CUSANUS

THE LEGACY OF LEARNED IGNORANCE

edited by Peter J. Casarella

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Jasper Hopkins

3. NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S INTELLECTUAL RELATIONSHIP TO ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

During this sexcentenary of the birth of Nicholas of Cusa, there is an almost ineluctable temptation to super-accentuate Cusa's modernity—to recall approvingly, for example, that the Neokantian Ernst Cassirer not only designated Cusa "the first Modern thinker"[1] but also went on to interpret his epistemology as anticipating Kant's.[2] In this respect Cassirer was following his German predecessor Richard Falckenberg, who wrote: "It remains a pleasure to see, on the threshold of the Modern Age, the doctrine already advanced by Plotinus and Scotus Eriugena, received [by Cusanus] so forcefully that time, numbers, spatial figures, and all categories ... are brought forth out of the creative power of the mind."[3] Others have proclaimed Nicholas to be a forerunner of Spinoza,[4] of Leibniz,[5] of Hegel,[6] and, indeed, of German Idealism generally.[7]

1. Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 10.

2. Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer, 1911), 35-36. See also, for example, Ekkehard Fräntzki, *Nikolaus von Kues und das Problem der absoluten Subjektivität* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1972), 51.

3. Richard Falckenberg, *Grundzüge der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lehre vom Erkennen* (Breslau: Koebner, 1880), 139.

4. Maurice de Gandillac, *La Philosophie de Nicolas de Cues* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1942), 448.

5. Robert Zimmermann, "Der Cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus als Vorläufer Leibnitzens," in *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 8 (Vienna, 1852), 306-38; Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Metheuen, 1932), 139.

6. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1953), 245. Edrnond Vansteenberghe, *Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues (1401-1464)* (Paris, 1920; reprint ed., Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), 282.

7. Heinrich Rombach, *Substanz, System, Struktur. Die Ontologie des Funktionalismus und der philosophische Hintergrund der modernen Wissenschaft*

Most of these interpretations are wildly exaggerated and result from an excessive degree of enthusiasm that leads interpreters to the point of raving. However, rather than our mimicking them by endeavoring to apprehend Nicholas's thought as a pre-mirroring of various philosophical frameworks of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries—frameworks through which Nicholas's own philosophical works are then retrospectively further interpreted and measured—we will do better to take a more sober approach. Such an approach will begin by seeking to understand Nicholas's ideas in terms of both their historical antecedents and their fifteenth-century context. Moreover, it will proceed to demarcate the *creative lines of difference* that arise from his adapting certain of these antecedent and fifteenth-century ideas to three of his own fundamental fifteenth-century tenets: (1) the doctrine of the infinite disproportion between the finite and the infinite, (2) the doctrine of learned ignorance, and (3) the doctrine of the coincidence of opposites. Thus, we should orient Nicholas's thought by comparing it, first, with that of his more recent predecessors such as Ramón Llull and Meister Eckhart; then we should look at such more distant figures as Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus and, finally, at such remote figures as Augustine, Proclus, Aristotle, Plato, and Pythagoras. And in seeking out those of his fifteenth-century contemporaries who influenced him, we should not overlook Leon Battista Alberti and Jean Gerson, along with the Italian humanists. Only after having explored all of the foregoing influences on Nicholas ought we to take up the issue of what residue of his thought, if any, resurfaces in the modern philosophers Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel—not to mention such contemporary thinkers as Paul Tillich and Martin Heidegger.

One antecedent thinker who is not much discussed in relation to Nicholas of Cusa is the eleventh- and twelfth-century philosopher-theologian Anselm of Canterbury. Not even Karl Jaspers' book that (as edited by Hannah Arendt) bears the title (in English) *Anselm and Nicholas of Cusa*[8] interrelates the two philosophers; rather, it simply expounds each one's pat-

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(Munich: Alber, 1965), 1:150. But see also my article "Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?" in *Renaissance and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Peter A. French and Howard K. Wettstein, Midwest Studies in Philosophy, vol. 26 (Boston: Blackwell, 2002), 13-29.

8. Karl Jaspers, *Anselm and Nicholas of Cusa*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. into English by Ralph Manheim (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) [excerpted

tern of thought separately and disconnectedly Surely, it is high time, at this sexcentenary turn of history, to take a keener look at how Anselm's thinking influenced Nicholas's and at how Nicholas adapted Anselm's ideas to his own.

Preliminarily, let us note that Nicholas expressly refers to Anselm by name and endorsingly cites certain of his works. Hence, there can be no question about the fact that he was familiar with the small corpus of Anselm's writings and that he unhesitatingly appropriated a number of Anselm's teachings. But, likewise, there can be no doubt about the fact that, at times, he extended Anselm's ideas, so that his own use of Anselm's teachings goes further than Anselm himself would ever have approved. Moreover, at other times, Nicholas supplements these teachings, so that he supports Anselm's line of thought by adding further rationales—rationales that Anselm himself had not given but that he would, in all likelihood, in some cases have accepted. In any event, in our exploring the intellectual relationship between Anselm and Nicholas, it will not be a question simply of our discerning parallels in their thinking.[9] Instead,

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from vol. 2 of Jaspers' *Die grossen Philosophen*].

9. Nor will there arise the issue of our *heuristically* relating Nicholas's thoughts to such modern ideas as Hegel's conception of the Absolute or Kant's notion that the categories-of-thought legislate to reality. Hans G. Senger, for example, makes an intriguing distinction between (1) the question of Nicholas's historical influence on Kant and Hegel and (2) the question of its being permissible to view Nicholas, from the twentieth-century standpoint, as a prefigurer (in certain respects) of Kant and HegeL See Hans Gerhard Senger, "Überlegungen zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues," in *En kai plāthos. Einheit und Vielheit,* ed. Ludwig Hagemann and Reinhold Glei (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 174-210, here at 209: "Dabei sollte dann aber keine Unklarheit darüber aufkommen, daß wir uns dann nicht mehr im Bereich direkter Wirkungsgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues bewegen. Es müßte vielmehr stets bewußt bleiben, daß mit einer solchen Bezugsetzung eine Wirkungsgeschichte rekonstruiert wird, die historisch so nicht gegeben, sachlich aber erlaubt und fruchtbar sein kann für eine Einlassung auf beides, auf die Cusanische Philosophie von der Moderne aus und auf die transzendentale Philosophie der Subjektivität von ihrer fernen Herkunft her." ("In this regard, then, [viz., re Cusanus's views in relation to Hegel's notion of the Absolute and Kant's theory of knowledge] let there be no unclarity about the fact that we are no longer dealing with the question of Cusanus' direct historical influence. On the contrary, we must always remain conscious of the fact that with such a comparison (e.g., between Cusanus and Hegel) we are reconstructing a narrative of Cusanus' discernible historical influence—a narrative that cannot with historical accuracy be characterized in just that way. Yet, the narrative is permissible as being factually elucidating and as being fruitful for an entrance (1) into Cusan philosophy as seen from the viewpoint of Modern philosophy and (2) into the transcendental

without ignoring the parallels, we will want to look at Nicholas's express endorsements, explicit extendings, and overt supplementings of Anselm's reasoning. And in doing so, we will see that he refers by name to Anselm's treatise *De conceptu virginali* ("On the Virgin Conception"),[10] as well as referring to *De similitudinibus* ("On Likenesses"),[11] the work that contains Anselm's sayings. Moreover, he alludes to Anselm's *Meditation* I, his *Proslogion* ("An Address"), his *De veritate* ("On Truth"), his *De casu diaboli* ("On the Fall of the Devil"), and his *Cur Deus homo* ("Why God Became a [God-]man").[12] There can be no serious doubt that Nicholas had read the entirety of Anselm's corpus and was not drawing his knowledge of Anselm's views merely from secondary sources.[13]

First Consideration: The Description of God

The primary tenet that Nicholas appropriates for himself is Anselm's twofold description of God, according to which God is both something than which a greater cannot be thought[14] and something greater than can be thought.[15] These *Proslogion* descriptions can, for Anselm, be correlated

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philosophy of subjectivity from the point of view of its distant origins."

10. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VI (6:6-10) and (13:5-9). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from Cusanus follow the chapters, paragraphs, and line numbers in the Heidelberg Academy of Letters' series *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1932-present). All citations from Anselm are taken from *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F S. Schmitt, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946-61; reprint ed., Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Press, 1968), which is hereafter cited as *S.*

11. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VI (28:5-11).

12. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* III (9:17-21); *Sermo* XX (14:10-12); *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* ("A Defense of Learned Ignorance") 8; *De docta ignorantia* I, 12 (*Die Belehrte Unwissenheit*, ed. Paul Wilpert and Hans Gerhard Senger, Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung, Heft 15, 3 vols. [Hamburg Felix Meiner, 1994-99], 34:3-6); *Sermones* (Paris ed., 1514), vol. III, fol. 170^{r}, line 21; and *Sermo* III (6:1 - 7:7).

13. By contrast, note how Nicholas appropriates certain aspects of Aristotle's political theory from a secondary source, viz., Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis*. See Cusanus's *De concordantia catholica*, Preface to Book III.

14. Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.

15. Ibid., 15. Regarding the first formula, see, e.g., the following works of Cusanus: *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* 8, *De apice theoriae* 12, *Sermo* XLI (9:16-19), and *Sermones*, p, fol. 156^{r}, line 29. Regarding the second formula, see, e.g., *De quaerendo Deum* 5 (49), *Idiota de sapientia* ("The Layman on Wisdom") II (28); *De li non*

with his puzzling, in *Monologion* ("A Soliloquy") 65, over how it is that since God is incomprehensible and ineffable, the things concluded in the earlier chapters of the *Monologion* could rightly be understood of Him. In other words, Anselm broods over the way in which the incomprehensible God can at all be apprehended. In *Monologion* 65 Anselm suggests that such a God can be apprehended only through likenesses, not as He is in and of Himself Similarly, Anselm's formula in *Proslogion* 15 to the effect that God is greater than can be conceived implies that God cannot be conceived as He is in and of Himself but can be conceived only through likenesses. In *Proslogion* 15 Anselm is distinguishing between *apprehending* God's attributes and *comprehending* God's attributes: we can do the former but never the latter.

Nicholas of Cusa, in reading the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, interprets Anselm's view by extending it further than Anselm himself had intended. For, on Nicholas's interpretation, Anselm taught that God as something greater than can be thought is inconceivable, thereby implying that God is unnameable—or, better, implying that God is nameable only symbolically.[16] Nicholas here interprets Anselm to suit his own purposes. That is, he makes Anselm's view accord with his own view that since there is no comparative relation between the finite and the infinite, all discourse about God must be, necessarily, utterly symbolical—and, thus, must be an instance of learned ignorance. To be sure, a quick reading of *Monologion* 65 might seem to confirm the belief that Anselm himself drew this very conclusion. However, in our effort to understand the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, we must take account, as well, of Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*. For in *Reply* 8 Anselm makes clear his belief that not all likenesses to God are symbolical but that, rather, some likenesses are truly comparative. Accordingly, we rightly think of God as without beginning and as without end, as unchangeable, as timeless, as not able not to exist, and so on. Hence, God can be named the Self-Existent One, the Im-

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aliud 4 (11), *De venatione sapientiae* 26 (77), *Sermo* XX (6:4-5); *Sermo* CCIV (4:1-3), and *Sermones*, Paris ed. (1514), vol. II, fol. 138^{r}, lines 8-7 from bottom and fol. 156^{r}, line 30.

16. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XX (6:4-11): "Nam hoc solum habemus per Anselmum, quod Deus est melius quam cogitari possit. Hoc autem melius est innominabile, si non est cogitabile. Quare non est optimus nomen Dei, sed superoptimus. Unde secundum hoc, quia potius scimus quid Deus non est quam quid est, Deus potius est innominabilis quam nominabilis."

mutable One, and so on. Although God does not exist in the way that creatures do, nonetheless, according to Anselm, His existence can to some extent be both conceived and named by us analogically and non-symbolically—even if through a glass, darkly.

Second Consideration: A priori Reasoning

Although Nicholas takes over Anselm's two *Proslogion* descriptions of God, he does not likewise make use of Anselm's *Proslogion* argument for the existence of God—Anselm's so-called ontological argument. Nevertheless, he nowhere objects to Anselm's argument, as does, for example, Thomas Aquinas; and he nowhere seeks to replace it by an empirical argument. Instead, like Anselm, he accepts the validity of a priori approaches that purport to assure us of God's existence. Nonetheless, he formulates an a priori existence-argument that differs from Anselm's. For although he agrees with Anselm that God cannot not-exist,[17] his argument to the conclusion that, 'necessarily, God exists' moves by way of recourse to the notion of *presupposition*:

> Since every question about what is possible presupposes Possibility, doubt cannot be entertained about possibility. For doubt does not pertain to Possibility. For whoever would question whether Possibility exists sees ...[that] without Possibility no question could be posed about Possibility.... And so, it is evident that Possibility itself precedes all doubt that can be entertained. Therefore, nothing is more certain than is Possibility itself, since [any] doubt [about it] can only presuppose it, since nothing more sufficient or more perfect than it can be thought.[18]

Possibility itself, says Nicholas, is "That than which nothing can possibly be better."[19] And this is tantamount to his stating that Possibility itself is That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, so that, conversely, That than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, God, must be, and be thought to be, Possibility itself. In the end, then, Nicholas, being motivated by Anselm, does not merely repeat Anselm's ontological line of reasoning but creatively extends it so as to formulate a new strategy for arriving at Anselm's conclusions about God's self-existence and about the

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17. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* CCIV (2:1-5 and 3:1-2).
18. Nicholas of Cusa, *De apice theoriae* 13:4-14.
19. Ibid., 12:6-7.

indubitability of that existence. As concerns our present purposes, it does not matter that Nicholas's strategy is no more sound than was Anselm's strategy in *Proslogion* 2 and 3.

Third Consideration: Eternal Truth

Nicholas also alludes to another of Anselm's formulae: Anselm's definition of "truth" as "rightness perceptible only to the mind."[20] No doubt, Nicholas was familiar with Anselm's argument in *Monologion* 18, repeated in *De veritate* 1, that Truth—subsequently identified as God—is without beginning and end. For it was always true in the past that something was going to exist; and it will always be true in the future that something has existed. Since these propositions are true, there is Truth, without which no proposition could be true. Thus, Truth itself is without beginning, since it never began to be true that something was going to exist; and Truth is without end, since it will never cease to be true that something has existed.

As for Nicholas, he does not repudiate this reasoning any more than he repudiates Anselm's purported proof of God's existence in *Proslogion* 2. Nonetheless, he does not repeat the argument but formulates a cognate one of his own:

> Now, everyone sees that God is Necessity itself, which cannot not-exist. For if it is true that God exists, I know that there is truth. On the other hand, if it is true that God does not exist, I again know that there is truth. Likewise, if you say that it is true that there is truth and say also that it is true that there is no truth, then no matter which of these contradictory alternatives you assert, you in either case affirm that there is truth. Hence, the truth is that there is Absolute Necessity-of-being, which is Truth itself, through which exists whatever is.[21]

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20. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* I, 12 (34:3-6). What Nicholas actually says is: "The most devout Anselm compared the maximum Truth to infinite rectitude. Let me, following him, have recourse to the figure of rectitude, which I picture as a straight line."

21. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* CCIV (3:1-11). "Sed quod Deus sit ipsa necessitas, quae non esse non possit, quisque videt. Nam si verum est hoc, quod ipse sit, habeo veritatem esse; si verum est ipsum non esse, habeo iterum veritatem esse. Sic si dixeris verum esse veritatem esse, et similiter dixeris verum esse veritatem non esse, semper, qualitercumque dixeris contradictorie, affirmas ipsam esse. Unde veritas esse absolutam essendi necessitatem, quae est ipsa veritas, per quam est omne id quod est." Anselm himself, and possibly also Nicholas, is influenced by Augustine's *De vera religione* 39.73 (PL 34:154-155) and *De libero arbitrio* II, 12.

So, like Anselm, Nicholas uses the consideration that there must be Truth, since certain propositions will always be true. And it seems to him reasonable to identify Truth with God. If we look even farther back into the history of theology, we may judge that both Anselm and Nicholas were influenced by Augustine's argument concerning Truth—an argument found in his *De libero arbitrio* ("On Free Choice of the Will"), Book II, chapter 12.

Fourth Consideration: Theory of Atonement

Yet, Anselm's influence is predominant and central as regards Nicholas's doctrine of the Atonement—a doctrine that, to a large extent, Nicholas draws directly from Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*. Let us dwell at length upon this influence. Nicholas follows Anselm in arguing that to sin is to dishonor God—something that a rational creature ought to refuse to do even if his refusal were to occasion the destruction of himself and of everything that is not God. Accordingly, in order for a man to make satisfaction for his sin, he must give to God something that was not already owed to God—something whose worth surpasses the worth of everything that is not God. Since no human being who is merely a human being can make such satisfaction, a God-man was required. For only a God-man would be of Adam's race, would be able, by resuming obedience, to pay to God the honor that is owed Him, and would be able to make compensation, or satisfaction, for the *lèse majesté* ("dishonoring of the sovereign's majesty"), a phrase used by Nicholas in Latin (*laesa maiestas*).[22]

Moreover, Nicholas quotes Anselm's *Cur Deus homo* with respect to Jesus' not having been compelled to die in spite of the fact that God the Father willed for Him to die and in spite of the fact that Jesus could not do otherwise than what the Father willed. Nicholas states—with Anselm, mentioning Anselm by name—that all necessity and impossibility are subject to God's will.[23] Thus, it was necessary for Jesus to die only because Jesus Himself, as God, *willed to die* in order to pay the debt-of-sin on man's behalf.

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22. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* I (17:14); *Sermo* III (7:3).

23. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XXXV (3:1-8). Cf. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* II, 17. See also *Cur Deus homo* I, 9; II, 5; and II, 11 .

However, Nicholas does substantially more than just to telescope the argument of the *Cur Deus homo*. He adds an additional rationale for why the person of the Son of God—and not one of the other two persons—became incarnate. In *Cur Deus homo* II, 9, Anselm gave four reasons why it was most fitting for the *Son* to assume a human nature and to become a man (i.e., a human being).[24] The most significant reason is seen to be the following somewhat contrived set of considerations. Man in sinning against God acted from an autonomous will—one that was not subject to the will of God. But only God's will ought to be autonomous. Hence, in sinning by an autonomous act of willing, Adam arrogated to himself a *false* likeness to God. In this way he sinned more specifically against the person of the Son, who is the *true* likeness of God. "Hence, the punishment or the remission of the guilt is more fittingly assigned to Him to whom the wrong is more specifically done." Consequently, it is more appropriate that the Son, who is more specifically wronged, be the one to make remission by performing a meritorious act on man's behalf.

By contrast with Anselm, Nicholas adds a fifth rationale, doing so in his first sermon:

> Justice decrees that he who has sinned make satisfaction and that he make satisfaction in accordance with his having sinned. Man sinned; let man make satisfaction. Man willed to be God. Therefore, he sinned as gravely as God is great. Hence, a God-man must make satisfaction. And because man willed to be as wise as God, and because the Son [of God] is the Wisdom of the Father, it was fitting that not the Father, not the Holy Spirit, but the Son of the Father make satisfaction after having been made a man.[25]

Nicholas's reasoning parallels Anselm's insofar as Nicholas views Adam and Eve as having sinned more specifically against the Son of God. But Nicholas's explanation of this point differs considerably from Anselm's.

In a somewhat different vein, Nicholas also holds with Anselm, whom he again names expressly, that if Eve alone had sinned and not Adam, then mankind would not have inherited original sin, because, as he says, not the mother but "the father is the initiator of generation and is the

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24. See also Anselm, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 10.
25. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* I (23:22-29).

original transmitter unto his posterity."[26] Thus, unlike in the case of Eve, had *Adam* alone sinned, his posterity would still have contracted the guilt of original sin. Nicholas is here implicitly accepting Anselm's explicit consideration, in *De conceptu virginali* 9, that if Eve alone had sinned prior to her conceiving and procreating, God could have created from Adam's rib another woman, through whom the human race could be propagated sinlessly. For although the whole human race was present potentially in Adam's procreative power, it was not thus present in Eve.[27]

Nicholas also quotes endorsingly Anselm's notion of original sin, for in *Sermo* VI he writes:

> In *De conceptu virginali* Anselm says that original sin is the lack of original justice together with [the presence of] the obligation to have justice. Every sin is a privation of an opposing justice. Hence, original sin is the deprivation of original justice.[28]

Now, as both Anselm and Nicholas maintain: because Jesus was not propagated by the power of Adamic human nature but by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, He did not inherit original sin. Unlike Anselm, however, Nicholas grants that the Virgin Mary was herself born free of original sin.[29] By contrast, Anselm does ascribe to Mary original sin, but he supposes that prior to her conceiving of Jesus, she was cleansed by faith, so that at the moment of that conception she was "beautified with a purity than which a greater cannot be conceived, except for God's."[30] Nicholas cites this Anselmian passage;[31] and, thus, it is clear that in this respect he is influenced by Anselm's reasoning. In going beyond Anselm to embrace the doctrine of the immaculate conception of *Mary*, Nicholas is aware that Scripture does not teach this doctrine but that it accords with the observance of the Church in his own day. In accepting this observance, he once again supplements Anselm's teachings without countermanding anything that Anselm actually states.

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26. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VI (7:17-18).
27. Ibid., (7:7-9). Anselm, *De conceptu virginali* 23.
28. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VI (6:6-10).
29. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* IX (11:24-29 and 11: 13-17).
30. Anselm, *De conceptu virginali* 18. Cf. *Cur Deus homo* II, 16.
31. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VI (13:5-9).

A still further supplementing comes when Nicholas adds yet another reason why the Incarnation was necessary for man's salvation. This consideration has to do with the removing of man's ignorance. Simply put, Nicholas's reasoning goes as follows. Adamic man directs toward *this* life his every desire. He does not know how to seek that which is against this world, even as the eye does not know how to seek that which is *heard* but desires only to see and to see well. He continues:

> But because man did not know that he has the capability to have another life, he was not able to desire another life. Therefore, man was from birth ignorant. But in order that man be made wise and attain the highest end, Wisdom put on human nature; and Christ, the Wisdom of God, was made God-and-man, our Wisdom, so that in Him we might experience desires for another world. And because our fallen nature could not be elevated unless those earthly desires in it were mortified, Christ, in whom there is fullness, fills all our defects.[32]

Finally, Nicholas accepts Anselm's view that the Son of God assumed a particular human nature—that is, not universal human nature. Accordingly, the Son of God became incarnate as *a man*, that is, as a human being; He did not become incarnate as *man*, in a universal sense. Thus, the translation of the title *Cur Deus homo* as "Why God Became Man" tends to mislead us about Anselm's view. For the title suggests that God assumed human nature as such, thereby becoming man as such. Certainly, there have been theologians who have held just such a doctrine. In the nineteenth century, for example, Ferdinand Christian Baur asserted that "Christ as man, as the God-man, is man in his universality, not a single individual, but the universal individual."[33] Sometimes such a view has been projected back onto Anselm. However, Anselm states unequivocally in *De Incarnatione Verbi* ("On the Incarnation of the Word") 11 that the Word of God assumed an individual human nature.

By way of comparison, certain statements by Nicholas of Cusa may tend to give the false impression that he himself propounds the thesis that the Son of God assumed human nature as such, so that Christ did not *par-*

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32. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XXXV (4:9-22).

33. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis* (Tübingen, 1835; reprint ed., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 715: "Christus als Mensch, als Gottmensch, ist der Mensch in seiner Allgemeinheit, nicht ein einzelnes Individuum, sondern das allgemeine Individuum."

take of human nature but, rather, in Christ there is present human nature per se, of which all other men partake. Consider, for example, the following Cusan statement:

> Christ's humanity—as elevated unto the maximal degree, insofar as it is united to the divine nature—is the truest and most perfect humanity of all men. Therefore, the man who clings to Christ clings to his own humanity, so that he is one with Christ, even as Christ [is one] with God. Accordingly, each one who adheres to Christ and is united to Christ—not in and through something other than in and through his own humanity, which is also Christ's humanity—has satisfied the debt [of sin], is justified, is enlivened. For his humanity, which is one in him and in Christ, is united to God the Word.[34]

But what Nicholas writes in one place must be interpreted with the help of what he writes elsewhere. And when we look further, we recognize that Nicholas is not claiming that a believer's nature is numerically one and the same as Christ's human nature; nor is he claiming that Christ's human nature *is* the species human nature, rather than being a particular instantiation of the species. Indeed, Nicholas is teaching, as is also Anselm, that Christ's human nature is the perfection and the goal of human nature—in the sense that it is a perfect human nature, whereas the individualized human nature in every other human being (except for Mary)[35] is marred by sin. We discern Nicholas's view quite lucidly when he writes:

> If you conceive that Christ has the humanity of all men [i.e., of all human beings] and that He is man neither in the full breadth of the human species nor beyond the human species but that He is the most perfect end-goal of the species, then you see clearly how it is that the nature of your humanity obtains in Christ all fullness. [For your human nature is] present in Christ much more intimately than in a brother, a son, or a father—being there, rather, in the most precious identity that is positable with a numerical difference still preserved.[36]

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34. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XXII (38:4-14): "Christi humanitas in illam maximitatem elevata, ut divinae naturae unitur, est omnium hominum verissima atque perfectissima humanitas. Homo igitur, qui Christo adhaeret, ille suae propriae humanitati adhaeret, ut sit unus cum Christo, sicut Christus cum Deo. Propter hoc quisque Christo adhaerens et unitus non in alio, sed in sua humanitate, quae est et Christi, satisfecit debito, iustificatur, vivificatur, quia ipsa sua humanitas, quae est una in eo et Christo, Deo Verbo unita est."

35. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* VIII (13 and 27). Unlike Anselm, Nicholas maintains that Mary never sinned and that she was never even able to sin.

36. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XXXV, 5:1-9: "Si concipis Christum omnium hominum humanitatem habere et ipsum esse hominem non in latitudine speciei

So my individual human nature is not numerically Christ's human nature; and Christ's individual human nature is not numerically my human nature. Instead, my human nature and Christ's human nature are one and the same in species—Christ's individual human nature being the highest perfection of that species. Thus, insofar as a believer participates in Christ's human nature, he participates in perfection without participating in it perfectly. Only Christ partakes perfectly of human nature,[37] without His human nature's becoming human nature per se.

But Nicholas extends Anselm's position regarding *assumptus homo* ("the assumed human nature"): he extends it by incorporating it into the triad of doctrines mentioned earlier: the doctrine of *nulla proportio* ("no comparative relation"), the doctrine of *docta ignorantia*, and the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* ("the coincidence of opposites"). For example, in *De docta ignorantia* III, 7, he reasons that Jesus' humanity is both absolute and contracted, that it is both corruptible and incorruptible. This reasoning is confused; and Nicholas is unable to straighten it out, even as we are unable to straighten it out for him.[38] At other times, Nicholas's statements are not so much confused as they are imprecise, so that he himself can later correct them. For example, in *De docta ignorantia* III, 12, he states: "Since the union of the natures of Jesus is maximal, it coincides with the Absolute Union, which is God." Hereby he seems to suggest that the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ and the Absolute Union of the persons in God—a Union that he identifies as the Holy Spirit—are both maximal, and therefore infinite, so that they coincide. But if the hypostatic union is an infinite union, how does Christ's human nature, which is

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humanae neque extra, sed ut terminum speciei perfectissimum, vides plane quomodo tua humanitatis natura—in ipso multo intimius quam in fratre, filio, aut patre, sed in pretiosiore identitate quae salva numerali differentia dabilis est—omnem plenitudinem assequitur" [punctuation modifed by author].

37. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* LIV (5:20-26): "Unde, licet omnes homines per participationem humanitatis sint homines, tamen in nullo homine participatur ipsa humanitas sicut in alio: in uno clarius, in alio obscurius, in solo Christo, uti est in veritate, in omnibus aliter cum casu a veritate puritatis et perfectionis." See also *Sermo* CXXII (13:16-26).

38. See the following: Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1981, 2nd ed., 1985), 37-40, and Hopkins, *A Miscellany on Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1994), 281-82.

subsumed in His divine nature, remain finite rather than passing over into an identity with the divine nature, since at infinity all differences disappear? *In De visione Dei* 20 Nicholas clarifies his position by further specifying his earlier statement in *De docta ignorantia*—his earlier statement to the effect that the union-of-natures in Christ is a maximal union. For in *De visione Dei* 20 he writes: "The union of Jesus's human nature, *qua* human, to the divine nature is maximal, because it cannot be greater. But it is not maximal and infinite in an unqualified sense, as is the Divine [i.e., the Absolute] Union." Thus, "the human nature cannot pass over into essential union with the divine nature, even as the finite cannot be infinitely united to the Infinite." This clarification brings Nicholas's theory of Atonement into line with Anselm's and with orthodoxy.

Fifth Consideration: Faith and Reason

Like Anselm and Augustine, Nicholas himself frequently cites Isaiah 7:9 in the Old Latin version: "Unless you believe, you will not understand." Moreover, he once cites it, approvingly, in a context in which he mentions both Anselm and Augustine as having subscribed to this relationship between faith and reason.[39] Furthermore, both Nicholas and Anselm recognize that that watchword has limited application, since both agree with Augustine that in some respects understanding precedes faith.[40] For neither Nicholas nor Anselm applies Isaiah 7:9 to understanding that God exists, since both give reasons that serve to *ground* belief in God's existence; and both think that these reasons ought to be given to unbelievers. On the other hand, both apply Isaiah 7:9 to understanding *that God is triune*.[41] With regard to the doctrine of the Trinity both hold orthodox views and embrace the Athanasian Creed.[42] Nicholas accepts what Anselm says in *De Incarnatione Verbi* and in *De processione Spiritus Sancti* ("On the Procession of the Holy Spirit"), with one exception—an

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39. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XIX (6:21-22). See also *Sermo* XXXII (3:22-24); *Sermo* XLI (13:21); *Sermo* CXXXV (6:18); and *De docta ignorantia* III, 11 (244:8-9).

40. Augustine, *Sermo* 43.7.9 (PL 38:257-258).

41. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* XIX (6:13-22); Anselm, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 1 (S, II, 7:11-12).

42. See Jasper Hopkins, "Verständnis und Bedeutung des Dreieinen Gottes bei Nikolaus von Kues," MFCG 28 (2003): 135-64.

exception that relates, once again, to his doctrines of *nulla proportio* and *docta ignorantia*. Whereas Anselm unhesitatingly asserts that the numerically three persons of God are numerically one,[43] Nicholas asserts that God is *non-numerically* three and one.[44] In *De possest* ("On Actualized-Possibility") the discussant John remarks to Nicholas: "You say that God is three but not numerically three. Are not the three persons numerically three persons?" And Nicholas responds: "Not at all. For the number which you view when you say this, is a mathematical number and is derived from our mind; and the beginning of this number [three] is oneness. But with God, trinity does not exist from any other beginning; rather, it is the Beginning."[45] Accordingly, says Nicholas, "we do not give God the name 'one' or 'three' or call Him by any other name whatsoever; for He exceeds every concept of one and of three and of whatsoever nameable thing."[46] Hence, "as Infinite, God is neither trine nor one nor any of those things that can be spoken of."[47]

In spite of this difference between Nicholas and Anselm as regards the doctrine of the Trinity, Nicholas, for purposes of worship, continues to speak of God as one and as three. Moreover, he uses all of the same predi-

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43. Anselm, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 2 (S II, 13:14-21). See also *De Incarnatione Verbi* 9 (S II, 23:18 - 24:1).

44. Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* 24; *De visione Dei* 17 (Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De Visione Dei* [Minneapolis, Minn: Banning Press, 1985], 77:12 - 78:19).

45. Nicholas of Cusa, *De possest* (Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1986], 46:1-6). See also *De possest* 45 and 50. According to Nicholas: although numerical trinity is not real in God, non-numerical trinity is really present in God, so that Nicholas is not a Modalist. See n. 47 below.

46. Nicholas of Cusa, *De possest* 41:4-7.

47. Nicholas of Cusa, *De pace fidei* 7 (21:1-2). God is really both three and one—but not in any sense that reason (*ratio*) can understand. It is true for intellect (*intellectus*) that in God trinity is oneness. As Infinite, God is not numerically triune. Albert Stöckl (in his *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, vol. 3 [Mainz, 1866; reprint ed., Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag, 1968], 50-51) is wrong when he claims that Nicholas's Trinitarianism borders on pure Modalism (p. 50) and "sinks back into Modalism" (p. 51). Cf. *De docta ignorantia* I, 10 (27) and *De coniecturis* ("On surmises") I, 9 (*Mutmassungen*, ed. Joseph Koch and Winfried Happ, Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues in deutscher Übersetzung, Heft 17, 2nd ed. [Hamburg Felix Meiner, 1971], 40:1-2). Just as intellect is higher than is reason (so that Nicholas distinguishes rational number from intellectual number), so God excels the domain even of intellect. But He is more discerningly approached by way of intellect than of reason.

cations that are traditionally used of God. For example, in *De visione Dei* 17 he speaks of God as a trinity of Loving Love, Lovable Love, and the Union of both. These predicates are not only a reflection of Ramón Llull's *Art amativa* ("Art of Love") but also of Anselm's *Monologion* 49-61 and of Augustine's *De Trinitate* ("On the Trinity") IX, 5 and XV, 17.[48] But, once again, whereas Anselm conceives of God analogically as Love, Nicholas conceives of Him metaphorically as Love. This difference results once again from Nicholas's doctrine of *nulla proportio*. Yet, Nicholas adorns his view of God as Love in Anselmian garb, by speaking of God as "Love than which nothing more delightful, nothing better, can be thought."[49]

Sixth Consideration: Anselmian Parallels

In other respects, too, Nicholas stands in the Anselmian tradition, so that he agrees with particular points in Anselm's position, even though there is little or no reason to suppose that Anselm was the primary influence on him. We find, for example, that Nicholas accepts Anselm's view of sin and evil as nothing, as having no being.[50] And yet, this view was also Augustine's[51] and Ramón Llull's[52] and others', so that no primary influence from Anselm can be established. Nonetheless, Nicholas does comment, in another of his sermons, that "sin and evil, although not something according to fact are nevertheless known."[53] And the phrase "according to fact" ("*secundum rem*") is reminiscent of Anselm's distinction in *De casu diaboli* 11 between *secundum rem* and *secundum formam loquendi*, so that for Anselm evil itself is not something according to fact but

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48. See also Augustine's *De Trinitate* VIII, 8 and 10. Regarding Raymond Lull, see *Art amativa*, ed. Salvador Galmés (Palma de Mallorca: Institut d'Estudis Catalans de Barcelona, 1933), 305-7.

49. Nicholas of Cusa. *Sermones* (Paris ed., 1514), Vol. II, fol. 138^{r}, lines 10-9 from bottom.

50. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* I (16:4).

51. See, e.g., Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* I.1.13 (PL, 35:1385): "Peccaturn nihil est."

52. See, e.g., Raymond Lull's *Liber de praedicatione*, ed. Abraham Flores, Distinctio II B: Centum Sermones. Sermo 31 (II.3) [= Vol. 4, p. 123, in *Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina* (Palma de Mallorca, 1963)].

53. Nicolas of Cusa, *Sermones* (Paris ed., 1514), Vol. II, fol. 170^{r}, line 21.

is something only in a manner of speaking.[54] Nicholas also follows Anselm in maintaining that, as compared with God, all created things are as nothing and do not exist. Anselm expresses this idea vividly in *Monologion* 28 and *Proslogion* 22. Nicholas repeats it in *De quaerendo Deum* and *De venatione sapientiae* ("On the Pursuit of Wisdom").[55] But this time Nicholas is also following Augustine[56] and Meister Eckhart,[57] as well as Anselm, so that no one can claim that Anselm's influence is distinct or predominant.

We find Nicholas standing in the Anselmian tradition in multiple other ways. For instance, he adheres to the view that there is but one Exemplar of creation,[58] namely, the Word of God, a view subscribed to by Anselm in *Monologion* 30-35. Moreover, both of these philosophers appeal to Boethius's observation that a point within a point is but a single point; and in this way they symbolize their belief that eternity within eternity is but a single eternity.[59] Likewise, both men are willing to speak—in an extended and Pickwickian sense—of the world as eternal, even though, speaking more strictly, they call it temporal.[60] Similarly, Nicholas maintains, and Anselm takes seriously, the doctrine that the world was created all at once, though Anselm is noncommittal about this doctrine[61] and though neither Anselm nor Nicholas subscribes to Augustine's notion of *rationes seminales* ("seminal reasons" or "seminal causes").

Summarizing Conclusion

At first glance, it seems to almost everyone as if Nicholas of Cusa could not be more unrelated to anyone in the history of philosophy and

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54. Anselm, *De casu diaboli* 11 (S I, 250:21-24).

55. Nicholas of Cusa, *De quaerendo Deum* 3 (45) and *De venatione sapientiae* 38 (111).

56. See Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 134.4 (PL 37:1741).

57. Eckhart, *Expositio libri sapientiae*, ed. Josef Koch, 1.14a (34). [*Die lateinischen Werke*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992)], 354.

58. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* 2 (67).

59. Anselm, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 15. Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de mente* 9 (118); *De ludo globi* ("The Bowling Game") I (9:8-9); and *De docta ignorantia* I, 7 (21).

60. Anselm, *Proslogion* 20. Nicholas of Cusa, *De dato Patris luminum* ("On the Gift of the Father of Lights") 3 (106); *De ludo globi* I (17-18).

61. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* I, 18 (S II, 76:27 - 77:15). Nicholas of Cusa, *De genesi* ("On the Genesis [of All Things]") 2 (159).

theology than he is to Anselm of Canterbury. After all, the three tenets that largely define Nicholas's "metaphysic of contraction" seem altogether remote from Anselm's scholasticism.[62] For Anselm has no use for the triad of notions (1) that there is an infinite disproportion between the Creator and His creatures, (2) that, therefore, finite minds can never positively know *what* God is, given the alleged ground (3) that He is the coincidence of opposites (i.e., is undifferentiated 'Being' itself, which, with respect to its quiddity [or "whatness"], can never be conceived by anyone except itself). Unlike Anselm, Nicholas teaches that only God knows what He is; man knows only that He is and that some symbols befit Him more than do others. This befittingness is known through revelation—in particular, through the life and the teachings of Christ and through the Scriptures, Old and New.

However, we have seen that the intellectual relationship between Nicholas and Anselm is in many respects closer than an initial assessment betrays. For Nicholas takes over Anselm's descriptions of God, agrees with his approaching the question of God's existence by constructing a priori arguments,[63] subscribes wholesale to Anselm's theory of Atonement, to his doctrine of Incarnation, to his definitions of "original sin," of "truth," and of "evil." Furthermore, he agrees with Anselm regarding the relationship between the two natures in Christ. And he agrees likewise regarding the relationship between a believer's human nature and Christ's human nature, in spite of his stating, hyperbolically, that a believer becomes transformed into Christ.[64] Similarly, he lends credence to many features of Anselm's doctrine of the Trinity, Anselm's conception of faith, Anselm's emphasis on Mary's greatest conceivable purity except for God's. Surprisingly, though, he says nothing about Anselm's theory of free choice. Not surprisingly, however, he also says nothing about Anselm's dispute with Roscelin, which was no longer germane because Anselm had settled it definitively.

So, all in all, Nicholas, making use of Anselm's writings, seeks to extend and to supplement those of Anselm's ideas that he incorporates into

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62. Cf. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1983).

63. Note also Anselm's a priori line of reasoning in *Monologion* 1-4.

64. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermo* III (11:12).

his own metaphysics. Such extending and supplementing lead Nicholas to speak in paradoxical ways: God, he says, is unknowable because He is infinitely knowable,[65] God is the Being of being and the Not-being of not-being;[66] God can give Himself to me only if He also gives me to myself.[67] In such paradoxicality Anselm's thought becomes *aufgehoben*: it becomes subsumed, elevated, and transformed. If we can recognize this transformed residue, we will better be able to discern the truth that whatever degree of modernity Nicholas's philosophical-theology may possess, it is a modernity that never attempts to uproot itself from its rich historical heritage. Accordingly, in last analysis, Nicholas is metaphysically nearer to Anselm and to Augustine than he is to Spinoza and to Leibniz; and (although I have not raised the issue here but, rather, elsewhere) he is epistemologically nearer to Thomas Aquinas and to Albertus Magnus than he is to Kant.[68]

What is new and challenging about Nicholas's metaphysics is the amount of agnosticism that he finds to be compatible with faith. For if in this lifetime the human mind can never know *what* God is and must be content to know *that* He is and to conceive of Him metaphorically, then this viewpoint paves the way for Kant later to extend agnosticism even to the question of God's *existence*.[69] The upshot is that even as Nicholas en-

65. Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermones* (Paris ed., 1514), Vol. II, fol. 138^{r}, line 29. Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion* 16 (S I, 112:21-22): The Light in which God dwells (I Timothy 6:16) is inaccessible because it is too resplendent.

66. Nicholas of Cusa, *De li non aliud*, Proposition 5 (Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1987], 115:4-5). Cf. Anselm's paradoxical-sounding expressions: The Supreme Being exists in every place and at every time—and in no place at no time (*Monologion* 22). The Supreme Being is Substance beyond substance (*Monologion* 26).

67. Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* 7 (26:13-14). Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion* 1 (S I, 99:10-11): "I was striving unto God but collided with myself."

68. J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations: Volume Two* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 2000), 121-44. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Banning Press, 1996), 3-84. See also Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?" (n. 7 above).

69. Consistency requires Nicholas to maintain—as he does-—that even during the future life in Heaven believers will not know (other than symbolically) what God is, for creatures will remain finite. However, Nicholas, in speaking of the believer's sonship with God, sometimes gives the impression of maintaining that resurrected believers will know, other than symbolically, what God in and of Himself is. Note, e.g., *De filiatione Dei* 70: "Therefore, sonship is the removal of all otherness and all difference and is the resolution of all things into one thing—a resolution that is also the

larged the domain of faith so that it no longer was largely underpinned by Anselm's method of *sola ratione* ("by reason alone"), so Kant extended Cusa's agnosticism. Thereby Kant enlarged Cusa's domain of faith, which he now understood to include a series of faith-like postulates that permit one to give a unified answer to the *metaphysical* question "For what may I hope?", to the *epistemological* question "What can I know?", and to the *moral* question "What ought I to do?"

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imparting of one thing unto all other things. And this imparting is *theosis*. Now, God is one thing in which all things are present as one; He is also the imparting of oneness unto all things, so that all things are that which they are; and in the [aforementioned] intellectual intuition *being something one in which are all things* and *being all things in which there is something one* coincide. Accordingly, we are rightly deified when we are exalted to the point that in a oneness [of being] we are (1) a oneness in which are all things and (2) a oneness [which is] in all things." It would seem that in knowing all things in God, we would also know God's Essence. But Nicholas rejects this view. "Perhaps that which is often heard disturbs you: viz., that God is incomprehensible and that sonship—which is an apprehension of Truth, which is God—cannot he attained. You have adequately understood, l think, that truth as it exists in something other [than itself] can be comprehended as existing only in some way other [than the way it exists in itself]. But since these God-revealing modes are intellectual, then although God is not attained as He is, nevertheless He will he seen, in the pureness of our intellectual spirit, without any bedarkening sensory image. And this vision is clear to the intellect and is 'face to face' " (author's emphasis). *De filiatione Dei* 3 (62).

What sometimes confuses readers is that Nicholas elsewhere speaks of the future face-to-face vision of God as seeing God *as He is*. Yet, in such a context Nicholas is distinguishing between seeing (or knowing) God *as He is* (I John 3:2) and seeing (or knowing) *what* God is. Note, for example, *Sermo* IV (32:26-28): "Hoc tene: Deum in via cogmoscere possumus 'quod est', in patria 'sicut est', et numquam hic vel ibi 'quid est', quia incomprehensibilis." ("Hold to the following: In this lifetime we can know *that* God is; in Heaven we can know Him *as He is*; but neither here nor there can we know *what* He is, because He is incomprehensible.") This is confusing because most of the time when someone states that God can be known as He is, he means that God's Quiddity, or Whatness, can be known—non-symbolically.