

**A MISCELLANY  
ON NICHOLAS OF CUSA**

**BY JASPER HOPKINS**

**THE ARTHUR J. BANNING PRESS  
MINNEAPOLIS**

The translation of *De Genesi* was made from the Latin text contained in Volume IV (= *Opuscula I*) of the Heidelberg Academy edition of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1959).

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 93-72933

ISBN 0-938060-43-0

Printed in the United States of America

Copyright©1994 by The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402. All rights reserved.

**DIALOGUE**  
**ON THE GENESIS [OF ALL THINGS]<sup>1</sup>**  
*(Dialogus de Genesi)*

I

*Conrad:* Oftentimes our appetite is satisfied quite pleasantly by dishes that are less varied but savory. Accordingly, although you, Nicholas, have already generously served up teachings that show the way to undepletable nourishment of the soul, do not for that reason be annoyed, I ask, if I importunately request nourishment that is even more delicious.

*Nicholas:* You have known me for a long time, Conrad, and know that with tireless effort I am proceeding toward the Incomprehensible. And you know that I enjoy either being prodded by questions or being pushed forcibly by objections. So go ahead and ask.

*Conrad:* There are many important questions that present themselves all at once. Be indulgent if I ask these out of order.

*Nicholas:* It's up to you. Do as you please.

**142** *Conrad:* To begin with, I do not know whether I am surmising rightly [when I surmise] that the inquiry of all the wise concludes in one beginning. For [each inquiry] stops after it arrives at the source, by way of ascent from the lake and the river; for there is no end of the end, nor any beginning of the beginning. But where there is a coincidence of the beginning and the end, it is necessary that the middle also coincide [therewith]. Now, this [coinciding of beginning, middle, and end] seems to be [identifiable as] the Same, in which all things are the Same. Whereof the Prophet David says: "In the beginning You founded the earth; and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You are the same."<sup>2</sup>

Tell me whether I am surmising correctly.

*Nicholas:* Altogether correctly, indeed. But I am awaiting your question.

**143** *Conrad:* I'm wondering how it is that the Same is the Cause of all things, which are so different and so opposed. For the endeavor of my inquiry is directed toward the genesis of all things.<sup>3</sup> I very greatly desire to hear—briefly and uncomplicatedly and as best it can be done—your view about this genesis.<sup>4</sup>

*Nicholas:* How shall I, who of all people am most slow of mind, explicate in an uncomplicated summary a theme which all previous [thinkers] have abandoned as too weighty and as inexplicable?

*Conrad:* I know from your teaching that nothing is either attainable or expressible as it is [in itself].<sup>5</sup> (The divine Moses and the very many others who have spoken in various ways about the genesis [of all things] have left us with problems because of the *variety* of their surmises.) Nevertheless, I hope to be able to hear something or other from which to take nourishment.

*Nicholas:* Those who have spoken about the genesis [of all things] have spoken of the same thing in different ways, as you state. Why, then, are you amazed that the Same is the Cause of [all] the different things?

*Conrad:* Because the Same seems naturally suited to cause-to-be-the-same.

*Nicholas:* You speak correctly. Hence it is that from the Absolute Same all things both are that which they are and are in the manner in which they are.

*Conrad:* Unless you state this point more clearly, I won't understand.

**144** *Nicholas:* First of all, Conrad, you know that someone becomes knowledgeable by means of [making] close scrutiny.

*Conrad:* I admit that nothing except close scrutiny has made the difference between the one who is knowledgeable and the one who is ignorant.<sup>6</sup>

*Nicholas:* Give [close] attention, then, to the Absolute Same, and you will see immediately that the Absolute Same, since it is the Same, is eternal. For the Absolute Same cannot exist from something that is *other*. For since, as you state, the Same is naturally suited to cause-to-be-the-same, then what is other [is] also [naturally suited to cause] what is other. Therefore, how could the Absolute Same be from something *other*?<sup>7</sup>

*Conrad:* I understand.

*Nicholas:* Hence, it is eternal, simple, boundless, infinite, unalterable, unmultipliable, etc.

*Conrad:* When I consider with careful reflection, I cannot deny these [inferences]. For it is necessary that the Same be eternal, since the Same cannot be from anything else. Therefore, it is boundless, because it is eternal. Likewise, it is infinite and unalterable; for *alterability* derives from what is *alter* [i.e., *another*]. But *the Same*, through

itself,<sup>8</sup> indicates *unalterability*, and thus unmultipliability. (Without [alteration] there could not be multipliability.)<sup>9</sup> [So] I assent unreservedly to your assertion, which shows itself to be true.

**145** *Nicholas*: I want you also to take note of the fact that elsewhere God is called “One and the Same.” For those who have paid quite careful attention to the meanings of words have hitherto preferred [the word] “One” to [the word] “Same”—as if sameness were something less than one. (For everything that is the same is one, but not vice versa.) Those men—and especially the Platonists—also considered being and the eternal and whatever is not-one to be subsequent to the simple One.

But conceive of the Same in an absolute way—above the same insofar as it can be considered by means of [the signification of] a word. [The same] of which the Prophet [David] speaks is such that it is the Absolute Same, situated above all difference and opposition, since it is the Same. Therefore, the Ineffable Same, in which all things are the same, is neither the same as anything else nor different from anything else. In the Same, what is universal and what is particular are the Same; in the Same, oneness and infinity are the Same (and similarly regarding actuality and possibility,<sup>10</sup> essence and existence). Indeed, it is necessarily the case that in the Absolute Same, being and not-being are the Absolute Same.

*Conrad*: These points are evident to me when I scrutinize them closely. For the many, who say that something exists, are saying [one and] the same thing; likewise, they would be saying the same thing if they denied that something exists.<sup>11</sup> Hence, I understand the Absolute Same (in which there cannot be found opposition, which the same cannot have) to be such that all things other, different, opposite, composite, contracted, general, specific (and further things of this kind) are far removed from the Absolute Same.

**146** *Nicholas*: You understand well, Conrad. For when we say that what is different is different, we affirm that what is different is the same as itself. For what is different can be different only through the Absolute Same, through which all that is is both the same as itself and other than another. But whatever is the same as itself and other than another is not the Absolute Same, which is neither the same as another nor different from another.<sup>12</sup> For how could it befit the Absolute Same to be the same as another? Nor is [the Absolute Same] different. For how could difference befit the Absolute Same, which

precedes all difference and otherness?

*Conrad:* I understand you to mean (1) that of all beings<sup>13</sup> there is not one that is not the same as itself and other than another and (2) that, hence, the Absolute Same is no such being, although the Absolute Same is not *different* from anything that is both the same as itself and different from another.<sup>14</sup>

**147** *Nicholas:* You are conceiving correctly. For it is not the case that the Absolute Same, which we also call God,<sup>15</sup> is numerable with anything else so that God and heaven are more than one or are two or are other or different—just as it is also not the case that the Absolute Same is heaven qua heaven-that-is-*other*-than-the-earth.<sup>16</sup> And because the Absolute Same is actually the Form of every formable form, form cannot exist apart from the Same. For form causes a thing to be the same as itself; but that a thing is other than something else is due to the fact that it is not the Absolute Same, i.e., is not the Form of every form.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Absolute Same is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of every form; it is the Absolute Actuality of all possibility; it is the uncontracted, unaltered Same, in which the universal is not opposed to the particular, because the universal and the particular are subsequent to the Same. For the universal is both the same as itself and other than the particular. And similarly for the particular.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the Absolute Same is exalted above all intellectual-universal beings and above all real-particular beings.

*Conrad:* When I note that each thing is undeniably the same as itself, I see that the Absolute Same is participated in by all things. For if the Absolute Same were other than, and different from, all things, then they would not be that which they are. For how could each thing be the same as itself if the Absolute Same were different and differentiated from them or were *other* than they? Likewise, if what participates in the Same were the Same, in which it participates, then how would [this participant] be different from another [participant], which also is the same as itself?

**148** *Nicholas:* You understand keenly. Don't let the Platonists' view, although a subtle one, sway you: viz., that the First is so super-exalted that it cannot be participated in. Know that the Absolute One is identically participated in by means of [participating in] Sameness., which they say to be subsequent to the First, the Absolute One. Let it satisfy you that, no matter in what way [the One] is participated in, the fact that all things are the same as themselves is only from Him from

whom all things derive, who is the Absolute Same.

And because previously you have often heard from me very many such statements, let the foregoing discussion, in the foregoing way, presently suffice as an uncomplicated summary [of my views] on the Absolute Same.

I will [now] attempt to explain more fully the [other] points that were previously made. You said that the Same is naturally suited to cause-to-be-the-same. Admitting this point, I inferred that all things, although various and different, are from the Same that which they are and also are from the Same in the manner in which they are. You expressed puzzlement. By means of an uncomplicated summary I will hasten to free you of your puzzlement.

*Conrad:* O how greatly you will please [me] if in a manner apprehensible to me you actually do this, as you seem to be promising to.

- 149** *Nicholas:* You yourself will be the judge of whether I have fulfilled my promises. To begin with, you do not doubt that the Same causes-to-be-identical. For how could the Same, since it is the Same, cause-to-be-different? For in the Absolute Same difference is the Same, to which all difference is far subsequent. Therefore, the Same is naturally suited only to cause-to-be-identical, i.e., to cause-to-be-the-same. Hence, because each thing is the same as itself, each thing causes-to-be-identical. For example, the intellect understands, sight sees, heat heats,<sup>19</sup> and so on. And because the Same is unmultipliable, all making-identical occurs by means of an assimilation [*assimilatio*].<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Same calls what is not the Same unto the Same. And because the Same is unmultipliable and is unattainable by what is not the Same, what is not the Same arises transformedly unto the Same.<sup>21</sup> And, likewise, [this] occurs by means of an assimilation. For example, when Absolute Being itself, which is the Absolute Same, calls not-being unto the Same, then because not-being cannot attain unto Absolute Being itself, which is unmultipliable, not-being is found to have risen up, transformedly, toward Absolute Being itself—i.e., [to have risen up] as an assimilation for the Same. Now, assimilation indicates a certain coinciding of (1) the Same's descent toward what is not the Same and (2) what-is-not-the-Same's ascent toward the Same. Therefore, creation, or genesis, can be called an assimilation for Absolute Being itself;<sup>22</sup> for because Absolute Being itself is the [Absolute] Same, then through causing-to-be-identical it calls nothing, or not-being, unto itself. Hence, the saints have said that the creation is

a likeness of God or an image of God.

**150** But since Oneness, which coincides with the Absolute Same, is unmultipliable (because it is the same as Oneness), then since what is not the One cannot attain unto absolute, unmultipliable Sameness, what is not the One can be found to exist only in terms of plurality. Therefore, when the Absolute Same (which is also being and one and infinite) calls unto itself that which is not the Same, an assimilation arises in the many things that participate in the Same in various ways. Therefore, plurality, otherness, variety, difference, and further such things arise from the fact that the Same causes-to-be-identical.<sup>23</sup> Hence too [arises] order, which is a participation, with variation, in the Same; hence [too arises] harmony, which represents the Same in various ways. All things, though various, together proclaim the Same; and this harmonious proclamation is an assimilation [for the Same].

**151** In this way, then, the cosmos (or beauty), which is also called the world, arose as a quite bright representation of the Unattainable Same. For the variety of things, which are both the same as themselves and other than another, shows that the Unattainable Same is unattainable. For the more the Unattainability is unfolded in and through a variety of things, the more the Same shines forth in the various things.<sup>24</sup> For Unattainability coincides with the Absolute Same. Hence, it is evident that I rightly said that because the Same causes-to-be-identical, all things are that which they are in the manner in which they are. Therefore, this perfect inference [holds]: “The Absolute Same exists; therefore, all things are that which they are and are in the manner in which they are”—so that the reason for, or the cause of, all things is only that the Same causes-to-be-identical.<sup>25</sup> But you see that countless things participate in this Absolute Rational Ground [*ratio absoluta*], since each thing is the same as itself and since the more *same* it is,<sup>26</sup> the more perfectly it has an aptitude for causing-to-be-the-same. Moreover, at the same time, you also see the following: viz., that each thing is other than another. Therefore, you readily understand that all things are that which they are because when called by the Absolute Same unto [itself], the Unattainable Same, they are found to be such assimilations as they are.

**152** You will now be able, in the manner afforded by the power of your intelligence, to trace back to [one and] the same Cause (viz., to the Same itself) both the graded-perfection of [all] beings and the number, weight, and measure<sup>27</sup> of their powers and operations. And you



will now be able to know how it is that generations, corruptions, alterations, and other such things exist because of the fact that the Same causes-to-be-identical. For in order better to represent the very bright Unattainability (which coincides with the Absolute Same), beings concur in their being assimilated to the Same (each of which beings is the same as itself and is especially opposed to another), so that in this way Infinity, or Unattainability, is unfolded in a maximum opposition of participants—unfolded as clearly as the condition of the participants permits. Therefore, the things participating in Being itself are of opposing powers. But these beings (since each of them is the same as itself) endeavor to cause-to-be-identical. For example, heat causes to be hot; cold causes to be cold. Likewise, when heat calls to sameness with itself what is not hot, and when cold calls to sameness with itself what is not cold, a struggle arises. And therefrom [arise] (1) generation and corruption and (2) whatever temporal, changeable, unstable things there are and [also] (3) the variety of movements. You now see the one Cause of all things.

But if [instead of the foregoing], something else seems to you to be true], refute clearly and rationally what I have said.<sup>28</sup> I will be happy to be instructed. For in such way as to keep my promises, I stated the foregoing matters cursorily and tersely, in an uncomplicated summary, looking perhaps at too few [aspects]—something which<sup>29</sup> often is a cause of error.

153

## II

*Conrad:* You have thoroughly satisfied me, and no objection comes to mind. Indeed, when I observed you thus reasoning, I learned in a practical way that in all the things of which you have spoken, both now and often before, one and the same unattainable illumination of learned ignorance shines forth to me quite brightly through a variety of elucidating ways, so that your teachings are everywhere redolent of [one and] the same universal knowledge, for which they are assimilations.<sup>30</sup> For I have now apprehended nothing except what I have often already heard [to be expressed by you] in another way. Indeed, the Absolute Same is also the Absolute Maximum, which is ineffable and unattainable. And so, the Ineffable is the Cause of all effable things, and the Unattainable is the Cause of all attainable things. And now you have made known to me that Infinity—which coincides with the absolute, unattainable Same—shines forth quite brightly in the countless multitude of particular beings. For since particular beings

154

(each of which is the same as itself and other than another) surpass all denumerable numbers but, nevertheless, do not attain unto infinity (which is unattainable), the unattainability of Absolute Infinity is made more apparent. And because the Absolute Same is present in all things (since each thing is the same as itself), there are various concordances (universal, generic, specific) of all things, as also various differences, which the concordances cannot be without, because of the [fact that the Same is] unattainable. Likewise, I see the Eternal, which together with the Absolute Same, is the Unattainable Same. And I see that, hence, there are countless varieties of duration, which surpass all rational measure, so that in this way the unattainability of, the Eternal Same shines forth more perfectly.

**155** I see sufficiently clearly that the investigators of the genesis of [all] things who did not consider the foregoing points, were able to be mistaken. For from the fact that certain [of them] recognized that the world's duration is unmeasurable by reason, they judged the world to be eternal<sup>31</sup> (although the Eternal is the Absolute Same, unattainable by all duration—whose unattainability is the more manifest in and through the immeasurable duration). These [investigators] seem to me to be mistaken. [Their situation is] as if the eye were to judge that a certain material object, whose visible part participated in spherical shape, were a perfect sphere—[to do so] because the eye could not see that it was not a sphere.<sup>32</sup> For the eye cannot view a sphere by means of a single look.<sup>33</sup> But just as with respect to the apprehensibility of a sphere by sight we are aided by our synthesizing reason,<sup>34</sup> so it is necessary that we be aided by our high intellect, which shows us that rational measurement falls disproportionately short of the eternal. Thus, [the inference] “that whose duration is inapprehensible by reason is eternal” does not follow. For reason's measurements, which attain unto temporal things, do not attain unto things that are free from time—just as hearing does not attain unto whatever is not-audible, even though these things exist and are unattainable by hearing.<sup>35</sup>

**156** *Nicholas:* You reason excellently. Moreover, you have heard elsewhere<sup>36</sup> what I think about this matter. Let it suffice for now that we recognize the following: (1) The Absolute Same is the Cause of all things. (2) Absolute Eternity is unattainable by all the different kinds of immeasurable durations. (3) We know that this unattainability of the eternal shines forth in the immeasurability of durations. (4) The Peripatetics' claim “the world exists from eternity” is true

insofar as the Peripatetics are claiming that the eternal is unattainable by reason's measuring. (5) But truer is the claim of the Platonists, who call the world begotten and who have seen that the Eternal Same is the Absolute Beginning. (Nevertheless, the Platonists do not deny that the immeasurability of duration is compatible with begottness.) (6) Even our saints have expressed, in the clearest possible manner, the view that the world was created in the beginning.<sup>37</sup>

**157** It is evident that the world's beginning<sup>38</sup> is not in and through what is *other*. Rather, the Absolute Same is the Beginning, the Middle, and the End of the world. Moreover, God did not cause the world's *duration* to have any beginning (except for the Absolute Same) in addition to the world. Therefore, [the world's duration had its beginning] through the world and through all things that are in the world. Just as only in the Absolute Same is any of the world attained unto as it is,<sup>39</sup> So too duration, as it is, cannot be attained unto by any measurement. For through what is *other* how could what is the same be attained unto except in some way other [than as it is]?<sup>40</sup> By means of the measurements of one thing's duration how could another thing's duration be measured if [the two measurements] were incommensurable and unknown? Indeed, only the Absolute Same is the altogether adequate measure of all things that are in any way measurable.<sup>41</sup>

**158** *Conrad*: I would readily agree with all [these points] except that the Book of Moses on Genesis holds me back. For in accordance with the things set forth there and rightly included, we can rationally infer the temporal measure of the beginning of the world, which [length of time] has not yet reached 7,000 years (although in Pliny's *Natural History*, and in many other [writers], we read otherwise).

*Nicholas*: I hold Moses' writings in very great esteem; and when I turn to the writer's intent,<sup>42</sup> I know that these writings are altogether true. Indeed, when I turn to God Himself, whose prerogative it is to deify, then wholeheartedly and most steadfastly I acknowledge and affirm [the following truths—doing so] not because I am a Christian or because I am bound to the Law but because reason forbids me to believe anything else:<sup>43</sup> (1) God created the world and created man in His image and created man exceedingly good. (2) Sin entered into the human race not because of the Creator but because of man. (3) God, by many means—by prophecies, promises, and gifts—has recalled man from the evil way that he contracted from his first parents,

not from God. (4) God armed man, [thus] recalled, with laws in order for him to resist his corrupt inclinations. (5) Above all these things God gave additionally to man the promise of being a son of God in and through His own son, provided man would believe and would keep the commandments.

**159** But where Moses expresses in human terms the manner in which all these things were done, I believe that he elegantly expressed it to the end [of saying] what is true in the manner in which what is true can be grasped by man. But you know that he used a human manner in order to instruct men in human terms. To these things he added, in their own place and subsequently to the human manner-of-speaking, other things of such kind that intelligent men would understand that the things which express the manner [of creating] are human assimilations for the unattainable divine manner. For when Moses revealed (1) that God is nothing of all the things that can be seen or depicted or carved and (2) that He is visible by man only in vestiges that are subsequent to Him and (3) that He who is of infinite power does nothing through temporal delays,<sup>44</sup> Moses showed sufficiently that he befigured in human terms the mode of the inexpressible act of creation. Hence, the wise, who say that the invisible God created *at once* all things as He willed to, do not contradict the intent of the law-giver Moses, even as the very many others also do not do who have used other befiguring modes. And with this befigurement is especially compatible the fact that when Moses spoke of man, he called him *Adam*, [a word] which is an appellative enfolding in its signification *man*, whether masculine or feminine.

**160** And for the aforementioned reasons, and for many others that can be treated more suitably elsewhere, the Jews are enjoined to reserve the beginning of Genesis for the wise, in order that the literal, surface-meaning would not offend neophytes. But the wise and those who are quite skilled in theological matters, knowing that the divine modes cannot be apprehended, are not offended if the befiguring assimilation is found to be contracted to the language of the heavens. For, as best they can, the wise free it from that contraction in order to see that only the Absolute Same causes-to-be-identical. Hence, (1) the discrepancies (a) between the historical accounts and (b) between rationales, times, names, and men, and (2) the inaccurate account of the flow of the rivers that are said to flow from the midst of Paradise, and (3) whatever other [discrepancies], even were they more absurd, do

not at all offend them. Rather, from among the absurdities they seek out the more secret mysteries—just as in the case of the especially accomplished intellects of the saints you can also find regarding that [first] part of Genesis, if you read Ambrose’s *De Paradiso* and his *In Hexameron* and if you read Basil, Augustine, Jerome, and the likes.

I noticed that, being wise, all these [saints], although they seem to be at odds in many respects, agree in the main. Still, not all take literally the manner [of creating] that is narrated there. The views of all these [men] concerning the manner [of God’s creating] I accept in the following way: viz., as if they were wise men’s different concepts of [that] inexpressible manner; and turning myself only to the Same—which each [of those wise] has endeavored to befigure assimilatively—I find rest in it.

161

III

*Conrad:* I am immensely pleased to have heard from you these points, especially the points about the beginning of Genesis. For, as I understand the matter: there was a single intent of the law-giver [Moses]; you affirm this intent to be most true, just as do all the wise; yet, you do not deny the story of the manner [of creating]; for you say that the manner [of creating] was thus historically recounted in a human way for the sake of the listeners, in order to bear fruit in spite of the fact that man cannot either conceive or express the divine manner [of creating] except by means of various assimilations.

162

But David our prophet (who spoke about the Absolute Same and [the meaning of] whose words<sup>45</sup> you amply explained) says elsewhere that by the word of the Lord the heavens were established, and by the spirit of His mouth all their<sup>46</sup> power.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, I entreatingly ask to be taught whether this assimilation [of David’s] is a suitable one, especially since the words do not seem to be basically much different from Moses’ befiguring.

*Nicholas:* Each [of them] endeavored to surmise the manner in which all things derive from the First. But among the wisest philosophers there is the view that by the command of the [divine] will the natural forms<sup>48</sup> of things come into existence from God, who is purest Intellect, existing completely and most perfectly in actuality. (By comparison, the form of a house [arises] by the command of an architect, whom his instruments obey.) Hence, to speak quite concisely: every agent, because it is the same as itself, is shown by means of the afore-

said, to cause-to-be-identical; therefore, in acting, every agent represents by means of a certain likeness [God's] act-of-creating.

**163** *Conrad:* No doubt. But one action [represents it] in a clearer manner than does another. Hence, I ask to be guided by you through a closer assimilation.

*Nicholas:* Gladly, to the extent that [such guidance] now comes to mind. You have seen, I suppose, vessels being made by the glassblower's art.<sup>49</sup>

*Conrad:* I have.

*Nicholas:* This art can guide you sufficiently. For a glassblower collects material. Then he tempers it in a stove with the help of fire. Afterwards, by means of an iron rod on which material is collected in order to receive—through an inflow from the glassblower<sup>50</sup>—the form of the vessel conceived in the glassblower's mind, the glassblower breathes out his breath. The breath enters into the material; and by means of the breath's moving the material in conformity with the intent of the glassblower, a glass vessel is made by him from the material which previously lacked all form of a vessel. This [new] form so forms the material that there is such a vessel of such a kind that the material, now standing under a form, lacks the universal possibility to become just any form at all of a vessel, for the universal possibility is [now] actually specified. But when the glassblower of this vessel of this kind proposes to make another vessel of another kind: seeing that neither this vessel nor its parts (since they are its parts) can possibly become that which he intends (since each vessel is a whole and is complete and its parts are parts of that whole), he causes the vessel or its pieces to be returned to the original material, by removing the actuality of the form by which the vessel was restricted. And after the material is thereupon reduced, through dissolution, to fluidity and universal possibility, he makes of it another vessel.

**164** By some such likeness, although a remote one, God brings all things into being, although He does not gather the possibility-of-things from something that He has not created. Moreover, with regard to sensible forms, nature uses the sun's heat as the glassblower uses fire; and nature acts as does the breath of the glassblower; and nature is directed by the Mind of the Supreme Artisan, just as the breath of the glassblower is directed by the glassblower's mind. Certain such [truths], and many others, you will be able to infer [from the example of the

glassblower's art], if you give heed.

*Conrad:* You have given an excellent likeness concerning the genesis of sensible things. I see, as if by means of a paradigmatic exemplification, how it is that (1) nature is the beginning of motion, (2) heat is an instrument of nature, (3) place is as a stove (as if heat were a knife and place were its sheath). And from your example I grasp many [truths] about nature, which is present even in the center of the world.

If you can, then make use of a more general likeness, I ask.

165

IV

*Nicholas:* Many quite suitable paradigms can occur to one who considers [the matter]. But I think that among the operations known to us teaching is a sufficiently close assimilation<sup>51</sup> for the universal mode of creating. Hence, Moses, David, and other prophets took *that* assimilation [viz., teaching] as closely befiguring the manner of creating. For a teacher, to the end of calling an untaught student unto an identical mastery [with himself], calls silence forth unto being a vocal likeness of his concept; and silence rises up in assimilation to the concept of the teacher. This assimilation is an intellectual word, which is befigured in the rational word; and the rational word is befigured in the sensible word. Hence, the sensible word, with respect to its vocalization, rises up from silence; and through stages of confused sound it [becomes] a discreet, articulate utterance. (For when a teacher is teaching, those who are more distant from him hear a certain confused sound.) Therefore, sound is the possibility, or proximate material, of the utterance. Hence, when an utterance is called forth from silence: at first there arises a sound—the possibility, as it were, of the utterance. (Thus, the possibility which is the sound is neither the silence nor the formed utterance but is a formable utterance.) Next, arise the elements of the confused sound; thereafter comes a combining of elements into syllables, of syllables into expressions, and of expressions into a statement.<sup>52</sup> And it is evident that these things occur in this progressive order with regard to the calling forth of silence unto a vocal word—although the difference of priority and posteriority is not really noticed by a hearer.

166

The teacher's word, then, thus set forth, contains a threefold order. (1) For one such word is the sensible word; and, through sensible ears only, it is attained unto by those who are altogether igno-

rant of the names for things. And this mode [of attainment] is characteristic of bestiality; for all beasts, together with [any] man who is ignorant of the names for things, attain unto nothing other than unto the articulated utterance. (2) Next, there is the rational word, because it is attained unto by those who know the names for things. Hence, since only reason grasps the names for things, the teacher's discourse is attained unto, in this second way, only by men and not by beasts. (3) But because a grammarian can attain only unto the discourse, and not unto the mind, of the teacher who is attempting to explain, by means of his discourse, a mathematical or a theological concept, you know that the teacher's word exists [also] in an order other than the rational. Since, then, the mathematician or the theologian views the mind of the teacher in and through the teacher's word, you [can] elicit therefrom the intellectual word, which belongs to the third order and which bears a close likeness to the mind of the teacher.

**167** You also see, with respect to the word's vocalization, a certain power-of-breath [*virtus spirativa*] in the teacher. From this power the various motions of the tongue, the lips, and the other instruments must proceed in order that there be a vocal word. Therefore, the movers (also called Muses by the poets) of the arteries, the tongue, the lips, and the jaw participate in various ways in the spirit [*spiritus*] of the speaker, so that they are spirits that move, in various ways, the instruments in accordance with the intention of the speaker.

Likewise, the prophet very suitably likens the creation to the word and the spirit of the mouth.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this is the intention of our holy Moses, who, likewise, likens [God's] manner-of-creating to verbal expression. For he states: "God said 'Let there be light,' and light was made."<sup>54</sup> Thus, he compared [God's] ease-in-creating to the spoken word.

**168** And, hence, God's ineffable name, which is of supreme mystery—a name which the Greeks call Tetragrammaton (because it is written from four Hebrew characters<sup>55</sup>) and which is pronounced "Jehovah"—is said to be ineffable perhaps because it is the enfolding of all vocalization, as being the Fount of every effable word, in the sense that the Ineffable shines forth, as Cause, in every effable word. For unless something else occurs to you, the following seems to be a desire of maximum profit: to be able to investigate—by means of this befiguring illustration for the flowing forth of beings from the First—all the things that everywhere present themselves (to one who attends



unhurriedly and carefully) for consideration in terms of distinctness, order, motion, etc.

*Conrad:* I do not know what else could occur to anyone other than that it is especially important to give heed both to the holy prophets' simple but very fertile traditions and to the philosophers' arguments. For with great ease I am led by the compactness of [this] likeness—led to see the very beautiful order of things, i.e., [to see] how it is that corporeal things exist for the sake of sensory discrimination, sensory discrimination exists for the sake of rational discrimination, rational discrimination exists for the sake of intellectual discernment, and intellectual discernment exists for the sake of the true Cause, which is the Creator of all things.

**169** For by means of the aforementioned paradigm I see most clearly that all [other] natures serve the intellectual [nature] as assimilations for it, so that the intellectual nature is a sign of the true and absolute Cause and so that, likewise, by means of the intellectual nature every being attains unto the Fount of its own being. For what does all sensory stimulus aim at except a discrimination or an explanation? What does all reasoning aim at except understanding? What does all understanding aim at except the true, absolute Cause? All things aim at the Same, which is something absolute; a sign for the Same is not found outside the intellectual domain. For example, the essence-of-a teacher's-statement is found only in the intellectual domain, wherein the true rationale (*causa*) shines forth. When a mathematician teaches that every triangle has three angles equal to two right angles: even if his student grasps *that* this [proposition] holds true, nevertheless as long as the student does not conceive of the true rationale [*causa*], he does not understand; but once the rationale (*causa*) becomes disclosed, his intellect views the essence. Similarly, I see that the [Absolute] Cause shines forth in the intellect.

**170** Therefore, the intellect alone has an eye for viewing an essence, which it cannot see except in the true Cause,<sup>56</sup> which is the Fount of all desire. Moreover, since all things seek to exist, then in all things there is desire from the Fount-of-desire, wherein being and desire coincide in the Same. Therefore, everything's desire is in accordance with its being, so that rational things desire to exist rationally, sensible things sensibly, etc.; and they seek to exist optimally. Therefore, all things desire what is best, but they do so in their own manner.<sup>57</sup> The Absolute Good is one and the same; and everything's desire

shows that everything is called unto this Good.

171 I have gladly drawn such points from your words; and I rejoice that by means of this patent likeness I am able to elicit many important points about the genesis [of all things] and about nature. But because there are not lacking saints who befigure the world by means of a written book, expound, I ask, how the matter seems to you.

*Nicholas:* I do not disdain any befigurer. I understand the Same [to be depicted] by each [of them]. To me a sufficiently suitable likeness to the world seems to be a written book whose language and letters are not known—as if there were presented to a German a certain Greek book of Plato's in which Plato described his intellect's meanings. For if the German applied himself attentively to the shapes of the letters, then from the agreement and the disagreement of the characters, he could surmise<sup>58</sup> certain elements [of the language], and from various combinations he could surmise the vowels; but the essence, either in whole or in part, he could not at all surmise unless [something of it] were revealed to him. Accordingly, I conjecture some such world, where the befigured divine power is hidden. By means of a careful investigation of this world (through proportions, differences, agreements, and studious inference) one can arrive at a knowledge of the existence of its elements and combinations. Nevertheless, an investigator, in and of himself, will not discover the proper name of any element, vowel, or combination; rather, his discriminating reason assigns a respective name to the things found. Moses beautifully expresses this point where he describes Adam, or man, as having imposed names on things; and in the course of the story he implies that a certain [respective] reason is always the rationale [*causa*] for the names.<sup>59</sup> Hence, too, in accordance with various reasons, various names for things are found; and various names of one and the same thing are [taken] from reason's various surmises. That book [of Moses] reveals to us only the following: (1) He who wrote with His own finger<sup>60</sup> is great and exalted above all that can be spoken of. (2) There is no end of His greatness, wisdom, and power. (3) Unless He revealed, nothing at all could be known. (4) Unless our intellect is conformed to Him, it will not understand, because unless the Absolute Same is seen, the befigurings of His likeness will not be understood. [By comparison]: if Socrates is not known, then no one can recognize the image-of-Socrates, inferring from it the rationale [*causa*] for the [presumed] recognition.

172

173 Respond to the following, I ask: Suppose an inventor of some art (e.g., of painting)—subsequently to whom there is no such [other knowledgeable person], because there is no contemporary to whom he can pass it on—wants to leave his art behind and [therefore], because he is not able to leave it behind in some better way, paints in a book the unbefigurable art of painting. Would you not see, in the book, various figures from which you would be able to surmise the wonderful and unknown art of the artist? But since the art is not visible but is only intelligible, how would you be able to attain by sight this art that is the simple form of all the shapes and that is expressed there in each and every thing because it is the absolute essence<sup>61</sup> of the shapes? Indeed, you would lack this understanding of the art. [By comparison,] is not God the Father the Fount of the art of causing-to-be-identical? This is the art that enfolds every [other] art, and it is the absolute, formal Essence<sup>62</sup> of all formable things. (This Fount is also called the Father's Son, Word, Power, or Wisdom, and is called by many other names as well.) How, then, can this art of being present in all things, which are unfolded [from God], be conceived by someone who does not have an understanding of the art? For only God the Father's intellect, which is this art, has this art.

174 Therefore, it is evident that neither in part nor in whole can any essence be attained unto by man.<sup>63</sup> When human meditation explores these matters, it despises its own syllogistic inferences and turns obediently to the revealed prophetic illuminations; and, in this way, while despising itself as being completely helpless with regard to knowledge, it proceeds unto the things it is seeking. Likewise, the knowledge that one is ignorant humbles; and by humbling, it exalts and makes learned.<sup>64</sup> Moses expresses this point perfectly where he describes the fall of man into ignorance (which is the death of the intellect) as having happened because by his own power man attempted to become coequal with God in knowledge. It will perhaps be useful for you to take note of this point.

175

V

*Conrad*: Especially [useful], indeed! For I see all these points. But because so many points have now been touched upon—points which were enfolded in the Prophet's words and were hidden from me—do not, I ask, be reluctant to add hereto the reason why the Prophet says<sup>65</sup> that the heavens were formed by the *word* but the powers by the *spir-*

it, for [God is] the Absolute Same, which causes all things by an identical act [of creating].

*Nicholas:* I have learned by experience that authority very greatly contributes to study. For if someone receives something said [in Scripture] as disclosed by divine revelation and if he seeks with all his effort to behold intellectually that which he believes regardless of the kind of statement it is, then even if the treasure is entirely hidden, it will show itself to be there findable [by him] in an inapprehensible way.<sup>66</sup> Hence, by means of the deepest faith we are led to the highest [insights], as you have heard elsewhere, [viz.,] in *De Filiatione Dei*.

**176** Similarly, I accept by faith the foregoing prophetic expression as closely befiguring the genesis of [all] things, and I proceed to view—with the intellect and by means of a likeness—this genesis, which,<sup>67</sup> nevertheless, remains invisible. The Prophet says: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were established, and by the spirit of His mouth all their power.”<sup>68</sup> Where we have “*domini*” [“of the Lord”], the original Hebrew language has the ineffable name of God (regarding which I [earlier]<sup>69</sup> made a few points), which is pronounced “Jehovah”. Therefore, the Prophet says (1) that the Word is from Jehovah as from the Father of the Word (since [the ineffable name of God] is the enfolding of all vocalization, without which vowels no word can be vocal), and (2) that the Spirit is of the Father and of the Word (since the Spirit is the Spirit of His mouth, as if the mouth were the coincidence of the beginning of the one who pronounces and of the word [pronounced], with the Spirit proceeding from both).

**177** And this trinity is present in the Absolute Same—without which trinity the Same would not have the power to cause to be identical. Therefore, the Absolute Same is three and one—something which we experience in the fact that the Same causes to be identical. Likewise, every agent participates in this trine and one Nature, without which Nature an agent would not be an agent. You were able to read about this topic everywhere in Book One of *De Docta Ignorantia*, where I set forth my meager understanding (being nonetheless the perfect gift of God) concerning the Trinity, which very many others have dealt with befiguringly and—each in his own way—excellently.

**178** But returning now to [the topic of] the genesis [of all things], I say that the Prophet [David] intimated to us that the heavens (and whatever [else] came into existence under the name “heavens” or in

terms of this likeness or explanation) came forth as the word of the Lord and Commander. This word is not delayed in its execution. Moreover, the Lord's reason is His will, and His will is His reason: it speaks, and things are made; it commands, and they are created without any intervening delay. Then, after the heavens have been called forth into existence, He breathes into them power—so that what is extrinsic to each thing is its being called forth from nothing (called forth as being a concealing and enclosing heaven),<sup>70</sup> and what is intrinsic to each thing is its being turned toward the Creator (as if the creature were spoken forth from God). Hence, in a thing's power there shines forth the divine power as if breathed into the thing. And the expression of likeness to the Creator is stronger with regard to this turning than with regard to the extrinsic relation by which the thing has been called forth from nothing. For example,<sup>71</sup> in the case of what is animal, we must affirm that the living and sensing power breathed into it by God is something greater than is the "soul's heaven," i.e., the body, which has been called forth from nothing. Thus, in similar fashion, we may consider that in every created thing (since it is an assimilation) there is something extrinsic, viz., its having been called forth from nothing, and something intrinsic, viz., its participating in true being—as if there were in the being of each creature the following three things: (1) *possibility* with respect to being called forth from nothing, (2) *actuality* with respect to participating in the divine power, and (3) the *union* of these.<sup>72</sup>

**179** Expressing the foregoing point elegantly, Moses says: "Therefore, God formed man from the clay of the earth, and He breathed into his countenance the breath of life, and man was made into a living soul."<sup>73</sup> Thus, Moses expressed the fact that earthly man (who is even called Adam, as being earthly) exists by means of the following [two] modes: (1) in accordance with the extrinsic mode, as a body called forth from the clay of the earth or from the nature of the elements, and (2) in accordance with the intrinsic mode, as a vital power from the breathing-into of the Divine Spirit or from the participation in the divine power—so that in this way and from these [two] things a living man is one true man.

**180** In a way that is not at all absurd we can understand by the name "heaven" a certain specific mode that includes the motion of participated power. An illustration would be the syllogistic power of reason. This power is found to be contracted in specific ways among certain

modes when we make inferences, so that the first figure [of a Syllogism]<sup>74</sup> is as the realm, or sphere, or heaven, of that [first] mode. And in that heaven—as being the universal mode of the first figure—there are circles that differ in species and that are modes more greatly contracted [in differing degrees]. A similar point holds true regarding the other figures, so that in this way every species is a heaven that contains within its own ambit an invisible power breathed into it; and the inhabitants of this heaven participate in various ways in that power. This participation cannot occur outside its own heaven, just as the putting together of a syllogism from three universal affirmative [propositions] cannot occur outside the first figure. Hence, every creature is moved within its own heaven and finds rest there—just as you have heard elsewhere<sup>75</sup> about this matter.

**181**     *Conrad:* I have heard previously that which you have also just now expressed. But I do not clearly understand your last point. For the fact that we human beings necessarily use modes when we reason, as you say, happens because syllogistic reasoning requires this usage. Hence, the specific modes come in this way from combinations [of proposition]; and by ourselves, in the light of reason, we see that syllogisms cannot be validly formed in other ways. The matter is different in the case of God, where *will* coincides with *reason*, so that what is willed is rational.

**182**     *Nicholas:* I wanted to say to you this one thing: viz., that a “heaven” can be understood to be a specific, finite, closed, or concealed mode of assimilation for the Same. I adduced the not-unsuitable example of the figures of a syllogism. You [now] reply: not so regarding the syllogistic modes, which are valid in certain combinations but not in others; and not so in the case of God, whose will is His reason.

I answer: I meant this very thing: viz., that *just because* a specific mode of assimilation is from God, it is rational. For since the Same causes to be identical: when with regard to their being assimilations the discernible modes (which may be concealed in certain respects) represent the Same, they are called *special* modes, inasmuch as, [respectively], they serve as a *specific* mode of representation. For since the Same causes to be the same, it cannot be discerned apart from an assimilation.

**183**     Therefore, just as harmony has special proportional modes in which it can be found to be (these modes can be participated in in

various ways, and apart from these modes of consonance, or harmony, we hear dissonance), so we must think about the Same as about consonance and harmony, for the Same is not inharmonious with, or different from, these modes. And just as harmony requires special proportions apart from which it cannot be found, something similar is generally true regarding the Absolute Same. Accordingly, in this way, the Same's will, which<sup>76</sup> does not will anything that is *other*, coincides with its reason, since the Same's reason cannot admit of what is *other*. Therefore, in the Absolute Same reason coincides with will (even as is befigured in nature and in the explanation of harmony), so that the species of things are such species as they are and cannot be otherwise. If there is a deviation from these species, then a monster or a dissonance is produced, but it cannot realize its own species. For to depart from [one's species]—which species is, in its own way, an assimilation for the Same—is to distort the beautiful form of the reflection of the Same, which is, unqualifiedly, the Fount of all beauty and of every good.

**184** *Conrad*: I do not see how to dissent in any respect from these points, which in my judgment have been reasonably established.<sup>77</sup> But our prophet David ascribes to the heavens *powers* and *angels*, for he says: "Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the highest. Praise Him all you His angels. Praise Him all you His powers."<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, tell me one thing: viz., whether angels preside over these heavens just now mentioned. Thereafter, since the deepening night is calling us to repose, I will cease troubling you.

**185** *Nicholas*: In addition to our proposed topic you now raise these many [concerns], which need time for deeper investigation. But to finish up, I will say a [further] word: viz., that every motion of all rational species tends toward the Absolute Same. Indeed, we say that motion is spiritual and rational. [The situation is] as if spirit were a power breathed out from the mouth of God, through which power that identical-making motion is ministered unfailingly. This motion is God's power, which moves and directs unto the Same those things that thus partake [of it].

**186** For when we envision all lions (that now exist and that have existed) to be acting as lions do, we conceive of a sphere or a realm or a heaven that continuously encompasses the power of this species and that makes it a different species, and distinguishes it, from the others. And [in our concept] we ascribe an administering spirit to that celes-

tial motion. This spirit is as a divine power that *enfolds* every such power which that specific motion unfolds.<sup>79</sup> Thus, in this way, the administering spirit is God the Creator's minister and is an overseer in the kingdom of this motion, taking charge of such a domain of delegates.

Similarly, [regarding] a teacher who is also headmaster of the school: through a given subordinate teacher the headmaster is in charge of the course of grammar; through another subordinate, in charge of the course of rhetoric; through another, of logic; and through another, of mathematics. Thus, in this way, grammar is a heaven consisting of a certain specific mode of participating in the instruction from the teacher who is also the headmaster. And the grammatical scholars are inhabitants of this heaven; they participate in the headmaster's instruction—participate in accordance with that specific mode of their own habitation, viz., the mode of grammar. And the intellect of the subordinate teacher is the director and the mover of that heaven [of grammar] and of the heavenly [i.e., the grammatical] things in that heaven.

**187** Or perhaps you will find a closer comparison in your own self. For, indeed, your intellect, especially, is the same as itself, because it is a sign of the Absolute Same. It shines forth only in reason. For in varying ways various reasonings are likenesses of the intellect. Some [of these are likenesses] lucidly and clearly; and so, they are called ostensive or demonstrative. Others [of them are likenesses] in a way that is subject to persuasion or that is weak or obscure; they are called rhetorical. And still others [are likenesses] in a way that is in-between. Therefore, when the intellect, in causing to be identical, strives to call unto itself the sensible world (in order that the world may rise up in an assimilation for the intellect), it endeavors to draw the world unto itself by way of reason. Now, specifically different discriminations of, or reasons for, sensible things can vary. In and through these discriminations and reasons sensible objects can be elevated unto assimilations for the intellect (e.g., in a visible or audible or gustatory or olfactory or tactile manner). Accordingly, a heaven of sight arises (and a heaven of hearing, etc.), so that the sensible world is discerned in a visible manner. That is, the sensible world rises up<sup>80</sup> unto becoming an assimilation for<sup>81</sup> the intellect—something which occurs by means of discrimination that is present in sight in a visual way. Therefore, the heaven of sight—a heaven filled with the visual power—is governed and moved by its own rational and discriminating spirit. Thus, by



virtue of the fact that the [rational] spirit is intently present to the eye, this spirit enjoys visual discrimination, in which it lives delightedly while participating in the intellect.

Conceive of the same thing regarding the other senses.

Because this topic needs to be expounded more at length and because another time is more suitable: let what has already been discussed—in the foregoing way, regarding the genesis [of all things]—suffice for now.

Just now the cock has called us to repose. Farewell.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Ap.* *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* [Vol. II (edited by Raymond Klibansky) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1932)].
- CA* *Cribratio Alkorani* [Vol. VIII (edited by Ludwig Hagemann) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1986)].
- DI* *De Docta Ignorantia* [Latin-German edition: *Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung*, published by Meiner Verlag. **Book I** (Vol. 264a), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 3rd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1979. **Book II** (Vol. 264b), edited and translated by Paul Wilpert; 2nd edition with minor improvements by Hans G. Senger, 1977. **Book III** (Vol. 264c), Latin text edited by Raymond Klibansky; introduction and translation by Hans G. Senger, 1977].
- DP* *De Possess* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1986)].
- DVD* *De Visione Dei* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 2nd ed., 1988)].
- MFCG* *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, edited by Rudolf Haubst *et al.* A continuing series published in Mainz, Germany by Matthias-Grünwald Verlag.
- NA* *De Li Non Aliud* [Latin text contained in J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 3rd ed., 1987)].
- PF* *De Pace Fidei* [Vol. VII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1970)].
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. Series published in Paris.
- TB* Theodor Bibliander, editor, *Machumetis Sarracenorum Principis Vita ac Doctrina*. Zurich, 1550 (2nd ed.).
- VS* *De Venatione Sapientiae* [Vol. XII (edited by Raymond Klibansky and Hans G. Senger) of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1982)].

## 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 Beryllo* (1988); *Cribratio Alkorani; De Principio; De Venatione Sapientiae; Compendium; De Apice Theoriae*.

B. Texts authorized by the Heidelberg Academy and published in the Latin-German editions of Felix Meiner Verlag's Philosophische Bibliothek: *De Docta Ignorantia*.

C. Editions by J. Hopkins: *De Visione Dei* (1988); *De Possess* (1986); *De Li Non Aliud* (1987).

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.

2. All references to the Koran are in terms of the English translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1980 printing). A reference such as 'Surah 7:29' indicates Surah 7, verse 29.

3. References to the Bible are given in terms of the Douay version. (References to chapters and verses of the Psalms include, in parentheses, the King James' locations.) English translations of the Vulgate are sometimes taken from the Douay version, whether *in locis* this borrowing is explicitly indicated or not.

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

5. American-style punctuation is used, except where clarity occasionally requires placing a comma or a period outside of quotation marks.

## NOTES TO *DE GENESI*

1. A fuller title would be “*De Genesi Universorum*” This fact is made clear throughout the dialogue—but especially at *De Genesi* 1 (143:3). *De Genesi* 1 (149:17) indicates that the Latin word “*genesis*” is being used as an alternate for “*creatio*”.

This work was completed on March 2, 1447 in Lüttich. The discussant, Conrad, is presumably Conrad of Wartberg. See n. I of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*. At *De Genesi* 5 (175:12) *De Filiatione Dei* is mentioned, as is *De Docta Ignorantia* at *De Genesi* 5 (177:5).

2. Psalms 101:26-28 (Psalms 102:25-26).

3. This is a key passage for understanding the meaning of the title “*De Genesi*.” (See n. 1 above.)

4. At 143:3 of the printed Latin text, I am reading “*quam*” in place of “*quem*”, as does also the Paris edition.

5. See, above, n. 2 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.

6. This sentence expresses a certain optimism characteristic of the Renaissance. Nicholas’s conception of wisdom is such that even the man without formal schooling (the *idiota*) may in certain respects surpass in wisdom those who are erudite. See Nicholas’s *Idiota de Sapientia*.

7. See, above, n. 46 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

8. “. . . through itself”: i.e., through the fact that it is the Same.

9. At 144:17-18 of the printed Latin text Nicholas means for “*quae*” to refer to “*multiplicabilitatem*,” which is understood but unexpressed. I have deleted the editor’s addition of the words “*et negat multiplicabilitatem*.”

10. See, above, n. 18 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

11. *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (83).

12. Nicholas does not here say that the Absolute Same is the same as itself; but he also does not here deny it. His point is that the Absolute Same is not the same as any finite being.

13. See, above, n. 26 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

14. See *De Genesi* 1 (146:4-6).

15. Here Nicholas makes clear that “*idem absolutum*” is a name for God, though at a later period he prefers the names “*non-aliud*,” “*possest*,” and “*posse*”.

16. See, above, n. 46 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*. Also see *DP* 11-12. *NA* 6 (20). *DI* II, 4 (115).

17. Nicholas borrows certain metaphysical themes—such as the form-matter distinction—from Aristotle, but he does not develop them as does Aristotle. In the present passage he states that a given particular’s form makes it identical with itself And he goes on to say, elliptically, that one thing differs from another because it (i.e., its form) cannot be the Form of all forms. According to him, form is a principle of concordance, in that through a similarity of their respective essential form, things belong concordantly to species and genera. See *De Genesi* 2 (154:9-12). Also see, above, the chapter “Nicholas of Cusa and John Wenck’s Twentieth-Century Counterparts,” as well as, elsewhere, my *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, Chap. 3.

18. That is, the particular is both the same as itself and other than the universal.

19. This example, repeated in the section that corresponds to margin number 152,

shows that the interchangeable expressions “causing to be the same” (“*facere idem*”) and “causing to be identical” (“*identificare*”) do not refer to *numerical* identity.

20. An assimilation is a likeness. Cf. n. 81 below. The notion of *assimilatio* looms large in *Idiota de Mente*. See also *De Filiatione Dei* 6 (87).

21. Nicholas’s words here have sometimes been thought to foreshadow the later notion (within German philosophical Idealism) of *Aufhebung*, which encompasses the concepts of cancellation, preservation, and elevation. See, above, n. 6 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.

22. Creating is an assimilation for (i.e., a likeness of) the Absolute Being, the Creator. However, the creation is *not* the Absolute Being in a contracted, or non-Absolute, mode. God, who is the Absolute, is not at all contracted and can never be other than Absolute. To say—as some interpreters have wanted to—that for Cusa the world is God in His contracted state is to utter a contradiction, for the Absolute cannot be non-Absolute. Moreover, such a statement goes against Nicholas’s teachings throughout his works. Let it suffice for now to recall *DI* III, 1 (182:5-8): “Primo libello ostenditur unum absolute maximum incommunicabile, immersibile et incontractibile ad hoc vel illud in se aeternaliter, aequaliter et immobiliter idem ipsum persistere.” See the critique of Henry Bett on pp. 4-9 of my *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*.

23. The Same does not directly cause otherness. Otherness arises from the fact that the Absolute Same, viz., God, cannot create another God, so that, inevitably, what is created falls short of being absolutely Same. Otherness is this falling short. Nonetheless, what is *other* can serve as an assimilation for, or a likeness of, the Absolute Same. This assimilation is necessarily symbolical and disproportional. Accordingly, it is a metaphorical likeness. Cf. *DI* II, 4 (114).II, 2 (104). *De Dato Patris Luminum* 2 (99).

24. The various things are images of the Unattainable God. Cf. *De Filiatione Dei* 4 (72-78).

25. This sentence corresponds to 151:7-10 of the printed Latin text. Other translators have not been able to make sense out of the sentence because it is incorrectly punctuated in the Heidelberg edition (as also in the Paris edition).

26. According to Nicholas’s metaphysics sameness, or identity, admits of degrees. Only God, who exists per se and immutably, is unqualifiedly self-identical.

27. Wisdom 11:21.

28. In spite of the speculative nature of this dialogue Nicholas conceives of himself as proceeding rationally. Conrad states, at the beginning of the section indicated by margin number 184: “I do not see how to dissent in any respect from these points, which in my judgment have been reasonably established.” Cf. Nicholas’s words in his speculative work *De Li Non Aliud*: “I shall speak and converse with you, Ferdinand, [but only] on the following condition: viz., that unless you are compelled by reason, you will reject as unimportant everything you will hear from me” *NA* 1 (2:7-9).

29. The word “*quae*”, at 152:19, Nicholas appears to understand as “*quae res*”. Cf. *De Filiatione Dei* 6 (86:9). See, above, n. 79 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

30. See n. 20 above.

31. That is, these investigators judged the world and time not to have had a beginning.

32. At 155:7 of the printed Latin text the editor rightly signals that “*non*”, though found in the mss., is to be deleted.

33. In his writings Nicholas often stresses the role of perspective. He does so most eloquently in *DVD*. Also see, above, n. 5 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.

34. According to Nicholas reason (*ratio*) not only discriminates (*discernit*) but also synthesizes (*componit*). Interpreters who see Nicholas as foreshadowing certain themes in Kant point to passages such as the present one. See, above, n. 39 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

35. Like others of his day Nicholas was an epistemological realist.

36. See *DI* II, 9.

37. “... in the beginning” translates “*in principio seu initio*” (156:12).

38. “... the world’s beginning”: “*principium seu initium mundi*” (157:1).

39. See the mirror example in *De Filiatione Dei* 3 (65-68).

40. *De Filiatione Dei* 1 (54:21-22). See, above, n. 12 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

41. *DI* 1, 20 (61:20-3 1). *DP* 9.

42. The sections corresponding to margin numbers 158-161 display something like what Nicholas will later, in *CA*, refer to as *pia interpretatio*, i.e., devout interpretation. Although in *CA* *pia interpretatio* has reference to rightly interpreting the Koran, the exegetical principles invoked by Nicholas in *CA* are extensions of his basic point in *De Genesi* 2 (158-161).

43. Regarding Nicholas’s appeal to reason, see n. 28 above.

44. (1) Exodus 20:4. (2) Genesis 9:14. Exodus 33:20-23. (3) Exodus 3:14. Genesis 17:1. Deuteronomy 33:27 (RSV). Cf. Ecclesiasticus 18:1.

45. *De Genesi* 1 (142:7-8).

46. Nicholas here (163:3) writes “*et spiritu oris eius omnem eius virtutem*”. But at 176:5 he uses “*eorum*” in place of the second “*eius*”; and, indeed, “*eorum*” is correct. The English translation reflects the belief that “*eius*” is a mistake for “*eorum*”. This mistake is natural since Nicholas, throughout his works, uses both “*caelum*” (singular) and “*caeli*” (plural) when referring to the heavens.

47. Psalms 32:6 (Psalms 33:6).

48. Nicholas nowhere opposes the view that things have natural forms; indeed, he supports it. See n. 17 above. Also see the references, above, in n. 77 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

49. *Idiota de Mente* 13.

50. In this section Nicholas uses many words to indicate one and the same glassblower: “*vitrifex*,” “*artifex*,” “*magister*,” “*vitricator*”. To translate each of these words by a different English word might well create the impression that more than one person is involved: viz., someone who conceives and directs the activity and someone who performs the work of artisanry. In particular, this impression would be fostered by Nicholas’s words: “*Post mediante canna ferrea, cui colligatur materia, ut recipiat per influxum artificis formam vasis concepti in mente magistris, vitricator spiritum insufflat, qui subintrat ipsam materiam . . .*” (163:7 - 10; my italics). But 164:5 makes evident that the *magister* is the one who actually blows the glass—i.e., is the glassblower.

In order to prevent misunderstanding, I have translated the foregoing Latin terms

by the single English term “glassblower”. Nicholas’s terminology is frequently perplexing. CC, above, n. 17, n. 34, n. 46 of Notes to *De Quaerendo Deum* and n. 18 of Notes to *De Filiatione Dei*.

51. Seen. 20 above.

52. *DI* II, 10 (153:6 - 10).

53. See n. 47 above.

54. Genesis 1:3.

55. *DI* I, 24 (75). I, 25 (84).

56. See n. 39 above.

57. *DI* II, 2 (104).

58. The verb “*conicere*” is sometimes better translated into English as “to surmise” than as “to conjecture.” One *surmises* on the basis of definite clues, as Nicholas’s illustration here indicates. Where no such clues are involved, “to conjecture” is the better rendering, as at 172: 1.

59. Genesis 2:19-20.

60. Exodus 31:18.

61. The expression “absolute essence” (“*absoluta quiditas*”) does not here (173:7) refer to God, even though a few lines later (173: 10-11) “*absoluta formalis quiditas*” does refer to God. Nicholas’s terminology is not always clear. In *DI* II, 8 (135) Nicholas’s use of “*absoluta possibilitas*” also gives rise to confusion. See notes 83 and 84 on p. 195 of my *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*.

62. See n. 61 above.

63. See, above, n. 2 of Notes to *De Deo Abscondito*.

64. This passage attests to the fact that in the expression “*docta ignorantia*” the word “*docta*” also signifies learned ignorance, even though it principally signifies an ignorance that must be learned, in the sense that one must be taught it.

65. Psalms 32:6 (Psalms 33:6).

66. The notion of God’s being apprehensible inapprehensibly is the obverse side of the notion of learned ignorance. See the *Letter to Cardinal Julian* at the end of *DI* III (viz., 263:5-9). Cf. *NA* 9 (33).

67. At 176:3 of the printed Latin text, I am reading “*quae*” in place of “*qui*”.

68. Psalms 32:6 (Psalms 33:6).

69. *De Genesi* 4 (168).

70. Regarding the correct translation of the Latin phrase “*quasi caelum celans et claudens*” (178:7), cf. 182:1-3.

71. The printed Latin text will read more clearly if at 178:11 a period is placed after “*exstitit*” and the subsequent “*ut*” is capitalized. “*Ut*” there means “For example” and governs the indicative mood, even though at 178:14 “*ut*” signals a result clause and governs the subjunctive.

72. *DP* 47.

73. Genesis 2:7. *De Filiatione Dei* 5 (82:5-11).

74. The first figure (or combination of propositions) of a syllogism is (as Nicholas subsequently indicates) the combination of three universal affirmative propositions.

75. *De Quaerendo Deum* 1 (23-3 1).

76. At 183:7 of the printed Latin text, I am reading “*quae*” for “*qui*”.

77. See n. 28 above.

78. Psalms 148:1-2.

79. That is, this spirit *enfolds* every power that is *unfolded* in the activity which falls within that leonine species.

80. *De Genesi* 1 (149-150).

81. “. . . an assimilation for”: i.e., a likeness of. Note the substitution of “*assimilatio*” for “*similitudo*” at 165:8-9 above. Also cf. 164:12 with 165:4.