

## CHAPTER ONE

### NICHOLAS OF CUSA AND PURE SUBJECTIVITY

Twentieth-century philosophers and theologians have made various claims regarding the modernity of Nicholas of Cusa's metaphysics. None of these seem more intriguing than the claim advanced by Walter Schulz in his book *Der Gott der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik*, the first chapter of which is entitled "*Cusanus und die Geschichte der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik*."<sup>1</sup> Schulz states his purpose at the very outset: "This lecture does not set itself the task of investigating the historical influence of the great Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa; rather, its aim is to work out the starting point of his thought and to show that this starting point characterizes the metaphysics of the modern period down to the present day."<sup>2</sup> That is, Schulz is not alleging that Nicholas's thought is an historical determinant of later metaphysical systems. Rather, he is analyzing Nicholas's thought from the viewpoint of the history of ideas; and from this viewpoint he attempts to describe Nicholas's starting point, wherein he purports to find the essential structure, *die Wesensstruktur*, of Nicholas's metaphysics.<sup>3</sup> Schulz champions the view that a partially similar structure is an inherent component of the metaphysics of the modern period: "This lecture," he recapitulates, "deals with Cusanus and the history of the metaphysics of the modern period. Its aim is to show that Cusanus is the thinker who first set forth an essential feature (*Wesenszug*) of this metaphysics."<sup>4</sup> Here there is still no suggestion that later metaphysicians were influenced—

whether knowingly or unknowingly, whether directly or indirectly—by Nicholas's metaphysical starting point.

The *Wesenszug* to which Schulz refers us is the concept of God as *entsubstantialisiert*, i.e., as desubstantialized.<sup>5</sup> The account given below in Section I affords an extended summary of Schulz's interpretation of Nicholas of Cusa's modernity.

## I

1.1. Nicholas's concept of God contrasts with the medieval concept, typified by Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm conceived of God as the greatest being of all, as that than which nothing greater can be thought. But, for Anselm, God is greatest in a comparative sense, for He is greatest in such way as to be *greater* than all other beings. Compatibly with this notion of a hierarchy of beings, Anselm also teaches that the highest order of reality, viz., God, is in certain respects *analogous* to the inferior orders of reality. In the later Middle Ages the Anselmian conception of reality began to give way to the conception of God as incomparable, and disanalogous, to beings in the world. For example, Meister Eckhart affirms that God is inconceivable, that from the point of view of beings in the world God is a nothing.<sup>6</sup> Yet, at the same time, he affirms that God is *intelligere*, or *understanding*, and therefore is *subject*. Nicholas appropriates from Eckhart the characterization of God as *pure subjectivity*. For it was Eckhart who answered the question "whether in God being and understanding are the same" by professing: "I am currently of the following opinion: it is the case not that God understands because He *is* but rather that He *is* because He understands; thus, God is understanding (*intellectus et intelligere*), and understanding (*ipsum intelligere*) is the foundation of His being."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, for Eckhart, God is no longer characterized as an existent being whom factually ascribable properties

befit; rather, He is actualization—indeed, the actualization of His own thought.<sup>8</sup> Like Eckhart, Nicholas too teaches, in *De Deo Abscondito*, that as seen from the viewpoint of beings in the world God is a nothing, whereas if characterized positively and in Himself, He is *videre* and *intelligere*—in other words, pure subjectivity.<sup>9</sup>

1.2. From Nicholas's doctrine of God as pure subjectivity there stems a new conception of creation, for God's creating is asserted to be identical with His seeing.<sup>10</sup> God's creating is His making visible that which in itself is invisible. Qua that which is seen, the visible is the *unfolded* image of that which is still *enfolded* in the God who sees. Thus, the visible image always exists (though as that which is invisible) in the creating Exemplifier; and, vice versa, the invisible Exemplar always remains present (though as that which has become visible) in the image.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, just as it is not the case either that there is *seeing* without there being something *seen* or that there is something *seen* without there being *seeing*, so it is not the case either that God exists without finite things or that finite things exist without God. Indeed, finite things are God become visible.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, (1) God-qua-invisible-*Observer* and (2) the world-qua-visibly-*observed*-God are united by (3) God-qua-*Observing*. It seems, then, that God's relationship to the world is an ontologically necessary one and that the world is God's activity made manifest.<sup>13</sup>

1.3. In *De Visione Dei* Nicholas illustrates the bond between God and human subjectivity—doing so by means of an "omnivoyant portrait." This portrait is such that from whatever angle an observer looks at it, its eyes seem to be looking only in the direction of the observer. Whenever the observer changes his place, the gaze of the portrait appears to follow him so as now to be directed only toward his new position. If, at one time, several persons look at the portrait—each from his respective angle—the portrait will seem to each person to be directing its sight at him alone.

Nicholas uses this example to illustrate God's omnivoyant concern for all creatures, whether great or small. But, more importantly, he also uses it to illustrate three metaphysical tenets. Only while the observer is looking at the portrait does he see that the portrait is looking at him. From this consideration Nicholas draws his first metaphysical inference, by asking rhetorically: "O Lord, what is Your seeing, when You look at me with an affectionate eye, other than that You are seen by me?"<sup>14</sup> But would the portrait continue to look at me even when I turned my gaze from it? From this consideration Nicholas draws a second conclusion: "That You do not look at me is the following: viz., that I do not look at You but disregard You and despise You."<sup>15</sup> Finally, in the illustration, the observer is the one who is active and who by changing positions recognizes that the gaze of the portrait follows him. Accordingly, Nicholas declares: "When I see how in relation to *my* changing, the gaze of Your image and Your countenance appears changed, You seem to me—because, as changed, You encounter me—as if You were the shadow which follows the changing of the one who is moving."<sup>16</sup>

The foregoing three metaphysical tenets portray God's *seeing* as incorporated into man's seeing. Now, in *De Visione Dei* Nicholas maintains that God *is* His seeing. Accordingly, he also teaches that God is incorporated into man's vision, though without losing His identity as God.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Nicholas does not consider God to be a substance, contrasted with other substances but regards Him as *vis entificativa*<sup>18</sup> and as power which is within me, empowering me to see.<sup>19</sup> Nicholas's reasoning is here highly dialectical, presenting, on the one hand, the picture of God as powerful and empowering, but, on the other hand, the picture of God as almost powerless. For, on the one hand, God is said to be the Exemplar, I His image; but, on the other, God is said to follow me as does my shadow, which is an ungraspable and inessential image of myself, its reality. Insofar as I am God's image and shadow, God is transcendent; insofar

as He is my shadow, His power is limited by my movements, and Truth itself is moved.<sup>20</sup> With the recognition that Truth itself is moved, Nicholas has grasped the whole of the metaphysics of the modern period: viz., that Transcendence exists as the dialectical Other of finite subjectivity—exists as the Other which, in every transformation of this metaphysics, is transformed in accordance with the characterization of finite subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Nicholas's dialectical reasoning leads him to affirm that Transcendence-qua-the-image-of-finite-subjectivity is incorporated into the transformations of finite subjectivity. But this *image* is also the true *Exemplar*; for finite subjectivity, of which Transcendence is the image, can understand itself only when it measures itself against Transcendence-qua-Exemplar. In other words, the fact that Transcendence is my image is attested by the power of finite subjectivity;<sup>22</sup> yet, the power of finite subjectivity is not self-bestowed but arises from subjectivity's transcendent Ground, so that finite subjectivity is a unity of power and powerlessness. Accordingly, the statement "Transcendence is my image" is just as true as the statement "Transcendence is my Exemplar."<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, teaches Nicholas of Cusa, Transcendence qua Exemplar can only be comprehended incomprehensibly, through learned ignorance.

## II

All of the foregoing constitutes Schulz's interpretation of Nicholas of Cusa's metaphysics. Schulz certainly does have a way of making this metaphysics look modern. Such words as "*Transzendenz*," "*Reflexion*," "*Aufhebung*," such phrases as "*endliche Subjektivität*," "*der entsubstantialisierte Gott*," "*das dialektische Andere*," and such sentences as "*Gott ist in das Sehen des Menschen einbezogen*" do indeed have a seductively modern ring. Nonetheless, Schulz's interpretation of Nicholas's metaphysics is

resoundingly wrong; and perhaps a principal cause of this *Fehldeutung* comes from an overeagerness, on Schulz's part, to find in Nicholas unambiguous signposts of modernity.

2.1. To begin with, Schulz is not careful in his statements. Talk about an essential feature of the metaphysics of the modern period (*ein Wesenszug der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik*) is always suspect. It is doubtful that there is some essential feature, or set of essential features, which characterizes all of the metaphysical theories formulated since 1500. For example, not all of these systems are dialectical in their method; not all afford a role to the concept of pure subjectivity; not all dispense with the notion of substance; not all describe God as Being itself; not all regard God as inconceivable; not all sharply contrast being and beings; and so on. Of course, we can always single out some characteristic, or set of characteristics, and proclaim it to be essential. We can then rule that any post-fifteenth-century metaphysical system which does not exhibit this characteristic is not really modern but is only a reconfiguring of certain aspects of ancient or medieval theories of reality. But such legislation would be question-begging.

The vagueness in Schulz's talk about a *Wesenszug der neuzeitlichen Metaphysik* entails a corresponding vagueness in his aim. For unless we know what features Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Hobbes, Condillac, J. S. Mill, and the others have in common, we cannot know whether or not Nicholas "is the thinker who first set forth an essential feature" of the metaphysics of the modern period. But the difficulty does not end here. For Schulz tells us that he is looking for the essential structure (*die Wesensstruktur*) of Cusa's thought, since this essential structure is an essential feature (*ein Wesenszug*) of the metaphysics of modernity. But Schulz does not succeed in delineating the essence even of Nicholas's metaphysics, let alone the essence of his entire thought. For example, in expounding Nicholas's concept of God, Schulz

neglects the whole of *DI* III, as if it were not essential to the structure of Nicholas's metaphysics. Moreover, there is no mention (let alone clarification) of the doctrine of the coincidence of opposites, of the notion of contraction, of the theory of universals, or of the thesis that *quodlibet in quolibet est*; yet, these are all fundamental, in a crucial way, to Nicholas's metaphysics. So from the very start Schulz oversimplifies—with the result that even should every one of his construals of Nicholas's texts be correct, he still would not have established anything clearly. We shall soon see, however, how far from correct most of his exegesis is. But beforehand we must pursue further the matter of his inexactitude.

2.2. Schulz claims that Nicholas took over Meister Eckhart's view of God as *reine nichtseiende Subjektivität*; for Nicholas teaches, says Schulz, that as seen from the viewpoint of beings in the world God is a nothing, whereas if characterized positively and in Himself, He is *videre* and *intelligere*—in other words, pure subjectivity (p. 14). Now, almost everything about this statement of Schulz's is problematical.

2.2.1. First of all, Nicholas does not maintain that God is characterizable in Himself as *videre* and *intelligere*; rather, he maintains that God, in Himself, cannot at all be properly characterized by us, because we cannot at all conceive of Him as He is in Himself. That is, in Himself, God is not Creator, Being, Oneness, Mind, Understanding, Seeing—or anything else which can be spoken of or conceived by us.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, when God is conceived positively, as in *DII*, 24, He is being conceived not as He is in Himself but only symbolically. So Schulz is wrong in saying that, according to Nicholas, God is characterizable, in Himself, as *videre* and *intelligere*.

2.2.2. Secondly, Schulz never clearly states what he means by "pure subjectivity." Ordinarily, one would expect the term to signify that which is purely a subject and can never be an object. For instance, as Kant defines the trans-

cendental ego, it is only a subject and can never be an object, not even to itself; therefore, it *does not*, and *cannot*, know itself. When Schulz says that, for Nicholas of Cusa, God is pure subjectivity, we might be led to expect the doctrine that God cannot be an object even to Himself and cannot know Himself. If this is what Schulz either means or implies, then he is simply mistaken. For in *DI I*, 26 (88:19-20) Nicholas affirms that God is known to Himself; and in *De Visione Dei* 12 he writes: "You do not see anything other than Yourself, but You Yourself are the object (*obiectum*) of Yourself."<sup>25</sup> If, on the other hand, Schulz means something different by "pure subjectivity," then he should spell it out explicitly; for the trouble with such a term is that it does not have wholly the same meaning in the context of, say, Hegelian philosophy as it has in the context of Kantian philosophy. Thus, we cannot be sure just what this phrase expresses when used by Schulz.

2.2.3. Similarly, Schulz's allusion to "our modern concept of subjectivity" (p. 13) is almost meaningless. Even his attempt to specify what he takes to be *the* modern concept is inexact: *das eigentlich Seiende wird gerade nicht mehr als dinglich vorhandenes, substantielles Etwas, sondern als geistig-ichhafter Selbstvollzug bestimmt*" (p. 13). One wonders about how to unpack the vague phrase "*geistig-ichhafter Selbstvollzug*." And does not Schulz himself tell us, just a page later, that Eckhart and Cusa no longer regard God as *Seiendes*? Hence, (1) if our modern concept of subjectivity is that *das eigentlich Seiende wird gerade nicht mehr*...etc., and (2) if, for Cusa, God is not *Seiendes* (p. 14), and a fortiori not *das eigentlich Seiende*, then (3) the modern concept of subjectivity has nothing to do with Cusa's conception of God. How, then, can the modern concept of *pure* subjectivity be relevant to Cusa's conception of God if the modern concept of *subjectivity* is itself not relevant? And is it not specifically Cusa's conception of God which Schulz claims to be the essential structure of Cusa's thought? Thus, the modern concept of subjectivity would

seem to be irrelevant to the essential structure of Cusa's thought. Yet, Schulz's aim is to show the connection between the essential structure of Cusa's thought and the metaphysics of modernity, one of whose essential components is its notion of subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> Schulz appears to be caught in a web of inconsistency; if this appearance is deceiving, then the deceptiveness only further points up the fact that Schulz's account is replete with unclarity.

2.2.4. A further difficulty with Schulz's claim, stated in the first sentence of 2.2 above, is that Nicholas does *not* teach that as seen from the viewpoint of beings in the world God is a nothing. Rather, in his short dialogue *De Deo Abscondito* he denies both that God is nothing and that He is something; for God, he says through the mouth of the Christian, is beyond nothing and something. Moreover, in *DI I*, 17 we find the following passage:

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 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 that our understanding of God draws near to nothing rather than to something.

So it is incorrect, or at least imprecise, to ascribe to Nicholas the view that from the viewpoint of beings in the world God is a nothing. God is not nothing, though from our viewpoint He may appear closer to nothing than to something; for He is *nothing in this world*.

2.2.5. The final difficulty with Schulz's claim (as stated in the opening sentence of 2.2 above) is its emphatic assertion that Nicholas takes over the following view of Eckhart's: that it is the case not that God understands because He is but rather that He *is* because He understands. Yet, Schulz refers us to no passage in Nicholas's writings where a comparable claim is made. True, in *De Visione Dei* Nicholas

does say that God's seeing is His being (Chap. 4); but he does not reverse this by stating that God's being is His seeing. Moreover, although he does say that God's absolute countenance is the absolute being of every being (*De Visione Dei* 7), he nowhere states that God is absolute countenance *because* He is absolute being, or is absolute being *because* He is absolute countenance. So, at best, Schulz has simply not documented his claim that Nicholas took over the particular Eckhartian view in question; and, at worst, he has advanced a claim which cannot be documented. In general, we must be very cautious about how we attempt to link Nicholas with Eckhart. It is seldom accurate to assert, *simpliciter*, that Nicholas "takes over" such and such a view from Eckhart. For the respective metaphysics of these two thinkers are different enough to make us wary even about assuming that where the two use the same wording, they mean to convey the same picture.

2.3. When we turn our attention from the foregoing passage to other parts of Schulz's chapter, we discover other problems of interpretation. For instance, Schulz alleges that, according to Nicholas, the world and God are bound together by an ontologically necessary relation (p. 16), by an essentially indissoluble relation (p. 22). Though Schulz never explains what he means by "ontologically necessary relation," the usual way of construing it would be the following: God cannot exist without the world, and the world cannot exist without God. A paradigmatic example of someone who propounds this doctrine is afforded by Hegel, who teaches not only that the finite cannot exist without the Infinite but also that *ohne Welt ist Gott nicht Gott*. By contrast, however, Nicholas explicitly denies that God cannot exist without the world, while affirming that the world cannot exist without God.<sup>27</sup> True, Nicholas does insist that God never *at any time* does exist apart from the world; still, in an ultimate sense, the world is said to be totally dependent upon God, and God is said to be totally independent of the world, which does not confer anything on Him (even as

a mirror image does not confer anything on the reality it reflects). However, the fact that God at no time exists apart from the world is a *contingent* fact. Thus, we are not entitled to infer that, for Nicholas, God is bound to the world by ontological *necessity*. So, once again we have an instance where Schulz's interpretation is either erroneous or obscurely expressed. Perhaps Schulz means that Nicholas regards the world and God as bound together by ontological necessity because Nicholas regards the creation as a necessary emanation from God. But if this is what he means, then he should say so; and if he says so, he will be wrong.

Schulz, whose chapter is meagerly documented, seems to gather the idea of an ontologically necessary relationship from the end of *De Deo Abscondito*. There Nicholas, in the person of the Christian, draws a comparison: God is to all things as seeing is to things visible. Schulz might be taking this comparison to imply that just as there cannot be seeing without things seen, so there cannot be God without the world. (Cf. p. 15.) Yet, such a construal would abuse Nicholas's twofold point: viz., (1) the *epistemological* point that God can no more be named from within the domain of beings than sight (whose center is colorless) can be named from within the domain of color, and (2) the *ontological* point that God can no more exist in the domain of finite beings than sight can exist in the domain of color.<sup>28</sup>

Schulz thinks that, on Nicholas's view, the world of beings is God become visible (p. 15). Yet, Nicholas nowhere asserts this but maintains, instead, that the world is the manifestation of the invisible God.<sup>29</sup> However, to say that the world *manifests* God is not to say that the world *is* God in His visible state.

2.4. Schulz's confusion with respect to the doctrine of creation leads him to misapprehend *De Visione Dei*, from which he elicits three metaphysical tenets: (1) that God's seeing, when He looks at me with an eye of graciousness, is His being seen by me; (2) that God's not looking at me is

my not looking at Him; (3) that, in an ontological sense, God is my shadow. These tenets, Schulz tells us, imply (1') that God is incorporated into human vision (without, however, being reducible thereto), (2') that God (who is Truth) is changeable, (3') that God is not only my Exemplar but is, *equally*, my image, and that God is in certain respects rendered powerless by the power of finite subjectivity. Now, when we examine the text of *De Visione Dei*, we may well be struck by how impressionistic Schulz's interpretation of it is. For one of the first things we recognize is that in *De Visione Dei* the meanings of Nicholas's statements are extraordinarily context-dependent, because of the fact that this work is his most dialectical one. To lift these statements from their contexts and transfer them to the context of Hegelian-like philosophy is inevitably to distort them.

2.4.1. Let us take as an example Nicholas's statement "God is my shadow" and his converse statement to the effect that he, Nicholas, is the shadow and God is the reality. As the context of *De Visione Dei* 15 shows, the first of these statements must be qualified by the phrase "*videris aliquando quasi*" ("You sometimes seem as if . . ."). For what Nicholas says is the following:

You, O God, worthy of admiration by every mind, You who are Light sometimes seem as if You were a shadow. For when I see that in accordance with my changing, Your portrait's gaze and Your countenance seem to be changed because I am changed, You appear to me as if You were a shadow which follows the changing of one who is walking. But because I am a living shadow and You are the Truth, I judge from the changing of the shadow that the Truth is changed. Therefore, O my God, You are shadow in such way that You are Truth; You are the image of me and of each one in such way that You are Exemplar.<sup>30</sup>

The point being made here is that though God is Light, He sometimes seems to me to be a shadow. But, in fact, I am the shadow, and God is the reality, or truth. When I observe changes in myself, I mistakenly judge that the reality, which is my Exemplar, is changed.

Nicholas continues with his quasi-paradoxical dialectic,

not explicitly repeating at every juncture the word "seems," preferring to leave it understood in order to heighten the paradoxical effect: My face is a true face, because God, who is Truth, bestowed it; but it is also the image of the Absolute Truth. So it is both truth and image, though in different respects. In relation to my changing face, God's countenance is both changed and unchanged. It is changed because it does not desert the truth of my face; it is unchanged because it does not follow the changing image. Nicholas moves towards a climax a few lines later, where he explicitly reintroduces the understood word "seems": "Thus, O God, You seem to be mutable on account of Your infinite goodness, because You do not desert mutable creatures. But because You are Absolute Goodness You are not mutable, since You do not follow mutability." So although God sometimes *seems* to us as if He were mutable, He is, nonetheless, Absolute Goodness, which is immutable. Nicholas here uses the term "Absolute Goodness," even though earlier, in Chapter 13, he explained that infinite goodness is not goodness but is infinity. Having told us that God is beyond goodness in any sense in which it can be conceived by us, he does not expect the symbolism of goodness to mislead anyone here in Chapter 15.

Hence, Schulz is mistaken in telling us that Nicholas believes that Truth itself is changeable, that Transcendence is as much my image as my Exemplar, that God is in certain respects rendered powerless by the power of finite subjectivity (pp. 29-30).<sup>31</sup> These mistakes lead him to miscast Nicholas's role in Renaissance philosophy, to baptize Nicholas as the initiator of a line of thought which can be traced, by *Ideengeschichte*, right up to Hegel—indeed, right up to the present day.

2.4.2. The remainder of Schulz's construal of *De Visione Dei* must also be judged as deviant. Does the portrait keep looking at me when I turn aside my gaze?, asks Schulz on behalf of Nicholas. Schulz then answers by directly quoting Nicholas's text: "That You do not look at me is the follow-

ing: viz., that I do not look at You but disregard You and despise You" (p. 19). But this is a mistranslation of, and a misapprehension of, Nicholas's meaning. A more accurate translation would be the following: "The reason that You do not look at me is that I do not look at You but reject and despise You." Accordingly, Nicholas is *not* saying that God's not looking at me is in some sense the same as my not looking at Him. Moreover, contrary to the impression conveyed by Schulz, Nicholas is not saying, either, that God looks at me only while I am looking at Him. In the context at hand Nicholas is discussing not simply God's looking at me but God's looking at me *pietatis oculo*, or *oculo gratiae*: with an eye of graciousness, with an eye of grace. Two sentences before the one in question he writes: "If You do not look at me with an eye of grace, it is my fault, because I am separated from You through my turning away and through my turning toward something else, which I prefer to You." In the sentence in question the phrase "*oculo gratiae*" is implicit; the reader is expected to supply it from the context. Even when I do not look unto God, God continues to look upon me; for God's sight does not desert anyone, Nicholas states in *De Visione Dei* 5. But when I do not look unto God, God looks upon me with an eye of judgment, not with an eye of grace. Hence, in Chapter 8 Nicholas exults: "To all who love You, how beautiful and lovable is [Your gaze]! How dreadful it is to all who have forsaken You, O Lord my God!"

2.4.3. When we examine Schulz's first tenet, we find that it conveys the impression (but does not state outright) that God's seeing me is nothing other than His being seen by me. This time Schulz does mention the words "*pietatis oculo*" when he quotes Nicholas's rhetorical question, but he does so without, in his subsequent interpretation, taking any account of the force of these words. Instead of quoting only the rhetorical question, he should quote as well the sentence which follows it, for the two go together. An accurate translation of these would be something like:

O Lord, when You look at me with an eye of graciousness, what is Your seeing, other than Your being seen by me? In seeing me, You, who are *Deus absconditus*, give Yourself to be seen by me.

A few lines later Nicholas declares: "You never close Your eyes; You never turn away. And although I turn myself away from You when I completely turn myself to something else, You do not on this account change Your eyes or Your gaze." So God's seeing me is never unqualifiedly equivalent to God's being seen by me—i.e., is never simply "nothing other than" my seeing Him, though at times it might *seem* to me to be nothing other. God's looking upon me *with an eye of grace* is tantamount to my looking unto Him, because there is never the one without the other; and the reason for this linkage is that God, through grace, gives Himself to be seen by me.

Schulz's method of dealing with the text of *De Visione Dei* furnishes a paradigmatic example of special pleading. Here and there, wherever it serves his purpose, he rends a sentence away from its immediate context, transposes it to the context of German Idealistic philosophy, imposes upon it an exegetically unnatural but philosophically interesting construal, and then offers this construal as evidence of Nicholas's intellectual modernity.

2.5. In the end, we are asked by Schulz to believe that Nicholas desubstantializes God. Of course, this belief is true in one sense: viz., that Nicholas affirms that God is Being itself and denies that He is a being. But it is not true in any sense which would entail that within the Cusan system the world of beings is God become visible, that God is incorporated into human seeing, that, ontologically speaking, God is my shadow, that God is pure subjectivity, that God is rendered partially powerless by finite subjectivity, and that in Himself God is changeable. Moreover, if we are to set Nicholas's view in historical perspective, we must remember that even Thomas Aquinas refers to God as Being itself (*ipsum esse*) and that both he and Anselm of Canterbury (along with a host of others) disavow the doctrine that God



is *substance* in the proper sense of the word. Nicholas himself is willing to call God *Substance*, just as he is willing to call Him *Truth*; but he does not suppose that either of these appellatives befit God other than infinitesimally.<sup>32</sup>

So, in the end, Schulz has not succeeded in correctly delineating the *Wesensstruktur* of Nicholas's thought. And, correspondingly, he has not succeeded in showing that Nicholas is the thinker who first sets forth an essential feature of the metaphysics of the modern period.<sup>33</sup>