Now, the [maximum triangle] is a triangle which has no side except an infinite side. Hence, the angles will be maximum and infinite. Therefore, one angle is not smaller than the others, nor are two of them larger than the third. Rather, because there could not be any quantity outside of infinite quantity, there cannot be any angles outside of the one infinite angle. Therefore, the angles will be in one another; and all three angles [will be] one maximum.

56 Furthermore, a maximum line is just as much a triangle, a circle, and a sphere as it is a line; it is truly and incompositely all these, as was shown.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the unqualifiedly Maximum can be likened to the linear maximum, which we can call essence; it can be likened to the triangular maximum and can be called trinity; it can be likened to the circular maximum and can be called oneness; it can be likened to the spherical maximum and can be called actual existence. Therefore, the Maximum *is actually one trine essence*, although it is most true that the Maximum is these identically and most simply; the essence is not other than the trinity; and the trinity is not other than the oneness; and the actuality is not other than the oneness, the trinity, or the essence. Therefore, just as it is true that the Maximum exists and is one, so it is true that it is three in a way in which the truth of the trinity does not contradict the most simple oneness but is the oneness.

57 The foregoing is not possible otherwise than as is recognizable through the correspondence with the maximum triangle. Hence, when from the aforesaid we acquire knowledge of the true triangle and the most simple line, in the way in which this [knowledge] is possible for man, we will attain, in learned ignorance, unto the Trinity. For we [shall] see that we do not find first one angle and then another and then still another, as in the case of finite triangles; for there cannot be numerically different angles in the oneness of an incomposite triangle. Rather, one thing exists trinely without numerical multiplication. Therefore, most learned Augustine was right in saying that when you begin to number the Trinity, you depart from the truth.<sup>104</sup> For in the case of God we must, as far as possible, precede contradictories and

embrace them in a simple concept. For example, in God we must not conceive of distinction and indistinction as two contradictories but [must conceive of] them as antecedently present in their own most simple Beginning, where distinction is not anything other than indistinction; and then we will conceive more clearly that the trinity and the oneness are the same thing. For where distinction is indistinction, trinity is oneness; and, conversely, where indistinction is distinction, oneness is trinity. And similarly about the plurality of persons and the oneness of essence: for where plurality is oneness, trinity of persons is the same as oneness of essence; and, conversely, where oneness is plurality, oneness of essence is trinity of persons.

**58** The foregoing points are clearly seen in our illustration, where the most simple line is a triangle, and, conversely, the simple triangle is linear oneness. In our illustration we also see that the angles of the triangle cannot be numbered through *one, two, three*, since each angle is in each angle—as the Son says, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.”<sup>105</sup> Yet, the truth of a triangle requires that there be three angles. Hence, in our illustration there are most truly three angles; and each one is a maximum angle; and all are one maximum. Moreover, the truth of a triangle requires that no one angle be the other; and, in like manner, in the illustration the truth of the oneness of the most simple essence requires that these three angles not be three distinct things but be one thing. And this requirement, too, is met in the illustration.

Therefore, join together antecedently, as I said, these things which seem to be opposites, and you will have not one thing and three things, or three things and one thing, but the Triune, or Unitrine. And this is Absolute Truth.

**59** *Chapter Twenty:* Still more regarding the Trinity. There cannot be fourness, [fiveness], etc., in God.

Furthermore, the truth of the Trinity—a Trinity which is Triunity—requires that the trine be one, because [the trine] is spoken of as triune. But the triune comes under a concept only in the manner in which a mutual relationship unites distinct things and an order distinguishes them. Now, when we construct a finite triangle there is first one angle, then another, and then a third from the first two; and these angles bear a mutual relationship to one another, so that from them



there is one triangle. By comparison, then, [this mutual relationship obtains] infinitely in the infinite. Nevertheless, we must view this [mutual relationship] in the following way: viz., that priority is conceived to be in the eternity in such way that posteriority does not contradict it. For priority and posteriority could not belong in any other way to the infinite and eternal. Hence, it is not the case that the Father is prior to the Son and that the Son is posterior [to the Father]; rather, the Father is prior in such way that the Son is not posterior. The Father is the first person in such way that the Son is not subsequently the second person; rather, just as the Father is the first person without priority, so the Son is the second person without posteriority; and, in a similar way, the Holy Spirit is the third person. Let this [discussion] suffice, since [the topic] was dealt with more fully earlier.<sup>106</sup>

- 60** However, you might like to note, regarding this ever-blessed Trinity, that the Maximum is three and not four or five or more. This point is surely noteworthy. For [fourness or fiveness, etc.] would be inconsistent with the simplicity and the perfection of the Maximum. For example, every polygonal figure has a triangular figure as its simplest element; moreover, a triangular figure is the minimal polygonal figure—than which there cannot be a smaller figure. Now, we proved<sup>107</sup> that the unqualifiedly minimum coincides with the maximum. Therefore, just as one is to numbers, so a triangle is to polygonal figures. Therefore, just as every number is reducible to oneness, so [all] polygons are [reducible] to a triangle. Therefore, the maximum triangle, with which the minimum triangle coincides., encompasses all polygonal figures. For just as maximum oneness is to every number, so the maximum triangle is to every polygon. But, as is obvious, a quadrangular figure is not the minimum figure, because a triangular figure is smaller than it. Therefore, a quadrangular figure—which cannot be devoid of composition, since it is greater than the minimum—cannot at all be congruent with the most simple maximum, which can coincide only with the minimum. Indeed, “to be maximum and to be quadrangular” involves a contradiction. For [a quadrangle] could not be a congruent measure of triangular figures., because it would always exceed them. Hence, how could that which would not be the measure of all things be the maximum? Indeed, how could that which would derive from another and would be composite, and hence finite, be the maximum?

**61** It is now evident why from the potency of a simple line there first arises a simple triangle (as regards polygons), then a simple circle, and then a simple sphere; and we do not arrive at other than these elemental figures which are disproportional to one another in finite things and which enfold within themselves all figures. Hence, if we wanted to conceive of the measures of all measurable quantities: first we would have to have, for length, a maximum, infinite line, with which the minimum would coincide; then, similarly, for rectilinear size [we would have to have] a maximum triangle; and for circular size, a maximum circle; and for depth, a maximum sphere; and with other than these four we could not attain to all measurable things. And because all these measures would have to be infinite and maximum measures, with which the minimum would coincide, and since there cannot be more than one maximum: we say that the one maximum, which is supposed to be the measure of all quantities, *is* those things<sup>108</sup> without which it could not be the maximum measure. Yet, considered in itself, without relation to what is measurable, it neither is nor can be truly called any of these things; rather, it is infinitely and disproportionally above them.

By comparison, then, since the unqualifiedly Maximum is the measure of everything, we predicate of it those attributes without which we do not consider it to be able to be the measure of everything. Hence, although the Maximum is infinitely above all trinity, we call it trine; for otherwise we would not be considering it to be the simple Cause and Measure of the things whose oneness of being is a trinity—even as, with regard to figures, triangular oneness consists of a trinity of angles. Yet, in truth: if this consideration is eliminated, then neither the name “trinity” nor our concept of trinity at all befit the Maximum; rather, [the name and the concept] fall infinitely short of this maximal and incomprehensible Truth.

**62** And so, we regard the maximum triangle as the simplest measure of all trinely existing things—even as activities are actions existing trinely (1) in potency, (2) in regard to an object, and (3) in actuality. The case is similar regarding perceptions, thoughts, volitions, likenesses, unlikenesses, adornments, comparative relations, mutual relations, natural appetites, and all other things whose oneness of being consists of plurality—e.g., especially a nature's being and activity, which consist of a mutual relationship between what acts, what is acted upon, and what derives commonly from these two.

**63**      *Chapter Twenty-one: The likening of an infinite circle to oneness.*

We considered a few points regarding a maximum triangle. Let us likewise add [a few points] about an infinite circle. A circle is a perfect figure of oneness and simplicity. Earlier<sup>109</sup> I showed that a [maximum] triangle is a circle; and so, trinity is oneness. But this oneness is infinite, just as the circle is infinite. Therefore, it is infinitely more one, or more identical, than any oneness<sup>110</sup> expressible and apprehensible by us. For the identity in an infinite circle is so great that it precedes all oppositions—even relative oppositions. For in an infinite circle *other* and *different* are not opposed to identity.

Therefore, [by comparison]: since the Maximum is of infinite oneness, all the things which befit it are it, without difference and otherness. Thus, its goodness is not different from its wisdom but is the same thing; for in the Maximum all difference is identity. Hence, since the Maximum's power is most one, its power is also most powerful and most infinite. The Maximum's most one duration is so great that in its duration the past is not other than the future, and the future is not other than the present; rather, they are the most one duration, or eternity, without beginning and end. For in the Maximum the beginning is so great that even the end is—in the Maximum—the beginning.

**64**      All these [points] are exhibited by the infinite circle, which is eternal,<sup>111</sup> without beginning and end, indivisibly the most one and the most encompassing. Because this circle is maximum, its diameter is also maximum. And since there cannot be more than one maximum, this circle is most one to such an extent that the diameter is the circumference. Now, an infinite diameter has an infinite middle. But the middle is the center. Therefore, it is evident that the center, the diameter, and the circumference are the same thing.

Accordingly, our ignorance is taught that the Maximum, to which the Minimum is not opposed, is incomprehensible. But in the Maximum the center is the circumference. You see that because the center is infinite, the whole of the Maximum is present most perfectly within everything as the Simple and the Indivisible; moreover, it is outside of every being—surrounding all things, because the circumference is infinite, and penetrating all things, because the diameter is infinite. It is the Beginning of all things, because it is the center; it is the End of all things, because it is the circumference; it is the Middle of all things,

because it is the diameter. It is the efficient Cause, since it is the center; it is the formal Cause, since it is the diameter; it is the final Cause, since it is the circumference. It bestows being, for it is the center; it regulates being, for it is the diameter; it conserves being, for it is the circumference. And many similar such things.

**65** And so, your intellect apprehends that the Maximum is neither identical with nor different from anything and that all things are in it, from it, and through it, because it is the circumference, the diameter, and the center. [I do] not [mean] that it really is the circle, the circumference, the diameter, or the center; rather, it is only the most simple Maximum, which is investigated by means of these symbolisms. And it is found to surround all existing and non-existing things, so that in it not-being is maximum being, just as the Minimum is the Maximum. It is the measure (1) of all circular movement from potentiality to actuality and back again from actuality to potentiality, (2) of the composition from first principles to individuals and of the resolution of individuals to first principles, (3) of perfect forms of circular things, (4) of circular activities and motions which turn back on themselves and return to their [respective] beginning, and (5) of all such [motions] whose oneness consists of a perpetual circularity.

**66** From this circular figure many [points] might here be elicited about the perfection of oneness. For the sake of brevity I will pass over them, for on the basis of the aforesaid they can be readily inferred by anyone. I call attention only to the following: that all theology is circular and is based upon a circle.<sup>112</sup> [This is true] to such an extent that the names for the [divine] attributes are predicated truly of one another in a circular manner. For example, supreme justice is supreme truth, and supreme truth is supreme justice; and similarly for all the others. Accordingly, if you want to prolong the inquiry, an infinite number of theological [points] which are now hidden from you can be made very obvious to you.

**67** *Chapter Twenty-two: How God's foresight unites contradictories.*

But so that we may also come to see how through the previous points we are led to a deep understanding, let us direct our inquiry to [the topic of] God's foresight. Since it is evident from the foregoing that God is the enfolding of all things, even of contradictories, [it is also

evident that] nothing can escape His foresight. For whether we do some thing or its opposite or nothing, the whole of it was enfolded in God's foresight. Therefore, nothing will occur except in accordance with God's foreseeing.

- 68** Hence, although God could have foreseen many things which He did not foresee and will not foresee and although He foresaw many things which He was able not to foresee, nevertheless nothing can be added to or subtracted from divine foresight. By way of comparison: Human nature is simple and one; if a human being were born who was never even expected to be born, nothing would be added to human nature. Similarly, nothing would be subtracted from human nature if [the human being] were not born—just as nothing [is subtracted] when those who have been born die. This [holds true] because human nature enfolds not only those who exist but also those who do not exist and will not exist, although they could have existed. In like manner, even if what will never occur were to occur, nothing would be added to divine foresight, since it enfolds not only what does occur but also what does not occur but can occur. Therefore, just as in matter many things which will never occur are present as possibilities so, by contrast, whatever things will not occur but can occur: although they are present in God's foresight, they are present not possibly but actually.<sup>113</sup> Nor does it follow herefrom that these things exist actually.

Accordingly, we say that “human nature enfolds and embraces an infinite number of things” because it [enfolds] not only the human beings who did exist, do exist, and will exist but also those who can exist, though they never will (and so, human nature embraces mutable things immutably, just as infinite oneness [embraces] every number). In a similar way, God's infinite foresight enfolds not only the things which will occur but also the things which will not occur but can occur (and it enfolds contraries, even as a genus enfolds contrary differentiae). Those things which [infinite foresight] knows, it knows without a difference of times; for it is not the case that it knows future things as future, and past things as past; rather, it [knows] mutable things eternally and immutably.

- 69** Hence, divine foresight is inescapable and immutable. Nothing can transcend it. Hence, all things related to it are said to have necessity-and rightly so, since in God all things are God,<sup>114</sup> who is Absolute Necessity. And so, it is evident that the things which will never occur are present in God's foresight in the aforesaid manner, even if

they are not foreseen to occur. It is necessary that God foresaw what He foresaw, because His foresight is necessary and immutable, even though He was able to foresee even the opposite of that which He did foresee. For if enfolding is posited, it is not the case that the thing which was enfolded is posited; but if unfolding is posited, enfolding is [also] posited. For example, although I am able to read or not to read tomorrow: no matter which of these I shall do, I will not escape [God's] foresight, which embraces [i.e., enfolds] contraries. Hence, whatever I shall do will occur in accordance with God's foresight.

And so, the following is evident: how it is that through the foregoing points (which teach us that the Maximum precedes all opposition since it somehow embraces and enfolds all things), we apprehend what is true about God's foresight and other such matters.

**70**      *Chapter Twenty-three: The likening of an infinite sphere to the actual existence of God.*

It is fitting to reflect upon still a few more points regarding an infinite sphere. In an infinite sphere we find that three maximum lines—of length, width, and depth—meet in a center. But the center of a maximum sphere is equal to the diameter and to the circumference.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, in an infinite sphere the center is equal to these three lines; indeed, the center is all three: viz., the length, the width, and the depth. And so, [by comparison], the Maximum will be—infinately and most simply—all length, width, and depth; in the Maximum these are the one most simple, indivisible Maximum. As a center, the Maximum precedes all width, length, and depth; it is the End and the Middle of all these; for in an infinite sphere the center, the diameter, and the circumference are the same thing. And just as an infinite sphere is most simple and exists in complete actuality, so the Maximum exists most simply in complete actuality. And just as a sphere is the actuality of a line, a triangle, and a circle, so the Maximum is the actuality of all things. Therefore, all actual existence has from the Maximum whatever actuality it possesses; and all existence exists actually insofar as it exists actually in the Infinite. Hence, the Maximum is the Form of forms and the Form of being,<sup>116</sup> or maximum actual Being.

**71**      Hence, Parmenides,<sup>117</sup> reflecting most subtly, said that God is He for whom to be anything which is is to be everything which is. Therefore, just as a sphere is the ultimate perfection of figures and is that than which there is no more perfect [figure], so the Maximum is the

most perfect perfection of all things. [It is perfection] to such an extent that in it everything imperfect is most perfect—just as an infinite line is [an infinite] sphere, and in this sphere<sup>118</sup> curvature is straightness, composition is simplicity, difference is identity, otherness is oneness, and so on. For how could there be any imperfection in that in which imperfection is infinite perfection, possibility is infinite actuality, and so on?

72 Since the Maximum is like a maximum sphere, we now see clearly that it is the one most simple and most congruent measure of the whole universe and of all existing things in the universe;<sup>119</sup> for in it the whole is not greater than the part, just as an infinite sphere is not greater than an infinite line. Therefore, God is the one most simple Essence (*ratio*) of the whole world, or universe.<sup>120</sup> And just as after an infinite number of circular motions an [infinite] sphere arises, so God (like a maximum sphere) is the most simple measure of all circular motions. For all animation, motion, and understanding are from Him, in Him, and through Him.<sup>121</sup> With God one revolution of the eighth sphere is not smaller than [one revolution] of an infinite [sphere], because He in whom as in an end all motion finds rest is the End of all motions. For He is maximal rest, in which all motion is rest. And so, maximum rest is the measure of all motions, just as maximum straightness [is the measure] of all circumferences, and as maximum presence, or eternity, [is the measure] of all times.

73 Therefore, in God as in an end all natural movements find rest; and in Him as in infinite actuality all possibility is realized. And because He is the Being of all being and because all motion is toward being, He who is the End of motion, viz., the Form and the Actuality of being, is the cessation of motion.

Therefore, all beings tend toward Him. And because they are finite and cannot participate equally in this End relatively to one another, some participate in it through the medium of others. Analogously, a line, through the medium of a triangle and of a circle, is transformed into a sphere; and a triangle [is transformed into a sphere] through the medium of a circle; and through itself a circle [is transformed] into a sphere.<sup>122</sup>

74 *Chapter Twenty-four: The name of God;  
affirmative theology.*

Now that in our ignorance we have striven—with divine assistance

and by means of mathematical illustration—to become more knowledgeable about the First Maximum, let us inquire about the name of the Maximum, in order that our learning may be still more complete. If we rightly keep in mind the points already frequently made, this inquiry will easily lead to discovery.

- Since the Maximum is the unqualifiedly Maximum, to which nothing is opposed, it is evident that no name can properly befit it. For all names are bestowed on the basis of a oneness of conception [*ratio*] through which one thing is distinguished from another. But where all
- 75** things are one, there can be no proper name. Hence, Hermes Trismegistus rightly says: “Since God is the totality of things, no name is proper to Him; for either He would have to be called by every name or else all things would have to be called by His name”;<sup>123</sup> for in His simplicity He enfolds the totality of things. Hence, as regards His own name, which we say to be ineffable and which is “tetragrammaton” (i.e., “of four letters”) and which is proper because it befits God according to His own essence, not according to any relation to created things: He ought to be called “One-and-all,” or better, “All-in-one.” And in like manner we previously<sup>124</sup> discovered [the name] “Maximum Oneness,” which is the same thing as “All-in-one”; indeed, the name “Oneness” seems still closer and still more suitable than the name “All-in-one.” Wherefore the prophet says: “On that day there will be one God, and His name will be one.”<sup>125</sup> And elsewhere: “Hear, O Israel,” (“Israel” means “one who sees God with the understanding”) “that your God is one.”<sup>126</sup>
- 76** However, it is not the case that “Oneness” is the name of God in the way in which we either name or understand oneness; for just as God transcends all understanding, so, a fortiori, [He transcends] every name. Indeed, through a movement of reason, which is much lower than the intellect,<sup>127</sup> names are bestowed for distinguishing between things. But since reason cannot leap beyond contradictories: as regards the movement of reason, there is not a name to which another [name] is not opposed. Therefore, as regards the movement of reason: plurality or multiplicity is opposed to oneness. Hence, not “oneness” but “Oneness to which neither otherness nor plurality nor multiplicity is opposed” befits God. This is the maximum name, which enfolds all things in its simplicity of oneness; this is the name
- 77** which is ineffable and above all understanding.<sup>128</sup> For who could understand the infinite Oneness which infinitely precedes all opposition?—where all things are incompositely enfolded in simplicity of



Oneness, where there is neither anything which is other nor anything which is different, where a man does not differ from a lion, and the sky does not differ from the earth. Nevertheless, in the Maximum they are most truly the Maximum, [though] not in accordance with their finitude; rather, [they are] Maximum Oneness in an enfolded way. Hence, if anyone were able to understand or to name such Oneness—which, since it is Oneness is all things and since it is the Minimum is the Maximum—he would attain to the name of God. But since the Name-of-God *is* God, His Name is known only by [that] Understanding which is the Maximum and is the Maximum Name. Therefore, in learned ignorance we attain unto [the following]: Although “Oneness” seems to be a quite close name for the Maximum, nevertheless it is still infinitely distant from the true Name of the Maximum—a Name] which *is* the Maximum.

**78** And so, from these considerations it is evident that the affirmative names we ascribe to God befit Him [only] infinitesimally. For such [names] are ascribed to Him in accordance with something found in created things. Therefore, since any such particular or discrete thing, or thing having an opposite, can befit God only very minutely: affirmations are scarcely fitting, as Dionysius says.<sup>129</sup> For example, if you call God “Truth,” falsity is the contradistinction; if you call Him “Virtue,” vice is the contradistinction; if you call Him “Substance,” accident is the contradistinction; and so on. But since God is not a substance which is not all things and to which something is opposed, and is not a truth which is not all things without opposition, these particular names cannot befit Him except very infinitesimally. For it is not the case that any affirmations—which posit in Him, as it were, something of what they signify—can befit Him who is not some particular thing more than He is all things.

**79** Therefore, if affirmative names befit God, they befit Him only in relation to created things. [I do] not [mean] that created things are the cause of [these names'] befitting Him, for the Maximum can have nothing from created things; rather, [I mean that these names] befit Him on the basis of His infinite power in relation to created things. For God was eternally able to create, because unless He had been able, He would not have been supreme power. Therefore, although the name “Creator” befits Him in relation to created things, it also befit Him before there was a created thing, since He was eternally able to create. The case is similar with “justice” and all the other affirmative names

which we symbolically ascribe to God on the basis of created things because of a certain perfection signified by these names. Nonetheless, even before we ascribed all these names to God, they were eternally and truly enfolded in His supreme perfection and in His infinite name—as were all the things (1) which are signified by such names and (2) from which we transfer [the names] to God.

- 80** The aforesaid is so true of all affirmations that even the names of the Trinity and of the persons—viz., “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit”—are bestowed on God in relation to created things. For because God is Oneness, He is Begetter and Father; because He is Equality of Oneness, He is Begotten, or Son; because He is Union of both [Oneness and Equality-of-Oneness], He is Holy Spirit.<sup>130</sup> Accordingly, it is clear that the Son is called Son because He is Equality of Oneness, or of Being, or of existing.<sup>131</sup> Hence, from the fact that God was eternally able to create things—even had He not created them—it is evident [that] He is called Son in relation to these things. For He is Son because He is Equality of being [these] things; things could not exist beyond or short of Equality. Thus, He is Son because He is Equality of being of the things which God was able to make, even had He not been going to make them. Were God not able to make these things, He would not be Father, Son, or Holy Spirit; indeed, He would not be God. Therefore, if you reflect quite carefully, [you will see that] for the Father to beget the Son was [for Him] to create all things in the Word.<sup>132</sup> Wherefore, Augustine<sup>133</sup> maintains that the Word is both the Art and the Idea in relation to created things. Hence, God is Father because He begets Equality of Oneness; but He is Holy Spirit because He is the Love common to both [Oneness and Equality of Oneness]; and He is all these<sup>134</sup> in relation to created things. For created things begin to be by virtue of the fact that God is Father; they are perfected by virtue of the fact that He is Son; they harmonize with the universal order of things by virtue of the fact that He is Holy Spirit. And in each thing these are traces of the Trinity. Moreover, this is the opinion of Aurelius Augustine when he expounds the following passage from Genesis: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” For he says that by virtue of the fact that God is Father He created the beginnings of things.<sup>135</sup>
- 81**
- 82** Therefore, whatever is said about God through affirmative theology is based upon a relationship to created things. [This is true] even with respect to those most holy names in which the greatest myster-

ies of divine knowledge lie hidden. These names are found among the Hebrews and the Chaldees; all of them signify God only according to some individual property—[all] except for the name from four letters, viz., *ioth, he, vau, he*. (This is the proper and ineffable [name], previously commented on.)<sup>136</sup> Jerome and also Rabbi Solomon (in his book *Dux Neutorum*)<sup>137</sup> deal extensively with these names. They can be consulted.

**83**            *Chapter Twenty-five: The pagans named God in various ways in relation to created things.*

The pagans likewise named God from His various relationships to created things. [They named Him] Jupiter because of marvelous kindness (for Julius Firmicus<sup>138</sup> says that Jupiter is a star so auspicious that had he reigned alone in the heavens, men would be immortal); similarly, [they named Him] Saturn because of a profundity of thoughts and inventions regarding the necessities of life; Mars because of military victories; Mercury because of good judgment in counseling; Venus because of love which conserves nature; Sun because of the force of natural movements; Moon because of conservation of the fluids upon which life depends; Cupid because of the unity of the two sexes (for which reason they also called Him Nature, since through the two sexes He conserves the species of things). Hermes<sup>139</sup> said that not only all [species of] animals but also all [species of] non-animals have two sexes; wherefore, he maintained that the Cause of all things, viz., God, enfolds within Himself both the masculine and the feminine sex, of which he believed Cupid and Venus to be the unfolding. Valerius,<sup>140</sup> too, the Roman, making the same affirmation, professed that Jupiter is the omnipotent Divine Father and Mother. Hence, in accordance with one thing's desiring (*cupit*) another, they gave to the daughter of Venus, i.e., of natural beauty, the name "Cupid." But they said that Venus is the daughter of omnipotent Jupiter, from whom Nature and all its accompaniments derive.

**84**            Even the temples—viz., the Temple of Peace, the Temple of Eternity, the Temple of Harmony, and the Pantheon (in which there was in the middle, under the open air, the altar of the Infinite Limit, of which there is no limit)—and other such [edifices] inform us that the pagans named God in various ways in accordance with His relationship to created things. All these names are unfoldings of the enfold-

ing of the one ineffable name.<sup>141</sup> And as accords with [this] proper name's being infinite, it enfolds an infinite number of such names of particular perfections. Therefore, the unfolded [names] could be many without being so many and so great that there could not be more of them. Each of them is related to the proper and ineffable name [i.e., to the tetragrammaton] as what is finite is related to what is infinite.

The ancient pagans derided the Jews, who worshiped one infinite God of whom they were ignorant. Nevertheless, these pagans themselves worshiped Him in unfolded things—i.e., worshiped Him where they beheld His divine works. In those days there was the following difference among all men: viz., [although] all believed that God is the one Maximum, than which there cannot be a greater, some of them (e.g., the Jews and the Sissennii)<sup>142</sup> worshiped Him in His most simple oneness (as the Enfolding of all things is); but others worshiped Him in the things in which they found the unfolding of His divinity, construing what was perceptually-observed as guidance toward the Cause and Beginning. In this last-mentioned way the simple populace was deceived; for they construed the unfolded things not as images but as the reality itself. As a result thereof, idolatry was introduced to the people—though, for the most part, the wise continued rightly to believe in the oneness of God. These points can be known to anyone who will carefully examine Cicero *On the Nature of the Gods*,<sup>143</sup> as well as the ancient philosophers.

**85** I do not deny, however, that certain of the pagans did not understand that since God is the being of things, He exists independently of things in a way other than through abstraction. (By comparison, prime matter exists independently of things only through the abstracting intellect). Such men worshiped God in created things; they also provided idolatry with supporting reasons. Certain men even thought that God can be summoned forth.<sup>144</sup> For example, the Sissennii summoned Him in angels. But the pagans summoned Him in trees, as we read regarding the Tree of the Sun and the Moon. Others summoned Him, with fixed incantations, in air, water, or temples. My earlier remarks show how deceived all these men were and how far they were from the truth.

**86** *Chapter Twenty-six: Negative theology.*

The worshipping of God, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in

truth,<sup>145</sup> must be based upon affirmations about Him. Accordingly, every religion, in its worshipping, must mount upward by means of affirmative theology. [Through affirmative theology] it worships God as one and three, as most wise and most gracious, as Inaccessible Light, as Life, Truth, and so on. And it always directs its worship by faith, which it attains more truly through learned ignorance. It believes that He whom it worships as one is All-in-one, and that He whom it worships as Inaccessible Light is not light as is corporeal light, to which darkness is opposed, but is infinite and most simple Light, in which darkness is Infinite Light; and [it believes] that Infinite Light always shines within the darkness of our ignorance but [that] the darkness cannot comprehend it.<sup>146</sup> And so, the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature. And such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the reality itself. Hence, it will be useful to set down a few more things about negative theology.

**87** Sacred ignorance has taught us that God is ineffable. He is so because He is infinitely greater than all nameable things. And by virtue of the fact that [this] is most true, we speak of God more truly through removal and negation—as [teaches] the greatest Dionysius, who did not believe that God is either Truth or Understanding or Light or anything which can be spoken of<sup>147</sup> (Rabbi Solomon<sup>148</sup> and all the wise follow Dionysius.) Hence, in accordance with this negative theology, according to which [God] is only infinite, He is neither Father nor Son nor Holy Spirit. Now, the Infinite qua Infinite is neither Begetting, Begotten, nor Proceeding. Therefore, when Hilary of Poitiers distinguished the persons, he most astutely used the expressions “Infinity in the Eternal,” “Beauty in the Image,” and “Value in the Gift.”<sup>149</sup> He means that although in eternity we can see only infinity, nevertheless since the infinity which *is* eternity is negative infinity, it cannot be understood as Begetter but [can] rightly [be understood as] eternity, since “eternity” is affirmative of oneness, or maximum presence. Hence, [Infinity- in-the-Eternal is] the Beginning without beginning. “Beauty in the Image” indicates the Beginning from the Beginning. “Value in the Gift” indicates the Procession from these two.

**88** All these things are very well known through the preceding [discussion]. For although eternity is infinity, so that eternity is not a greater cause of the Father than is infinity: nevertheless, in a manner

of considering, eternity is attributed to the Father and not to the Son or to the Holy Spirit; but infinity is not [attributed] to one person more than to another. For according to the consideration of oneness infinity is the Father; according to the consideration of equality of oneness it is the Son; according to the consideration of the union [of the two it is] the Holy Spirit. And according to the simple consideration of itself infinity is neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit. Yet, infinity (as also eternity) is each of the three persons, and, conversely, each person is infinity (and eternity)—not, however, according to [the simple] consideration [of itself], as I said. For according to the consideration of infinity God is neither one nor many. Now, according to the theology of negation, there is not found in God anything other than infinity. Therefore, according to this theology [God] is not knowable either in this world or in the world to come (for in this respect every created thing is darkness, which cannot comprehend Infinite Light), but is known only to Himself.

- 89** From these [observations] it is clear (1) that in theological matters negations are true and affirmations are inadequate, and (2) that, nonetheless, the negations which remove the more imperfect things from the most Perfect are truer than the others. For example, it is truer that God is not stone than that He, is not life or intelligence; and [it is truer that He] is not drunkenness than that He is not virtue. The contrary [holds] for affirmations; for the affirmation which states that God is intelligence and life is truer than [the affirmation that He is] earth or stone or body. All these [points] are very clear from the foregoing. Therefrom we conclude that the precise truth shines incomprehensibly within the darkness of our ignorance. This is the learned ignorance we have been seeking and through which alone, as I explained, [we] can approach the maximum, triune God of infinite goodness—[approach Him] according to the degree of our instruction in ignorance, so that with all our might we may ever praise Him, who is forever blessed above all things,<sup>150</sup> for manifesting to us His incomprehensible self.<sup>151</sup>

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*  
*DI* *De Docta Ignorantia*  
*DP* *De Possess* (reprinted in *PNC*)  
*IL* *De Ignota Litteratura*  
*MFCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*  
(ed. Rudolf Haubst)  
*NA* *De Li Non Aliud* (reprinted in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud*.  
Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1983 (2nd ed.)  
*NC* *Nicoló da Cusa*. Florence: Sansoni, 1962. (Pubblicazioni della Fa-  
coltà di Magisterio dell'Università di Padova)  
*NK* *Nikolaus von Kues. Einführung in sein philosophisches Denken*.  
Ed. Klaus Jacobi. Munich: K. Alber, 1979  
*PL* *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne  
*PNC* J. Hopkins. *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas  
of Cusa*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980 (2nd  
ed.)  
*SHAW* *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften.  
Philosophisch-historische Klasse*. Heidelberg: C. Winter

## PRAENOTANDA

1. All references to Nicholas of Cusa's works are to the Latin texts—specifically to the following texts in the following editions (unless explicitly indicated otherwise):
  - A. Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia: De Concordantia Catholica; Sermones; De Coniecturis; De Deo Abscondito; De Quaerendo Deum; De Filiatione Dei; De Dato Patris Luminum; Coniectura de Ultimis Diebus; De Genesi; Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae; Idiota* (1983 edition) *de Sapientia, de Mente, de Staticis Experimentis; De Pace Fidei; De Li Non Aliud* (Banning reprint); *De Venatione Sapientiae; Compendium; De Apice Theoriae*.
  - B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Melner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia, De Beryllo, De Possest* (Minnesota reprint).
  - C. Paris edition (1514) of the *Opera Cusana: Complementum Theologicum, De Aequalitate, De Principio* (=Paris edition, Vol. II, Part 1, fol. 7<sup>r</sup> - 11<sup>v</sup>).
  - D. Strasburg edition (1488) of the *Opera Cusana* as edited by Paul Wilpert and republished by W. de Gruyter (Berlin, 1967, 2 vols.): *Cribratio Alkoran, De Ludo Globi*.
  - E. Banning Press edition (1985) of *De Visione Dei*.

The references given for some of these treatises indicate book and chapter, for others margin number and line, and for still others page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. E.g., "DI II, 6 (125:19-20)" indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19-20. And "Ap. 8:14-16" indicates *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, p. 8, lines 14-16.
2. A number of references in the Notes have been adapted from Vol. I of the Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*.
3. To reduce publication costs, extensive references to the writings of Anicius Boethius, Meister Eckhart, and Thierry of Chartres have not been incorporated into the Notes. Readers are advised to consult the works of Joseph E. Hofmann, Hans G. Senger, Herbert Wackerzapp, and Pierre Duhern as listed in *PNC*.
4. The margin numbers in the English translation of *DI* correspond to those found in the Latin-German editions, cited in n. 1 above.
5. Any Latin words inserted into the English translation for purposes of clarification are placed in parentheses—except that nouns whose respective cases have been changed to the nominative are bracketed. All expansions of the translations are bracketed.
6. References to the Psalms are to the Douay version (and, in parentheses, to the King James's version).
7. References to *IL* are given in terms of the new critical edition published in *Nicholas*



of Cusa's *Debate with John Wenck: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Ignota Litteratura and Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981; 2nd edition, 1984).

### NOTES TO *LEARNED IGNORANCE*, BOOK ONE

1. *De Coniecturis* is also addressed to Cardinal Julian Cesarini (1398-1444), whom Nicholas also there refers to as his own venerable teacher. In spite of Josef Koch's caveat (*Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* III, p. 186) there is reason enough to believe that Cesarini, though only a little older than Nicholas, had indeed been one of his instructors at the University of Padua. The two were to meet again at the Council of Basel, over which Julian presided.
2. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—both the opening sentence and I, 2 (982<sup>b</sup> 12-14).
3. This sentence and the previous one are alluded to by John Wenck, *IL* 22:18-19.
4. See Gerda von Bredow, "Der Sinn der Formel 'meliori modo quo'...", *MFCG* 6 (1967), 21-30. Cf. n. 35 of the notes to Book Three.
5. *DI* I, 11 (3 1:1-4).
6. Throughout *DI* Nicholas frequently uses the word "*proportio*" (as well as the adjective "*proportionalis*" and the adverb "*proportionabiliter*"). I have usually adhered to the following English renderings: *proportio*-comparative relation, relation; *comparativa proportio*-comparative relation; *proportionaliter*-proportionally; *proportionalis*-proportional, *improportionaliter*-disproportionally, incomparably; *improportionalis*-disproportional.
7. *DI* I, 3 (9:4-5); 11, 2 (102:4-5).
8. Ecclesiastes 1:8.
9. Job 28:20-21.
10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 11, 1 (993<sup>b</sup> 9-11).
11. "*Maximitas*" means not merely *magnitudo* (greatness) but *maxima magnitudo* (maximal greatness). Nor is "*maximitas*" always a shorthand for "*absoluta maximitas*," for Nicholas also speaks of the universe as *maximitas*—viz., *maximitas contracta* [II, 8 (139:10-11)].
12. I Tim. 6:16.
13. Wenck pays tribute to Nicholas's Latin style (*IL* 19:5), calling it "sufficiently elegant." But, in fact, Nicholas's style can appear elegant only to someone like Wenck, whose own is so much worse.
14. Literally: "... showing at the outset learned ignorance's basis in the inapprehensible precision of the truth."
15. In the chapter title Nicholas uses the word "*incomprehensibilis*," though in the last line of the preceding chapter he used "*inapprehensibilis*." In fact, throughout *DI* and his other treatises he does not systematically distinguish his use of these two terms and their cognates. For example, he does not differentiate between apprehending and comprehending God. Nor does he regard *comprehendere* as simply *apprehendere intellectu*; for he writes not only "*simplici intellectione apprehendere*" but also "*simplicissima intellectione . . . comprehendere*" [I, 10 (29:13; 29: 10-11)]. Fol-

lowing the usage of Scripture (John 1:5), he is even willing to say “*tenebrae eam [i.e., lucem] comprehendere nequeunt*” [I, 26 (86:15-16)], where “*apprehendere*” would serve equally well. And just as at 11:9-10 he uses the expression “*sensu apprehendere*,” so in *Ap.* 2:18 he understands the expression “*comprehendi nequeat*” to mean “*sensu comprehendi nequeat*.” It is difficult to know whether at *Ap.* 2:18 he would likewise be willing to say “*apprehendi nequeat*.” As a rule, throughout his writings, both “*incomprehensibilis*” and “*inapprehensibilis*” could acceptably be translated by the one English word “ungraspable.”

16. *DI* I, 1 (3:2-3); II, 2 (102:4-5).

17. See II, 1 for examples of this point.

18. *DI* II, 1 (91:14-15).

19. The example of an inscribed polygon is also used in *DI* III, 1 (188:15-19); III, 4 (206:12-18).

20. Cf. *NA* 85:15-20.

21. In *NA* Nicholas elaborates upon the motif that God is not *other* than anything.

In calling God Equality of being and Form of being [*DI* I, 8 (22:8-10)], Nicholas is not suggesting that we can conceive of what it is like for God to be such Equality and such Form [*DI* I, 4 (11:7-9); I, 12 (33:4-6)]. Indeed, learned ignorance consists of the joint recognition that God is undifferentiated being itself and that such being is inconceivable by every finite intellect.

22. Regarding the translation of “[*est*] *omne id quod esse potest*,” see *PNC*, pp. 173-174, n. 12 and p. 165, n. 66.

23. Only the maximum thus freed from quantity—i.e., only the absolutely Maximum—coincides with the (absolutely) Minimum. At the end of the present chapter Nicholas makes clear that insofar as the terms “maximum” and “minimum” refer to God, they refer to what is beyond all contraction to quantity (or anything else). See n. 34 below. Cf. *DI* II, 8 (140:7-8); II, 9 (148:8; 150:9-10); III, 1 (182:5-6; 183:10-13); II, 8 (136:9-10). Especially note *De Visione Dei* 13 (58:11-12). *Complementum Theologicum* 12 (last 7 lines), Paris edition. *DP* 69:6 - 70:11.

Similarly, only absolutely maximum motion coincides with (absolutely) minimum motion [II, 10 (155:1-3)]—both of which are “motion” only in a metaphorical sense. Cf. *DP* 10-11. Likewise, absolutely maximum faith [III, 11 (249:1-2)] is not faith in any sense of “faith” that we can understand; for it coincides with God’s knowledge, and God’s knowledge is God, who is inconceivable except to Himself.

24. Nicholas does not here distinguish *intellectus* (intellect, understanding) and *ratio* (reason, reasoning), as he does at *DI* III, 6 (215:5-6). Also note I, 10 (27:14-18); I, 24 (76:4-5); II, 2 (100:9-10); III, 9 (233:6-7); III, 10 (240:1-2). See *PNC*, p. 172, n. 175.

25. *DI* I, 26.

26. No matter where you stop on the ascending scale, you stop at a finite number. No matter how far you count, you will have counted only a finite series. [Cf. *DI* II, 1 (96:1-18).] In this sense, the ascending scale is “actually” finite, though potentially infinite.

27. Apparently, Nicholas is arguing, straightforwardly, that if there were no *source* of number, which he has already shown to be finite, then there would not be any number. Note the English clause in parentheses at the close of this chapter.

Nicholas regards fractions not as numbers but as relations between two num-

bers. And like Aristotle [*Metaphysics* X, 1 (1052<sup>b</sup> 24f.)] he does not regard *one* as a number. [Number, says Aristotle (1053<sup>a</sup> 3 1), is a plurality of units.] He does, however, place one as the first member of the number series.

Also note Boethius, *De Institutione Arithmetica* I, 3 [ed. G. Friedlein (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1867; reprinted, Frankfurt: Minerva GmbH, 1966)]: “*Numerus est unitatum collectio, vel quantitatis acervus ex unitatibus profusus.*” Also see I, 23, where Boethius puts one at the beginning of the series of natural numbers (“*Ponatur enim naturalis numerus hoc modo: I. II. III. . . .*”)

28. At 13:30 “*unitati*” is a dative of comparison, which Nicholas sometimes uses. Cf. I, 21 (63:8-9).

29. *DI* II, 3 (108:1-15).

30. Deut. 6:4. *DI* I, 24 (75:12-76:13).

31. Matt. 23:8-9.

32. *DI* I, 8.

33. E.g., *DI* I, 4 (12:15-16).

34. God, who is uncontracted, is Maximum *Being* only insofar as being is uncontracted. But uncontracted and undifferentiated “being” is not being in any sense conceivable or nameable by us. Hence Nicholas goes on to state: “Wherefore, although it is evident through the aforesaid that the name ‘being’ (or any other name) is not a precise name for the Maximum (which is beyond every name), nevertheless it is necessary that being befit it maximally (but in a way not nameable by the name ‘maximum’) and above all nameable being.” In *DI* I, 24-26 Nicholas concedes the necessity—for purposes of worship—of conceiving of God *as if* He were contracted to various perfections which are signified by their names in our language, *as if* His trinity were truly describable as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so on.

35. In the previous paragraph Nicholas affirmed that “the unqualifiedly Maximum exists.” Proceeding on this basis, he draws the inference that the unqualifiedly Maximum cannot rightly be thought (*[non] intelligi potest*) to be able not to exist, since minimal being (i.e., maximal not-being) is maximal being. Apart from the foregoing basis his inference might seem reversible as follows: since maximal being is minimal being (i.e., maximal not-being), the unqualifiedly Maximum cannot rightly be thought to be able to exist.

36. Phil. 2:9.

37. *DI* I, 5 (14:5-8).

38. Klibansky thinks that Nicholas confused Varro's *Antiquities* either with Josephus's *The Jewish Antiquities* XV, 371-379; XVIII, 18 [Loeb Library Series, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press], Vol. 8 (1963) trans. Ralph Marcus and Allen Wikgren, Vol. 9 (1965) trans. Louis Feldman] or with reports found in Eusebius Caesariensis's *Praeparationis Evangelicae* IX, III, 7 and 13 [ed. G. Dindorf (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1867)]. Josephus and Eusebius ascribe the saying to the Essenes rather than to the Sissennii. Because the references to Josephus and Eusebius are not quite accurate, Wilpert believes that Nicholas was using one or more secondary sources, from which he borrowed the references.

39. John of Salisbury, *De Septem Septenis* VII (*PL* 199:961C).

40. Cf. Boethius, *De Institutione Arithmetica* II, 1 [ed. G. Friedlein (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1867; reprinted Frankfurt: Minerva GmbH, 1966)].

These are not absolutely simple. [Cf. *De Coniecturis* I, 10 (50) with *Idiota de*

*Mente* 9 (87:14-20)-the latter passage having reference to a continuum.] Likewise, when he implies that two objects can be equal-as he does here and in I, 9 (24:7-10), he does not mean *precisely* equal, for only God is precise Equality. [See *DI* I, 3 (9:13-15); II, 1 (91:9-13).] In general, note *DI* I, 11 (32:19-24); I, 17 (47:67); II, 1 (96:4-8).

Cf. n. 26 of the notes to Book Three.

41. In fact, Nicholas, like Leibniz after him, maintains that no two objects differ in number alone. *DI* I, 3 (9:13-15); I, 4 (11:9-12); II, 1 (91:12-13) as well as the whole of II, 1; III, 1 (188:12-20).

42. Literally: "But these [two things] will produce a doubleness for one of them."

43. Both "*conexio*" and "*unio*" are translated throughout by the one English word "union," since Nicholas uses the two words interchangeably. In *DI* I, 10 (28:14,19) he writes "*unio sive conexio*." Cf. II, 10 (15 2: 1) with II, 12 (173:13); II, 11 (155:8) with III, 12 (262:14); I, 10 (29:6) with I, 10 (29:8).

44. In the corresponding Latin sentence the word "*aliqua*" functions as does the French word "*des*" in "*Il y a des choses que je ne comprends pas*." Neither "*des*" nor "*aliqua*" need be translated by a separate English word.

45. *DI* I, 24 (80:4-8). Throughout his works—e.g., *De Coniecturis* II, 17 (173:11-13) and *NA* 5 (19:7-8)—Nicholas uses "Oneness," "Equality," and "Union" to refer to the Divine Trinity.

46. Much of the terminology in this chapter stems from Thierry of Chartres and Clarenbald of Arras. For a short discussion of Nicholas's use of Thierry see *PNC*, pp. 6-7 and the literature there referred to.

47. See n. 40 above.

48. In the corresponding line of the Latin text (24:13) I am reading "*unitatis*" in the place of "*unitas*".

49. Cf. *De Pace Fidei* 8 (24:6-7). *NA* 6 (19:13).

50. I. e., to human fathers, sons, and "spirits."

51. *DI* I, 24 (e.g., 79:1-5).

52. Martian Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* II, 138-140 [ed. Adolf Dick (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1925; reprinted with corrections and addenda by Jean Préaux (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1978)]. Nicholas's secondary source is John of Salisbury, *De Septem Septenis* VII (*PL* 199:961C), which wrongly indicates that philology (instead of philology) left behind circles and spheres.

53. *DI* I, 4 (11:4-9).

54. See n. 24 above.

55. I.e., understandable (intelligible) to itself but not to any finite intellect.

56. E.g., *DI* I, 5 (14:1-6).

57. I surmise that the Latin text needs to be repunctuated so as to place a colon after the first occurrence of "*maximum*" at 29:6 and a comma (rather than a period) after "*unio*" at 29:8. This way "*quoniam*" and "*hinc*" become coordinated, as they so often are for Nicholas [e.g., I, 12 (33:4,6); I, 18 (54:8-9); II, 1 (95:1,4)]. Nicholas's point seems to be that "one is maximal" indicates a trinity: viz., Minimum (which the One is), Maximum, and their Union. Since it has been not only stated but also "established" that the One is maximal, it has been established that the One is the trinity of Minimum, Maximum, and Union—in other words, that Oneness is minimal Oneness, maximal Oneness, and their Union.

Since Nicholas does not express himself with perfect clarity in 29: 1-11, my translation is not assuredly correct—nor Wilpert's obviously incorrect.

58. This reference is apparently to 27:15-16.

59. *DI* III, 11 (246:15-16). The seeker will even then see God through a cloud, though it be a more rarefied one; God will remain incomprehensible. Cf. *DI* I, 26 (88:16-20).

60. Rom. 1:20. I Cor. 13:12.

61. *DI* I, 3 (9:10-15). The Maximal Image is the Word of God (Col. 1: 15).

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

63. *DP* 62:10-63:15.

64. *DP* 44:3-7.

65. *De Institutione Arithmetica*, *op. cit.*, I, 1 (p. 9, lines 6-8; p. 10, line 10 through p. 11, line 1). See also Joseph E. Hofmann, "Mutmassungen über das früheste mathematische Wissen des Nikolaus von Kues," *MFCG* 5 (1965), 98-133.

66. *Ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* 8 (*PL* 42:674).

67. *De Institutione Arithmetica*, *op. cit.*, I, 1 (p. 10, lines 10- 13); 1, 2 (p. 12, lines 14-17).

68. *Metaphysics* VIII, 3 (1044<sup>a</sup> 10-11).

69. *De Anima* II, 3 (414<sup>b</sup>29.1-32).

70. *De Quantitate Animae* 8-12 (*PL* 32:1042-1047).

71. *De Institutione Arithmetica*, *op. cit.*, I, 1 (p. 9, lines 1-8).

72. Wilpert ( as well as Klibansky) regards Nicholas as having learned of the mathematical refutation of Epicurus from Albert the Great's *Metaphysica*. See Book I, tractate 3, chap. 15 through I, 4, 2. [Bernhard Geyer, ed., *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XVI, Part I (Münster, 1960), pp. 47-50].

73. Cf. *De Veritate* 1 and 10. Anselm of Canterbury, trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), Vol. II, pp. 77 and 91-92. Anselm speaks of *summa veritas* rather than of *infinita veritas*.

74. Heimeric de Campo, *Tractatus de Sigillo Aeternitatis* [Codex Cusanus 106, f. 77 (cited from P. Wilpert)]

75. *Ibid.* See R. Haubst, *Das Bild des Einen und Dreieinen Gottes in der Welt nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Trier: Paulinus, 1952), pp. 255-262.

76. Nicholas borrows this comparison from Meister Eckhart. See *PNC*, p. 13.

77. Boethius, *De Institutione Arithmetica*, *op. cit.*, II, 30 (p. 122, lines 1-3).

78. Since the Maximum is all that which can be, how could there be more than one Maximum? *DI* I, 5 (14:5-8).

79. In *DI* I, 13 Nicholas "proved" that an infinite line is a straight line.

80. At 40:21 "*infinite*" is a dative of comparison.

81. AB was shown to be the same infinite line as BC, which was shown to be the infinite circumference.

82. In an infinite circle the distance from B to C is the same as the distance from B all the way around to B again. If an infinite circle makes an infinite rotation, it describes an infinite sphere.

83. *The Mystical Theology* 1 [*Dionysiaca* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2 vols., 1937, 1950), I, 572].

84. *The Divine Names* 5 (*Dionysiaca* I, 355-356).

85. *The Mystical Theology* 5 (*Dionysiaca* I, 601-602).

86. *Letter to Gaius*, Part I (*Dionysiaca* I, 607).
87. Rabbi Solomon is Moses Maimonides. Nicholas takes the above quotation and the subsequent one from the *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dux Neutorum*), I, 59 and I, 58 respectively [pp. 139 and 137 of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 2nd printing)]. His secondary source is Meister Eckhart's *Expositio Libri Exodi*, n. 184 and n. 174. He confuses Maimonides with Raschi (Rabbi Solomon bar Isaac).
88. *DI* I, 20 (61:20-21); I, 23 (72:1-3).
89. *DI* I, 3 (9:10-17).
90. *DI* I, 11 (32:19-24). Cf. II, 1 (96:1-9).
91. *Metaphysics* X, 1 (1052<sup>b</sup> 19.1). Cf. *IL* 33:22-24.
92. *The Divine Names* 4 (*Dionysiaca* I, 274). Cf. *NA* 10 (37:1-23).
93. Calcidius, *In Platonis Timaeus*, 330 [*Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. J. H. Waszink (London: Warburg Institute, 1962), pp. 324325]. Calcidius attributes the statement to Plato, not to the *Phaedo*.
94. *DI* I, 3 (9:10-15).
95. Prima facie it is strange that Nicholas speaks of the Maximum as able to participate in essence (*ratio*). What he appears to mean is that since the Maximum is Infinite Essence, then in participating in essence, it participates in itself. To say that it participates in itself is tantamount to saying that it *is*, perfectly, its own essence. Note *DI* I, 19 (56:8): "The Maximum is actually one trine essence . . . ."
- N. B. Of God Nicholas uses indifferently the expressions "*ratio omnium*" and "*essentia omnium*" in *DI* I, 16-17. But of an infinite line he prefers to use only "*ratio omnium [linearum]*." Still, at I, 19 (56:5) we find "*essentia*" used of both God and an infinite line.
96. *DI* I, 16 (46:6-8).
97. *First Letter to Gaius* (*Dionysiaca* I, 607). *The Celestial Hierarchy* II (*Dionysiaca* II, 757).
98. *De Anima* I, 5 (411<sup>a</sup> 5-6).
99. *Metaphysics* V, 7 (1017<sup>a</sup> 8-9).
100. *The Divine Names* 1 (*Dionysiaca* I, 10-11).
101. *DI* I, 26.
102. *DI* I, 13-14.
103. *DI* I, 13 and 15.
104. Augustine makes this point at various places in *De Trinitate* V-VIII, though he does not use these exact words. Cf. *DP* 46:1-6, where Nicholas states that God is three but not numerically three.
105. John 10:38.
106. *DI* I, 7-9 and 19.
107. *DI* I, 4 (11:13-18; 12:4-6).
108. Viz., a line, a triangle, a circle, and a sphere.
109. *DI* I, 15.
110. At 63:9 "*unitati*" is a dative of comparison.
111. Nicholas does not believe that there is an actually existing infinite and eternal circle. Nor does he believe that the infinite circle is a supra-Platonicklike Idea or even an Idea in the mind of God. Rather, his point here is purely conceptual and illustrative: the "logic" of infinity is such that an infinite circle would have to be eter-

nal, just as its circumference would have to be its center.

112. *DI* 11, 3 (III:8-9). Nicholas seems to have taken this idea from Raymond Lull. For a full study of the intellectual relationship between Cusa and Lull, see Eusebio Colomer, *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Llull* = Vol. 2 in the series: *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Paul Wilpert (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961).

113. In the corresponding line of the Latin text (viz., 68:15) I am reading “*etsi*” in place of “*si*”. Although Nicholas generally uses “*etsi*” with the subjunctive, he also sometimes uses it with the indicative, as in the Latin sentence above. [Also note, e.g., III, 11 (249:3-4) and *De Coniecturis* II, 1 (75:5-6).] Similarly, although he generally uses “*licet*” with the subjunctive, he sometimes also uses it with the indicative, as at 68:9-10 above. In opting for the reading “*etsi*” I am following not only the sense of the passage but also a clue furnished by Codex Latinus Monacensis 14213, which has “*et*” instead of “*si*”.

114. Cf. Thierry of Chartres, *Lectiones in Boethii Librum De Trinitate* II, 60 [p. 174, lines 88-89 in Nikolaus Häring, ed., *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1971)].

115. *DI* I, 21 (64:3-8). Since an infinite circle is also an infinite sphere [I, 13 (35:6-7)], the same conclusions apply to the latter as to the former.

116. *DI* I, 8 (22:8).

117. Nicholas's secondary source maybe Thierry of Chartres, *Commentarium Librum Boetii De Trinitate* (PL 95:397C) or John of Salisbury, *De Septem Septenis* VI I (PL 199:961 B).

118. In the corresponding Latin sentence (71:6) I am following the reading of the Paris edition: “*et in ea. . .*”

119. *DI* I, 16 (45:9-18); I, 20 (61:20-21).

120. At *DI* I, 17 (49:5) the Maximum is said to be *ratio infinita*, just as at I, 16 (45:17-18) it is called *infinita essentia*.

121. The phrase “from Him, in Him, and through Him” is reminiscent of Rom. 11:36. It also occurs at *DI* I, 21 (65:3).

122. *DI* I, 13 (36:8-18).

123. *Asclepius* 20 [*Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.D. Nock (Paris: Société d'Édition “Les Belles Lettres,” Vol. 2, 1945), p. 321, especially lines 7-9 of the Latin text].

124. *DI* I, 5 (14:9-10, 13-14).

125. Zachariah 14:9.

126. Deut. 6:4.

127. See n. 24 above.

128. Phil. 2:9.

129. *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2 (*Dionysiaca* II, 759).

130. *DI* I, 9 (2 6:1-4).

131. Here Nicholas writes “*unitatis sive entitatis aut essendi aequalitas*”; at *DI* I, 8 (22:9- 10) he says “*Aequalitas vero unitatis quasi aequalitas entitatis, id est aequalitas essendi sive existendi*.” See n. 46 above.

132. Col. 1: 16.

133. *De Trinitate* VI, 10 (PL 42:931-932).

134. Viz., Oneness, Equality of Oneness, and Love.

135. *De Genesi ad Litteram* I, 4 (PL 34:249).

136. Toward the beginning of this chapter.
137. See n. 87 above.
138. Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos* II. 13.6 [Vol I, p. 56, line 30 to p. 57, line 1 of the edition by W. Kroll, F. Skutsch, and K. Ziegler (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 2 vols., 1897, 1913)].
139. *Asclepius* 21 (p. 321, lines 18-21 of *Corpus Hermeticum, op. cit.*).
140. Valerius Soranus. See Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* VII, 9 (*PL* 41:202).
141. I.e., "Tetragrammaton" or "Oneness to which neither otherness nor plurality nor multiplicity is opposed." *DI* I, 24 (75:5-11; 76:9-13).
142. See n. 38 above and *DI* I, 7 (18:5-6).
143. *De Natura Deorum* II, 28; II, 6.
144. *DI* III, 11 (253:14-17).
145. John 4:24.
146. John 1:5.
147. *The Mystical Theology* 5 (*Dionysiaca* I, 598-600).
148. *Guide for the Perplexed* I, 59. See n. 87 above.
149. *De Trinitate* II, 1 (*PL* 10:51A).
150. Rom. 9:5.
151. Nicholas's language is here deliberately paradoxical: God *manifests* His *incomprehensible* self. Nicholas continues his point in the Prologue of Book II: the Absolute Maximum shines forth in a shadow. See n. 59 above.