1974

The Learned Ignorance: Its Symbolism, Logic and Foundations in Dionysius the Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa

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by

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March 1974

Submitted to the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. The Speculative Context

The central importance of symbol and myth for an understanding of man and culture has been emphasized from the most divergent perspectives. No longer are questions of symbolism and mythology solely the concern of folklorists, classicists and literary critics. Depth psychology, anthropology, theology and the history of religions have all focused upon man's symbolizing power as formative of his personal and cultural existence. Man not only creates symbols, but orientates his personal development and practical life in relation to symbols, archetypes and mythic structures. Further, it is the

> symbolic function which has enabled man to create language and culture and has opened up for him "a new dimension of reality" not available to the rest of the animal kingdom.[1]

In this symbolizing power lie both the genesis of culture and the specific difference of humanity: man is essentially homo symbolicus. Within this context, man's symbolic creations are not only artifacts subject to formal analysis, but also reflections of the very being and life of humanity. As

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[1] David Bidney, Theoretical Anthropology (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 3.

a leading historian of religions has remarked, "Symbol, myth and image belong to the substance of the spiritual life.... Symbolic thought... is consubstantial with the human being."[2]

Nor has philosophy itself remained untouched by the questions of symbolism and culture, although the philosophical discussion of these issues reflects the varied speculative orientations of the thinkers confronting them. For example, both Whitehead and Cassirer — philosophers who in almost every other respect are poles apart — accord a fundamental role to symbolism. Whitehead makes the broad claim that "Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration: it is inherent in the very texture of human life."[3] Not content to limit his considerations to language and culture, Whitehead proceeds to place symbolism at the very center of his doctrine of perception. 'Symbolic reference' mediates between the two pure perceptual modes of 'presentational immediacy' (awareness of the sheer contemporaneity of present events) and 'causal efficacy' (pressure of past events, conditioning present actuality). Therefore, "when human experience is in question, 'perception' almost always means 'perception in the mixed mode of symbolic

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[2]Mircea Eliade, Images et symboles (Paris: Librarie Gallimard, 1952), pp. 12-13. My translation.

[3]A. N. Whitehead, Symbolism ("Capricorn Books"; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 62

reference'."[4] The symbolizing process thus functions not only in cultural creations, but in the prior, concrete immediacy of perception. In contrast, Cassirer's strongly Kantian perspective leads his analysis into a somewhat different direction from that of Whitehead. For Cassirer, symbolism constitutes the final horizon for the philosophy of culture and for philosophical anthropology generally. Arguing that the spheres of myth, art, language and science are symbols "in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own," he proceeds to a radical reformulation of the philosophical task:

> The philosophical question is no longer that of their [i.e., the symbols'] relation to an absolute reality which forms, so to speak their solid and substantial substratum; the central problem now is their mutual limitation and supplementation.[5]

Hence, in The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Cassirer attempts to correlate the worlds of language, myth and science. And he is further led to affirm as a fundamental principle that we "cannot attain knowledge of the 'essence' of man, except by viewing man in culture, in the mirror of culture."[6] As

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[4]A. N. Whitehead, Process and Reality, ("Free Press"; New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 196; II, viii, 1. Cf. also Symbolism, p. 18.

[5]Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, tr. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), pp. 8-9.

[6]Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, tr. C. S. Howe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 181.

the totality of symbolic forms in their living interrelation, culture constitutes the entire phenomenon of humanity, beyond which reflection cannot penetrate to any noumenal thing-in-itself. On purely Kantian grounds, Cassirer thus constructs an anthropology whose foundation and ultimate limits can be summed up in a single term: symbolization. Here, too, we confront man as radically homo symbolicus.

Discussion of the modes in which various disciplines and philosophers have responded to the questions of culture and symbolism could easily be extended. However, we intend neither to catalogue all the theories of symbolism, nor to develop a comprehensive philosophy of culture. It is sufficient to indicate the centrality of these issues for contemporary thought, in order to establish a framework for the essay which will follow. We shall be concerned with a particular symbolic sphere, that of religious symbolism and language, and with its interpretation at a definite stage of cultural history, that of medieval Christianity. Our task will be at once speculative and historical, focusing upon the structure and limits of religious symbolization as reflected in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa.

In relation to the typology of religious language, we concur with Cassirer's demand for a phenomenology of symbolic forms:

> Without reservation or epistemological dogma, we must seek to understand each sort of language in its uniqueness — the language of science, the language of art, of religion, etc. We must seek to determine what each contributes to the building up of a "common world".[7]

Yet a speculative determination of religious language, even in the fullness of its power and uniqueness, may not be sufficient. For once it is acknowledged that religious symbols and their meanings are culturally and temporally conditioned — that they come into being, are subject to modification, and perish — then the history of religious language and its interpretation must also be taken into consideration. Surely the various historical forms of religious symbolization manifest something of its typological structure, so that symbols become "'openings' (ouvertures) towards a trans-historical world."[8] However, such openings occur only within the life-communities of mankind, that is, within given historical and cultural settings. An adequate phenomenology of religious language and symbolism must therefore be both structural or synchronic, and historical or diachronic. Within this twofold phenomenology, philosophy thus turns towards a hermeneutic of religious symbolism and language.

Now, the nature of this hermeneutic is bound up with

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[7]Ibid. p. 97.

[8]Eliade, Images et symboles, p. 229

a general question of crucial importance for our inquiry: How are we to understand the relation between philosophical reflection and the symbolic sphere? And this question entails that of philosophy's origin and point of departure. Among the most persistent illusions in the history of philosophy is a belief in the self-sufficiency of philosophical speculation. The Cartesian quest for self-grounding certainty, the positivist immersion in formal structures, Husserl's epoche and 'transcendental ego': in its own way, each bears witness to this illusion. The illusion consists in the unacknowledged, and hence uncontrolled, presence of cultural presuppositions within such speculative systems. For instance, what has been the basis for logical positivism's exclusive appropriation of 'truth' to the propositions of the natural sciences and formal systems, if not an unexamined mythology of progress and science? If we are to avoid this type of arrogance, we must acknowledge the origination of philosophical speculation within the concrete setting of history and culture, and make awareness of our presuppositions the condition for reflective advance. Thinking must be situated or oriented, since "no one asks questions from nowhere. One must be in a position to hear and to understand."[9]

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[9]Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, tr. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 306. My remarks on philosophy's point of departure and relation to symbol and myth owe much to Professor Wilhelm Dupré and his lectures at De Paul University in 1968-'69; cf. his articles cited in notes 11 and 14.

Within this context, the relation between philosophy and symbolism comes into focus, since reflection arises only within the world of language, symbol and myth. In their power for disclosing meaning, symbols are among the primary cultural data for philosophical reflection. In seeking to assimilate these data and to penetrate their meaning, philosophy turns towards a meditation on symbols, a meditation which "wants to be the thought (pensée) which is in no sense without presupposition, but rather in and with all its presuppositions."[10] Nor is the hermeneutic of symbols simply one among the many options open to philosophical speculation; rather, as a primary recollection of philosophy's cultural ground, this hermeneutic articulates the origin of reflection itself. Since, as Ricoeur remarks, "the symbol gives rise to thought,"[11] symbolism constitutes an essential condition for

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[10]Paul Ricoeur, "Herméneutique des symboles et réflexion philosophique", in Il Problema della Demitizzazione: Archivio di Filosofia (Padua: Cedam-Casa Editrice dott. Antonio Milani, 1961), p. 51. Cf. The Symbolism of Evil, p. 357; also, Karl Jaspers, Truth and Symbol, tr. from Von der Wahrheit, part III, by Jean T. Wilde, et al. (New Haven: College & University Press, 1959), pp. 71-71, & 52: "To make the language of symbols clear is the highest achievement of philosophical thinking."

[11]Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, pp. 348-49; cf. "Herméneutique des symboles", p. 52. Similarly, other thinkers have insisted on the mythic as the origin of reflection; cf. Cassirer, Language and Myth, p. 44; and Wilhelm Dupré, "Myth, Truth and Philosophy", Existential Psychiatry, VI (1967), p. 172: "Myth is the origin of philosophy as the quest for the meaning of life which transcends all finite patterns and therewith rationality." In this context, we can understand Eliade's claim that "Before they became the main philosophi-

the raising of philosophical questions. Yet while the symbolic sphere thus grounds reflection, it does not deny the claims proper to philosophic thought. Hence,

> what the symbol gives rise to is thinking. After the gift, positing. The aphorism suggests at the same time that everything has already been said enigmatically and yet that it is always necessary to begin everything and to begin it again in the dimension of thinking.[12]

What is required of philosophy is not a gnostic absolutizing of particular symbols and myths, but rather their properly reflective interpretation. As a hermeneutic, philosophy simultaneously acknowledges the wholeness and originative power of language, symbol and myth, and explores their questions and meaning in the critical light of reflective consciousness. As a new beginning, reflection must articulate the logic of symbolic discourse, and seek out the conditions for its possibility.

However, the fundamental relation between philosophy and symbolism involves an essential ambiguity, since this relation not only grounds reflection, but also sets limits to it. The cultural and historical contingency of a particular tradition is shared both by its symbols and by the reflection rooted in them. Surely the symbolic and specula-

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cal concepts, the One, the Unity, the Totality were desires revealed in myths and beliefs and expressed in rites and mystical techniques" (The Two and the One, tr. J. M. Cohen ["Torchbook"; New York: Harper & Row, 1965], p. 122).

[12]Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, pp. 348-49. In terms of this new beginning, the properly constructive dimension of philosophy comes to light.

tive structures of the Western European tradition are not those of the Indian or Chinese civilization. No single tradition exhausts the symbolizing and reflective power of humanity. Nor are cultural boundaries impermeable: indeed, for better or worse, the encounter of the Hebraic and Greek traditions forms the foundation of Western civilization. And on a more modest scale, the process of acculturation and the achievements of anthropologists and historians of religions also testify to the permeability of cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, once we acknowledge the fact of cultural and historical boundaries, we must also note that at these boundaries reflection's "principle of orientation becomes a principle of limitation."[13] Yet it is only within these limitations that reflection is possible. A free-floating syncretism, attempting to cut itself loose from the concrete hic et nunc of its cultural and historical setting, could only be a disoriented reflection; it would, in fact, reintroduce the illusion of a philosophy without presuppositions. The ultimate questions of philosophy — those involving man and the world, transcendence and totality — can arise only in the midst of the human condition, which is historical and cultural throughout.[14] Reflection is situated within the

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[13] Ibid. p. 22.

[14] Wilhelm Dupré, "Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy", Philosophy Today, XIII (1969), p. 291.

creative tension of foundation and contingency, orientation and limitation.

In this context, the historical and comparative study of various epochs and cultures forms an integral part of philosophical reflection. The history of the symbols within which reflection is rooted must be of immediate concern to philosophy, as must that of their interpretation — which, in large measure, is nothing other than reflection's own history. Similarly, if it is to be genuinely reflective, philosophy must explore its own limitations — an exploration for which the comparative study of cultures and historical epochs is an indispensable condition; the differences as well as the similarities which such study discloses bring both the achievements and the limits of one's own tradition into sharper focus. Clearly a comprehensive historical phenomenology of symbols, even if limited to religious language and symbolism, would be a monumental task. Yet it is with this speculative framewrok in mind that the following essay is presented, as but a brief chapter of such a phenomenology.

2. The Historical Setting: The Hermeneutic of the Divine Names

The medieval period offers an extraordinary wealth of material for a historical phenomenology of symbols. Its monumental architecture, its poetry, the fecundity and pervasiveness of the exegetical tradition, all testify to the power which symbolism and the Christian *mythos* exerted upon both the creative imagination and the reflective mind. The symbolic themes of illumination, exemplarism, theophany and *imago Dei* permeate the speculative structures of the epoch, and ground reflection in areas as diverse as theology, metaphysics, epistemology and anthropology. Chenu is scarcely exaggerating when he remarks that, "In all its culture, the Middle Ages are the age of symbol, rather and more than that of dialectic."[15]

Within this setting, it is fitting that a primary locus for reflection be a cluster of symbols: the names of God. For throughout the rich variety of medieval philosophical and theological speculation, the hermeneutic of the divine names appears both as central and as fundamental to

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[15] M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957), p. 161. Chenu's entire discussion of "La mentalité symbolique" (pp. 159-90) is pertinent here, as it bears not only upon twelfth century thought, but also upon Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. Cf. also the more specialized study by Ewert Cousins, "Myth and Symbol in Bonaventure", *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings*, XLV (1971), pp. 86-93.

all other speculation. As Luis Martínez Gómez has insisted, while in the medieval period there was no problem of God in the modern sense of claiming to begin reflection from a religious zero, "there was indeed a problem for medieval man, that of naming God."[16] Augustine's De trinitate, for example, can be interpreted as the hermeneutic of the Trinitarian names of God, both in their linguistic formulations and in their foundations in the trinitarian 'images' within man. And the question of the adequacy of human names for God became an explicit theme in the grammatical speculation of the twelfth century.[17]

However, the full import of the task of naming God emerges in conjunction with the issue of divine transcendence. Since medieval Christendom was heir to the Hebraic tradition, where Yahweh remains inscrutably hidden and refuses to disclose His proper name,[18] the question of the divine names takes on a peculiar urgency. What symbols can articulate the transcendence of the Deus absconditus? How can we name the ineffable? Indeed, even ineffability cannot

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[16]Luis Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa", tr. A. C. Owen, International Philosophical Quarterly, V (1965), p. 81.

[17]Cf. Chenu, La théologie au douzième siècle, pp. 100-07.

[18]Judges 13:18; and the enigmatic passage in Exodus (3:13-15) where Yahweh rebukes Moses for asking His name, which remains jealously hidden in the reply, "I Am who I Am."

be properly predicated of God, as Augustine saw clearly:

> God should not be said to be ineffable, for when this is said something is said. And a contradiction in terms is created, since if that is ineffable which cannot be spoken, then that is not ineffable which can be called ineffable.[19]

In seeking to name God, thought and language thus confront their final limits. As symbols of ultimacy, the names of God impel reflection to explore the limits and foundations of language, symbolization and reflection itself. Conceived in this way, the hermeneutic of the divine names converges upon metaphysics. Symbols indeed give rise to thought, and reflection in turn must explore the limitations and conditions for the possibility of man's symbolizing activity.

While the various theories of analogy all sought to ground the task of naming God, the medieval period's most radical confrontation between the hermeneutic of the divine names and the issue of transcendence occurred within the tradition of the via negativa. With Vladimir Lossky we may distinguish two principles for the apophatic or negative way: one founded upon the essential inaccessibility of the divine nature itself, and the other upon the weakness of fallen

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[19] Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, tr. D. W. Robertson, Jr. ("Library of the Liberal Arts"; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 11 (I,vi,6). Similarly, Paul Tillich has written, "The word 'God' produces a contradiction in consciousness, it involves something figurative that is present in the consciousness and something not figurative that we really have in mind and that is represented by this idea.... It has the peculiarity of transcending its own conceptual content" ("The Religious Symbol", in Religious Experience and Truth, ed. Sidney Hook [New York: New York University Press, 1961], p. 315).

human nature.[20] Although awareness of man's weakness was rarely lost sight of in the medieval West, the doctrine of an essential apophaticism generally encountered strong, even virulent resistance and was explicitly condemned at Paris in 1241.[21] This doctrine nevertheless found vigorous exponents in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa. In these three thinkers, a thoroughgoing apophaticism is integrated within a comprehensive metaphysic of the divine names. Following Cusanus, we shall designate this comprehensive metaphysic as the learned ignorance (docta ignorantia) — a term which has the advantage of suggesting both the centrality of the via negativa, and the anthropological foundation of the metaphysic. For it is man who undertakes the hermeneutic of the divine names, and whose

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[20] Vladimir Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite", Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, XXVIII (1939), pp. 204-05.

[21] Among the ten "errors against theological truth", the first was "quod divina essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur... Firmiter autem credimus et asserimus, quod Deus in sua essentia vel substantia videbitur ab angelis et omnibus sanctis et videtur ab animabus glorificatis." Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis, ed. H. Denifle (Paris: Delalain, 1889), p. 170; cited by L. Sweeney & C. J. Ermatinger, "Divine Infinity according to Richard Fishacre", Modern Schoolman, XXXV (1958), p. 208. Regarding the role of "le courant érigeno-dionysien" in precipitating the crisis leading to the Paris condemnation, cf. P.-M. Contenson, "Avicennisme latin et vision de Dieu au début du XIII^e siècle", Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge, XXVI (1959), particularly pp. 84ff. In contrast to the general bias of the Latin West, essential apophaticism is fundamental for the speculative traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy; cf. Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, tr. members of the Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957), especially pp. 238-39.

orientation in this task is characterized as learned ignorance.[22]

That the theme of the learned ignorance constitutes a systematic and structural unity in the thought of Dionysius, Eriugena and Cusanus will be the central argument of the following essay. The historical basis for this thematic comparison can be presented briefly. With its claim to nearly apostolic authority, the late fifth or early sixth century Greek Corpus Areopagiticum exerted a powerful influence on the medieval West. In the Carolingian age, John the Scot translated the Corpus in its entirety, commented on the Celestial Hierarchy,[23] and employed Dionysian themes and citations throughout his own monumental De divisione naturae. A fifteenth century German cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa was concerned with the reunion of the Greek and Roman churches and cultures. While his practical efforts in this direction attained little lasting success, his writings display a

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[22]In our preliminary remarks, we shall be primarily concerned with the docta ignorantia's relation to the hermeneutic of the divine names. As our argument unfolds, the transcendental, logical and anthropological dimensions of the learned ignorance will emerge. Regarding the full scope of Cusanus' use of the term 'docta ignorantia', cf. Wilhelm Dupré, "Von der dreifachen Bedeutung der 'Docta Ignorantia' bei Nikolaus von Kues", Wissenschaft und Weltbild, Sept.-Dec. 1962, pp. 264-76.

[23]Cf. I. P. Sheldon Williams, "A Bibliography of the Works of Johannes Scottus Eriugena", The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, X (1959), pp. 198-224; Maïeul Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée (Brussels: Culture et Civilization, 1964 reprint ed. of the 1933 ed.), pp. 150-61 & 216-21; G. Théry, "Scot Erigène, introducteur de Denys", New Scholasticism, VII (1933), pp. 91-108.

profound and sympathetic understanding of Greek sources — and in particular, of Dionysius. Cusanus cites Dionysius throughout his writings, but most extensively in the De non-aliud where, among the four interlocutors, Cusanus is characterized as the most familiar with the Areopagite's thought.[24] The unity of the Greek and Latin traditions may thus have found at least a partial realization in Nicholas of Cusa's speculative work. Further, a manuscript containing Book I of Eriugena's De divisione naturae was formerly in Cusanus' library, and the extensive marginalia in Cusanus' own hand indicate careful and repeated reading of the text.[25]

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[24]Cusanus, De non-aliud, Philosophische-Theologische Schriften, ed. and German tr. by Wilhelm and Dietlind Dupré, in three volumes (Vienna: Herder & Co., 1964-67), vol. II, p. 444 (I). The Dupré edition will hereafter be cited simply as "Schriften", with volume and page. Where an English translation is available, reference to the Schriften will be given immediately following citation of the translation. Wherever a translation is my own, Cusanus' Latin will be given in the note. In all cases standard chapter divisions of Cusanus' texts will be given in parentheses at the end of a citation. Cusanus presents extensive quotations from the entire Corpus Areopagiticum in the De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 500-14 (XIV). An essay of basic importance concerning Cusanus' use of Dionysius is Ludwig Baur's Nicolaus Cusanus und Ps. Dionysius im Lichte der Zitate und Randbemerkungen des Cusanus, in Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1940-41; among the appendices Baur publishes Cusanus' marginalia to his manuscript of Albert the Great's commentary on the Corpus Areopagiticum (Cod. Cus. 96, fol.1^{v}-78^{v}), pp. 93-113.

[25]The manuscript is presently in the British Museum (Cod. Addit. 11035). The marginalia, along with pertinent passages from the De divisione naturae, have been published by the Institut für Cusanusforschung, in "Kritisches Verzeichnis der Londoner Handschriften aus dem Besitz des Nikolaus von Kues", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, III (1963), pp. 84-100. Cf. also Cusanus' references to "Iohannis Scotigena" in the Apologia

While these historical links are thus firm and clear, our primary concern will not be with the detailed documentation of textual similarities and sources. For much of this research has been expertly accomplished by a previous generation of scholars, and we need not repeat their work.[26] We shall rather seek to establish a unity of speculative structure between Dionysius, Eriugena and Cusanus. If such a genuine thematic unity can be demonstrated, not only shall we have further evidence for the continuity of the medieval Platonic tradition,[27] but a silent metaphysical question will also accompany our demonstration throughout: may not this speculative structure illuminate present reflection upon the religious dimension of human existence and its symbolic articulation? While historical accuracy remains of paramount importance, we may also find that the theme of the learned ignorance expresses a truth which transcends its cultural origin, and impinges upon our own quest for meaning. Again we must emphasize that a phenomenology of religious symbolism and its interpretation is essentially historical and specu-

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doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, pp. 560 & 578.

[26]Among these scholars are M. Cappuyns, G. Théry, R. Haubst, R. Klibansky and M. de Gandillac. Some of their works have been cited in the preceding notes, and others will be indicated during the course of our essay.

[27]Cf. Raymond Klibansky, The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages (London: Warburg Institute, 1950).

lative, since the ultimate questions of mankind arise only within the concrete dimensions of history and culture.

Before moving on to the speculative structure of the learned ignorance, it may be well to examine further its cultural setting. In what fashion, then, is reflection orientated or rooted for Dionysius, Eriugena and Cusanus? Conceived as the hermeneutic of the divine names, the philosophical-theological task is firmly situated within the religious horizon. In this respect, our three thinkers share the general orientation of medieval religious thought, since they too

> were concerned to lay hold of God through the instrumentality of the mind. They were not trying to prove His existence but were consumed with the desire to possess Him. This contemplative aspect was not complementary to rational speculation; rather it was the latter's source and motivation. First came the desire to savor God (sapere Deum), then the intellectual apprehension of His being, as a way (via) the better to savor Him.[28]

Given this explicitly religious setting, the vital convergence of religion and philosophy in medieval Christian Platonism becomes comprehensible. In the tradition of Augustine, Eriugena writes:

> What else is it to treat of philosophy if not to set forth the precepts of true religion by which the highest and principal cause of all things, God, is both humbly worshipped and rationally studied? It is settled, then, that true philosophy is true religion,

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[28]Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa", p. 82.

and conversely true religion is true philosophy.[29] For worship and reflection are bound together in a unitary quest for meaning, whose dynamics are summed up in the Anselmian formula, "fides quaerens intellectum."[30] Faith is neither a fundamentalist closure to reflection, nor simply belief with insufficient evidence for rational proof. Rather, as essentially a quest for understanding, faith provides a focus for "the desire given with our nature to possess not only knowledge, but wisdom or savory knowledge."[31] Faith is thus the fundamental and enduring condition for reflection. Apart from this ineradicable condition, the hunt for wisdom — that is, philosophy — is inconceivable, since the quest for

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[29] Eriugena, De divina praedestinatione, Joannis Scotis Opera, ed. H. J. Floss, Migne Patrologia Latina, vol. 122, 357D - 358A: "Quid est aliud de philosophia tractare, nisi verae religionis, qua summa et principalis omnium rerum causa, Deus, et humiliter colitur, et rationabiliter investigatur, regulas exponere? Conficitur inde, veram esse philosophiam veram religionem, conversimque veram religionem esse veram philosophiam." Although translations and other editions of Eriugena will be used in the following pages, in each case reference will be given to the Migne edition in parentheses following the citation. Wherever a translation is my own, the Latin will be given in the note. On faith and understanding in Eriugena, cf. also De divisione naturae, 1010B - D; Edward C. McCue, "The Point of Departure of Johannes Scottus Eriugena", The Modern Schoolman, XII (1934), pp. 19-21; Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, p. 315. In Augustine, cf. Contra academicos III, xx, 43; De vera religione I, v, 8, and I, vii, 12.

[30] Anselm, Proslogion, Opera Omnia, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), vol. I, p. 94 ("Praefatio"); alternately, "Credo ut intelligam", Proslogion, Opera, vol. I, p. 100 (ch. I). Cassirer has remarked that "the term fides quaerens intellectum becomes the epitome and motto of the whole of medieval philosophy" (The Logic of the Humanities, p. 48).

[31] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 2 ("Prologus"): "Sollicitamur appetitu naturae nostrae indito

truth cannot be undertaken without the "desire to be in the truth".[32] Hence, glossing a passage from Isaiah, "Nisi credideritis, non intelligitis," Cusanus writes that

> Faith.... embraces (in se complicans) every intelligible thing. Understanding is the unfolding (explicatio) of what was wrapped up in faith. The intelligence is therefore directed by faith; and faith is extended by understanding.[33]

The relation between faith and understanding thus constitutes a dynamic and integral dialectic, within which man continually moves from the implicit and virtual intelligibility given in faith towards the explicit and actual knowledge of understanding. This dialectic of faith and understanding therefore structures the quest for truth, as it establishes the personal and existential ground for reflection in man's connatural "desire to be in the truth".

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ad non solum scientiam, sed sapientiam seu sapidam scientiam habendum." Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 196 (I,1); De pace fidei, Schriften III, pp. 722-24 (VI); Aristotle, Metaphysics, 980a. 'Savory knowledge' renders literally Cusanus' etymological play on 'sapientia' as 'sapida scientia'; the derivation of 'sapientia' from 'sapere' can be traced back at least as far as Augustine, cf. De civitate Dei XII, 2.

[32] Cusanus, De Deo abscondito, Schriften I, p. 302: "desiderium... essendi in veritate". Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, pp. 434-36 (Bk. I); Wilhelm Dupré, "Nikolaus von Kues und die Idee der christlichen Philosophie", Philosophisches Jahrbuch, LXXIII (1965), pp. 27-28.

[33] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Germain Heron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 160; Schriften I, p. 492 (III,11). The passage in question is based on the Septuagint reading of Isaiah 7:9; following the Hebrew more closely, the Vulgate reads, "Nisi credideritis, non permanebitis." Augustine was aware of the variant readings, and argued for their "similarity in one area of meaning" (On Christian Doctrine, p. 45 [II,xii,17]); in the De trinitate (XV,11,2) he constructs an elaborate dialectic of 'seeking' and 'finding' upon this passage. Cf. also Eriugena's remarks, Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, critical ed. & French tr. by Edouard Jeaunneau ("Sources chrétiennes"; Paris: Editions du

Yet if the origin and principle of reflection are constituted in faith, its goal and telos lie in adoration. For the naming of God ultimately turns towards the praising of God as its completion. Hence, in summarizing his logic of the divine names, John the Scot speaks of the ways of affirmation and of negation, and concludes with a radical affirmation of divine transcendence: "Then, above everything that is predicated of Him, His superessential nature which creates and is not created must be superessentially more-than-praised."[34] Similarly, in the De venatione sapientiae Cusanus finds praise (laus) among the most suitable fields for the philosophical hunt of wisdom, and writes,

> Therefore, this is what I have captured on my hunt: my God is He who is praiseworthy through all praiseworthy things — not as participating in praise, but as that absolute praise [which] is praiseworthy in itself and [is] the cause of all praiseworthy things. He is therefore prior to, and greater than everything worthy of praise, since He is the final limit and possest of all praiseworthy things.[35]

Cerf, 1969), p. 214 (284D); De divisione naturae, 516C: "Nil enim aliud est fides... nisi principium quoddam ex quo cognitio creatoris in natura rationabili fieri incipit."

[34]Eriugena, Periphyseon (De divisione naturae): Liber Primus, critical ed. & tr. by I. P. Sheldon-Williams (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), p. 217 (522B).

[35]Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 160 (XXXVI): "Hoc igitur est, quod venatione cepi: Deum meum esse illum, qui est per omnia laudabilia laudabilis, non ut participans laudem, sed ut ipsa absoluta laus per se ipsam laudabilis et omnium laudabilium causa et ideo prior atque maior omni laudabili, quia omnium laudabilium terminus et possest." 'Possest' is one of Cusanus' original names of God; an amalgam of 'posse' and 'est', it indicates that God is all that can be — in contrast to the sphere of creation, which is the domain of the 'posse-fieri' and never can achieve a full realization of its possibilities. Cf. infra, pp. 114ff.

Dionysius perhaps carries this impulsion towards adoration the farthest, in orienting reflection towards union with God; in the Mystical Theology apophaticism becomes the speculative principle which directs the soul towards an experiential union with God. The multivalence and apparent ambiguity of Dionysian language also suggest this orientation, as when 'agnostos' and the coordinate image of cloud or darkness (gnophos, schotos) characterize both the unknowability of God, and the directedness of the contemplative soul in unknowing.[36] Embracing both the object of the quest and the seeker, Dionysius' terminology indicates that the unification (henosis) of the soul is approaching the absolute unity (henosis) of its transcendent object. Therefore, the "desire to be in the truth" simultaneously grounds reflection in faith and impels it towards adoration, and ultimately towards union with God.

However odd it may appear from a rationalistic or positivist point of view, this orientation of reflection within the religious horizon entails neither an abdication of speculative rigor, nor a closure to non-Christian modes of thought. For the relation of the metaphysic of the divine names to the Christian cult is not simply one of dependence,

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[36] Cf. Jan Vanneste, Le mystère de Dieu: Essai sur la structure rationnelle de la mystique du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), p. 170; also, Henri-Charles Puech, "La ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique", Etudes Carmélitaines, XXIII (1938), p. 36.

but also one of creative interpretation, critique and regulation . The learned ignorance recollects the limitations and the properly symbolic character of religious expression and ritual, and thereby preserves worship from collapsing into idolatry.[37] Further, in commenting on Dionysius' treatment of the divine names, Cusanus remarks that "praising God through them [i.e., the names], he explains them in this very praise. So, in the chapter on wisdom, intellect and reason are praised."[38] Praise and explanation belong together, as we recall the convergence of religion and reflection in the emblem, "fides quaerens intellectum". Thought thus retains its integrity and power, so that Dionysius can justly claim, "For me it is enough first to know the truth, next to expose it in the right way."[39] Within this setting, speculation possesses a clarity and rigor of its own, and enriches the practical acts of worship and their symbolic expressions by keeping their transcendental orientation before them.

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[37] Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 292 (I,27). Eriugena also insists upon reason's regulative function in relation to symbols given on the authority of Scripture; cf. De divisione naturae, 511C - 512B.

[38] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 82 (XVIII): "... Deum per ipsa laudans in eius laudem ipsa exposuit, ut in cap. de sapientia laudatur intellectus et ratio"; reference to Dionysius, On the Divine Names, ch. VII.

[39] Dionysius. Letter VII (PG 3, 1080A); cited, Jan Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?", International Philosophical Quarterly, III (1963), p. 293.

Now, in relation to the Christian cult, reflection finds an extraordinarily rich field for interpretation in the symbolic world of the Scriptural tradition. Here the emblem "fides quaerens intellectum" converges upon the maxim that "the symbol gives rise to thought". From this twofold perspective, the seemingly endless exegetical activity of the Patristic and medieval epoch comes into focus. For faith requires that its symbols be understood, that their meaning be raised to a genuinely reflective level. Yet as we approach the 'intellectum' evident in the exegetical tradition, we become aware of the essential complexity of the Patristic and medieval heritage. For the specific forms this understanding takes cannot be accounted for solely on the basis of the Scriptures' Hebraic origin. Rather, apart from the specifically Christian method of typological interpretation, the hermeneutical principles applied to the Scriptures are Greek in origin — and often distinctly Platonic in character. The Hellenization of Christianity, present from its earliest history,[40] consitutes the cultural foundation upon which Patristic and medieval Christianity's exegetical and speculative structures were built. The convergence of the philosophical and the religious thus finds concrete exemplifica-

[40] Cf. the excellent discussion by Werner Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), particularly pp. 21 & 39-40. On the "complementarity" of the Hebrew and Greek (especially Platonic) traditions, cf. Thorlief Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek, tr. J. L. Moreau (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

tion in the interpretation of Scriptures, and in the hermeneutic of the divine names.

Among the more remarkable features of Dionysius' On the Divine Names is the range and variety of the names discussed. In elaborating the fundamental dialectic of transcendence and theophany, Dionysius remarks that "the sacred writers celebrate It [divinity] by every name while yet they call It nameless."[41] He proceeds to catalogue the positive names of God, from the Scriptural declarations "I am what I am", "I am the Life", on through the

> many titles drawn from the whole created universe, such as 'Good', and 'Fair', and 'Wise', as 'Beloved', as 'God of Gods' and 'Lord of Lords'... as 'Giver of Life'... as 'King of kings', as 'Ancient of Days'.... They call Him a Sun, a Star, and a Fire,... a Dew, a Cloud, an Archetypal Stone.[42]

Yet throughout the treatise specifically Platonic modes of inquiry dominate; indeed, Platonic names of God provide the structure of the treatise. After preliminary and methodological remarks, Dionysius first considers the name 'Good' (agathon) in great detail, including an extended discussion of good and evil taken over from Proclus; and the treatise concludes with "the most important title of all,"[43] the name

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[41]Pseudo-Dionysius the Arepagite, On the Divine Names, in On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology, tr. C. E. Rolt (New York: Macmillan, 1966 reprint ed. of the 1920 ed.), pp. 61-62 (I,5). Standard chapter and paragraph divisions of the Dionysian corpus will be given in parentheses at the end of a citation.

[42]Ibid. pp. 61-62(I,5).

[43]Ibid. p. 184 (XIII, 1)

'One' (hen), which resonates throughout the entire Platonic tradition from the Parmenides to Plotinus and Proclus. As Iványka has commented, "These two names for the absolute are placed deliberately at the beginning and the end of the series of divine names,"[44] and thereby establish the boundaries within which the hermeneutic of the divine names is elaborated.

Evidence for the Platonism of Dionysius could easily be expanded — his metaphysics of emanation and return, his hierarchic conception of the chain of being, the pervasive influence of Proclus, etc. But we need not document further what is already common knowledge. We need only emphasize that Dionysius is a Christian thinker whose intellectual formation is thoroughly Platonic — indeed, Neoplatonic — in character, and in whose hands the hermeneutic of the divine names takes on the dimensions of an authentic metaphysic.[45] In both their Platonic orientation and their systematic character, the Dionysian writings are of fundamental importance for the tradition of the learned ignorance, particularly as developed in John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa.

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[44]Endre von Iványka, Plato Christianus: Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964), p. 241. Iványka's entire discussion, "Der Aufbau der Schrift 'De Divinis Nominibus'" (pp. 228-42), is pertinent here.

[45]Cf. Chenu, La théologie au douzième siècle, pp. 113-34.

In conclusion, as the metaphysic of the divine names, the learned ignorance acknowledges its presuppositions both within the religious horizon of faith and adoration, and within the cultural setting of Hellenized Christendom. While these presuppositions set definite limits for reflection, they also served to establish the conditions for its possibility. For, thus situated, the learned ignorance could raise the questions of the adequacy and structure of the divine names, and of their ontological and anthropological foundations. With these presuppositions in mind, we may now proceed to a critical exploration of the learned ignorance in Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa.

CHAPTER TWO

Language and Hermeneutics: Augustine and Cusanus

The question of language, its nature and origin, is clearly fundamental for the hermeneutic of the divine names, since naming occurs only within the context of language as a totality. However, difficulties arise as soon as we attempt to isolate the question of language from the comprehensive structure of the learned ignorance. For here reflection upon language and symbol is intimately bound up with epistemological and ontological considerations, as when John the Scot states that "What we know to be the case with names we must necessarily know to be so with the things which are signified by them."[1] Similarly, Dionysius' philosophy of symbolism and the divine names reflects his metaphysical concern with the hierarchic structure of being: more than mere linguistic constructs, symbols are articulations of being, which manifest an ontological process of participation. Further, in relation to the logos or verbum of the Johannine Gospel, a transcendental dimension becomes explicit within the very

[1]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 77 (459C); cf. also 768D-769A.

question of language, as reflection upon language turns simultaneously towards Trinitarian theology and towards a metaphysics of the word.[2] As we shall see, language here becomes the symbol of its own foundation, ultimacy and transcendence, since '*logos*' and '*verbum*' both designate language as a whole, and function as names of God. For language is the act of man whereby he actualizes his symbolizing power, and comes to acknowledge his relatedness to transcendence and totality. Hence, the full range and depth of anthropological and metaphysical questions is already contained within the issue of language. Therefore, far from being simply a single element, the interpretation of language implicates the learned ignorance in its entirety.

Nor does this complex interlacing affect only the issue of language. Rather, in their respective ways, the questions of logic and epistemology, and the central hermeneutical principles of coincidence and infinity, each provides a focus for the learned ignorance as a whole. It would therefore appear that "everything is in everything"[3]; Anaxagoras' metaphysical maxim may thus be taken as a principle of interpretation, articulating the internal unity

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[2]Cf. Eriugena, *Homélie sur le prologue de Jean*, pp. 226-40 (286B - 288A).

[3]For Cusanus' reflections on this dictum, cf. *De docta ignorantia*, *Schriften* I, pp. 344ff (II,v).

of the learned ignorance. Indeed, in demonstration of this thoroughgoing interpenetration and reiterative coherence lies the essential task of this essay. But although everything may be in everything, nevertheless everything cannot be said at once. Unity of insight must adapt itself to the temporal, sequential condition of language; argument must follow argument, as word follows word. The principle "quodlibet in quolibet" does not exempt us from the requirements for clarity of exposition, but rather demands that the learned ignorance in its totality be kept before us at every stage of our exposition. With this interlacing totality in mind, we may turn to the first stage of our discussion of the learned ignorance: the question of language.

In the medieval traditions, then, where are we to look for a philosophy of language adequate to the hermeneutic of the divine names? The thoroughly ontological bearing of Dionysius' and Eriugena's reflections on symbolism[4] precludes their consideration at this point; for while their assimilation of symbolism to theophany and their logic of the divine names are fundamental to the learned ignorance, these developments do not constitute a theory of language as such, and hence will be considered in the following chapters. In Nicholas of Cusa, on the other hand, the epistemology of the

[4]Concerning the distance between the Dionysian and the Augustinian interpretations of symbolism, cf. Chenu, La théologie au douzième siècle, pp. 174-78.

De coniecturis, and the speculation on naming and definition in the Idiota de mente and De non-aliud converge to form a fully developed philosophy of language. Although our central concern in this chapter will therefore be with Cusanus, we shall first discuss Augustine's reflections on language. Our reasons for proceeding in this fashion are threefold: first, in his novel teaching on words as signs and on the verbum mentis, Augustine presents a doctrine of incalculable historical importance for the medieval West; secondly, his theory of signs clearly distinguishes the structural elements for a hermeneutic of symbols; and finally, Augustine's remarks on language not only provide a focus for our understanding of Cusanus' philosophy of language, but themselves become richly suggestive when considered in this light.

1. Augustine: Sign and Interior Word

Augustine's reflections on language are clearly grounded in his experience and practice. The thoroughness of Augustine's rhetorical education, his activities as teacher, exegete and preacher — all suggest the experiential context of his thought. The De magistro first raises the question of language and meaning in attempting to account for the conditions of learning and teaching. Similarly, the sign theory of the De doctrina christiana establishes the speculative framework for the exegesis of Scriptural symbols. And as one

commentator has remarked, in the Confessiones we may discern a correlation of Augustine's "changing states of self-awareness and his comprehension of the outside world with his growing ability to learn through language and to express himself verbally."[5] Finally, in seeking images of the Trinity and Incarnation, Augustine speaks of the relation between "the word which shines within" (verbum quod intus lucet) and "the word which sounds without" (verbum quod foris sonat).[6] Thus there seems to be no area of Augustine's thought that remains untouched by the issues of speech, of sign, and of word. Here too it would seem that everything is in everything, as the question of language constitutes a dimension which permeates every other speculative concern.

In this context, Augustine's explicit treatment of word and meaning takes on peculiar importance for an understanding of his thought as a whole. However, given the aims of this essay, we shall confine our discussion to Augustine's remarks on language insofar as they impinge upon the hermeneutic of the divine names, and suggest the transcendental dimension of the word (verbum) which is fundamental for Cusanus' philosophy of language. To this end we shall first comment on

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[5]Marcia Colish, The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 20.

[6]Augustine, De Trinitate XV,xi,20 (PL 42, 1071-72).

the sign theory of the De magistro and the De doctrina christiana, and then turn to the 'interior word' of the De Trinitate.

For Augustine language is first of all a field of signification: a word is a sign, that is, "a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses."[7] Surely human language does not exhaust the sphere of signs. In distinguishing natural (naturalia) from conventional or imposed (data) signs, Augustine defines the former as those that, "without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire." Conventional signs, on the other hand, are "those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something they have sensed or understood."[8] Human speech therefore shares in the 'conventional' character of signs as diverse as the call of the dove or cock, and the entire array of such reflectively constructed symbols as banners, military

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[7] Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, p. 34 (II,1,1; PL 34, 36): "Signum est enim res praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud ex se faciens in cogitationem uenire." Cf. also De magistro I,2 - II,3 (PL 32, 1195-96); Confessiones I, viii, 13.

[8] Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, pp. 34-35 (II,ii,3; PL 34, 36-37). On the conventionality of language, cf. also De musica VI,ix,24. Augustine's distinction between the natural and the conventional echoes the argument of Plato's Cratylus.

standards, and ritual actions. Yet Augustine takes human language as a paradigm for understanding signification as a whole because of its pre-eminence in expressive and signifying power. Hence, in discussing the entire range of man's non-linguistic symbols, Augustine states that "I could express the meaning of all signs of the type here touched upon in words, but I would not be able at all to make the meanings of words clear by these signs."[9] Moreover, while some objects are "things in such a way that they are also signs for other things" — such as the stone upon which Jacob rested his head, and the beast sacrificed by Abraham — words find "their whole use in signifying."[10] The question of language thus converges upon that of signification, as signification comes to its most comprehensive manifestation in speech, and as words come to be seen as signs in their very essence.

How, then, are we to understand this relation between signification and language? If we recur to the definition of a sign as "a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the

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[9]Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, p. 36 (II,iii,4; PL 34, 38). Regarding Augustine's originality in fusing the issues of language and signification, cf. R. A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs", Phronesis, II (1957), pp. 64-65.

[10]Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, p. 8 (I,ii,2; PL 34, 20), emphasis added. Alternately phrased, the meaning of an utterance is what language says; the relation between language and signification is one of thoroughgoing interpenetration and coincidence.

senses," a threefold structure becomes evident: the object signified or *significatum*, the sign itself, and the subject for whom the sign discloses the *significatum*. Signs are given only in this triadic relation as a unified whole. In other words, "a thing is a sign, for Augustine, precisely in so far as it stands *for* something *to* somebody."[11] For 'sign' is itself a relational term, mediating between the signified object and the perceiving subject. In the essential transparence of the sign, its object and meaning become manifest; and in relation to this transparence, the personal dimension of interpretation and assimilation of meaning is as fundamental to the sign's truth as is its bond to the *significatum*.

The conditions for an interpretation of language are thus established within the constitutive relation of *significatum*, sign and subject. Conceived as a field of converging signification, language functions as a schematism which focuses our attention and memory upon 'things' (*res*). Hence, in the *De magistro* Augustine creates a speculative knot. On the one hand, "there is nothing that can be taught without signs," and particularly without words; and yet, on the other

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[11]Markus, *art. cit.*, p. 72. Markus also insists upon Augustine's originality in stressing the role of the subject in this relation. For a detailed, formal analysis of Augustine's teaching on signs, cf. B. Darrell Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*", in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 92ff.

hand,

> we learn nothing by means of these signs which we call words. On the contrary,... we learn the force of the word, that is the meaning which lies in the sound of the word, when we come to the object signified by the word.[12]

A circular dialectic thus arises: knowledge of 'things' is impossible apart from language and signs, but words only receive their meaning when the 'things' signified are known. The task of learning therefore seems to be caught up within an inescapable circularity of signs and _significata_, each of which presupposes the other. Although this dilemma finds its ultimate resolution only in Augustine's doctrine of Christ as the interior teacher, one commentator has argued persuasively for the internal coherence of this dialectic. He writes,

> Either... we get to know the meaning of words together with the things which exemplify their meaning, or we have a mere mass of unorganized experience on the one hand, and a mere series of meaningless noises on the other. The enquiry after the meaning of symbols is at the same time the enquiry into the reality they speak of.[13]

Within the relational structure of signification, language and the world of 'things' form an indissoluble polarity,

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[12]Augustine, _The Teacher (De magistro)_, in _Augustine: The Earlier Writings_, ed. & tr. by John S. Burleigh ("Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 91 (X,30; PL 32, 1212), & 94 (XI, 34; PL 32, 1215).

[13]Markus, _art. cit._, p. 69. Compare with the Kantian dialectic of intuitions and concepts, _Critique of Pure Reason_, A51, B75.

within which meaning is constituted. The essential transparence of language summons us to gaze, so to speak, through words and towards their meaning. The final value which Augustine attributes to words as signs is therefore that "they bid us look for things, but they do not show them to us so that we may know them."[14] The limitations of language are thus established within the signifying process and its relational structure, since words do not form an autonomous sphere of meaning, but rather find their meaning only in constitutive relation to the 'things' signified and the perceiving subject.

Whatever the shortcomings of Augustine's sign theory as a general account of language,[15] it is of fundamental importance for exegesis and the hermeneutic of the divine names. Indeed, the focal point for Augustine's theory of language lies in the question of religious knowledge and expression. The De doctrina christiana is, after all, a treatise on Scriptural exegesis and the education of the

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[14]Augustine, The Teacher, tr. Burleigh, p. 94 (XI,36; PL 32, 1215): "Hactenus verba valuerunt, quibus ut plurimum tribuam, admonet tantum ut quaeamus res, non exhibent ut noverimus."

[15]Cf. Wittgenstein's famous critique of Augustine's philosophy of language: "Augustinus beschreibt, könnten wir sagen, ein System der Verständigung; nur ist nicht alles, was wir Sprache nennen, dieses System"(Philosophische Untersuchungen, German text with English tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe [New York: Macmillan, third ed., 1970], p. 3; I,3).

Christian preacher or rhetor. Within this context, sign theory points up the ineradicable need for reflective interpretation of the symbolic world of the Scriptures and of the divine names. For as Augustine remarks, "even signs given by God and contained in the Holy Scriptures are of this [conventional] type also, since they were presented to us by the men who wrote them."[16] Therefore, in recollecting the triadic structure of signification, we must insist that although religious symbols may be 'revealed', their meaning is disclosed only in relation to the human capacity to receive and to interpret this revelation. Negatively expressed, a reification of religious signs severs the bond of signification; in place of a transparence disclosing something beyond itself, the sign takes on the full weight and opacity of a 'thing'. And whether this reification occurs through forgetfulness or through a philosophical bias, it closes the symbolic sphere to reflection and indicates a slavery to signs with a specific symbolic value. As Augustine states,

> There is a miserable servitude of the spirit in this habit of taking signs for things, so that one is not able to raise the eye of the mind above things that

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[16] Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, p. 35 (II,ii,3; PL 34, 37). As Augustine was well aware, the need for interpretation of Scriptural texts was heightened by the number of available — and at times conflicting — translations; cf. On Christian Doctrine, pp. 36-37 (II,v,6), 46-50 (II,xiii,19 - II,xv,22), & 129 (III,vii,15).

are corporal and created to drink in eternal light.[17] In positive terms, on the other hand, when the properly significative character of religious symbols and discourse is recalled, it provides a specific structure for faith's quest for understanding. For in the threefold relation of signification, sign and subject, faith and reflection are integrated within the task of interpretation, since the realization of a sign's meaning requires its reflective apprehension by the subject. And in the hermeneutic of religious signs, reflection opens towards the questions of man and totality, of the soul and God — or in Augustine's metaphor, towards eternal light.

The explicitly religious context within which Augustine formulates his doctrine of signs suggests that we need to examine more closely the realities (res) with which this doctrine is primarily concerned. The exegetical principles and exemple of the De doctrina christiana are directed towards building up the reign of charity, where the soul's love is

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[17] Ibid. p. 84 (III,v,9; PL 34, 69); cf. also pp. 86-87 (III,ix,13; PL 34, 70-71). Similarly, Peter Harte Baker has argued that the De magistro is a response to a Stoic materialism of words: "The materialism against which De magistro is directed is especially that which would make words or what they signify a source of immediate knowledge. If words are not mediate, there will be no reason to search for more immediate principles" ("Liberal Arts as Philosophic Liberation: St. Augustine's De magistro", in Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge: actes du quatrième Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale (Montreal: Institut d'Etudes Medievales; Paris: J. Vrin, 1969), p. 475).

rightly ordered towards God, the only fully worthy object of love.[18] In the De magistro the resolution of the question of the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning hinges upon the reflective turn towards "the interior truth", upon the mind's contemplation of the realities (res) present within itself. Language stimulates and focuses this contemplative turn towards "our inmost mind",[19] where Augustine seeks to establish the foundation for learning and knowledge in the illuminative presence of God to the mind:

> We listen to the truth which presides over our minds within us, though of course we may be bidden by someone using words. Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and wisdom of God.[20]

Therefore, in terms of the widely known passage in the Soliloquia, the realities which the doctrine of signification is designed to relate are ultimately two: God and the soul.[21]

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[18]Cf. On Christian Doctrine, pp. 10 (I,v,5; PL 34, 21), 88 (II,x,16; PL 34, 72), & 93 (III,xv,23; PL 34, 74).

[19]Augustine, The Teacher, tr. Burleigh, p. 70 (I,2; PL 32, 1195); cf. also pp. 96-97 (XII,39-40; PL 32, 1216-17), and Confessiones VII,x,16. Baker suggests that the thematic unity of the De magistro is to be found precisely in this anthropological turn towards the interior (art. cit., p. 475).

[20]Augustine, The Teacher, tr. Burleigh, p. 95 (XI,38; PL 32, 1216).

[21]Augustine, Soliloquia I,11,7; PL 32, 872. As Marcia Colish comments, "Since the objects of knowledge which interest Augustine and about which he theorizes are God and the soul, he limits the application of his sign theory to religious knowledge" (op. cit., p. 67).

Indeed, signs are instruments in the mind's quest for an integral knowledge of God and self. Metaphysics and anthropology converge in the threefold structure of signification, where the function of the religious symbol is to articulate the relatedness between the soul and God.

In the De Trinitate Augustine returns to the theme of language and sign when speaking of the images of the Trinity and Incarnation in man. The foundation of speech lies in the verbum mentis, which is itself an analogue for the divine Verbum. Further, the embodiment of the verbum mentis in the act of speech takes place through signification, and becomes an image for the Incarnation. Hence, Augustine writes that

> The word in its outward sounding is the sign of the word that is inwardly luminous; and to this latter the name "word" more properly belongs.... Even as our word is made utterance (vox), yet is not changed into utterance, so the Word of God was made flesh, but most assuredly not changed into flesh. Our word is made utterance, the divine Word flesh, by the assumption of outward form, and not by a consumption of itself and a passing into the other.[22]

Augustine speaks elsewhere of thought as interior speech,[23] but in a more neutral sense and without the symbolic and metaphysical power evident in Book XV of the De Trinitate.

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[22]Augustine, The Trinity, in Augustine: Later Works, ed. & tr. by John Burnaby ("Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 146 (XV,xi,20; PL 42, 1071-72): "Proinde verbum quod foris sonat, signum est verbi quod intus lucet, cui magis verbi competit nomen...."

[23]Cf. De magistro I,2 (PL 32, 1195-96); and Confessiones X,ii,2. The locus classicus for the analogy between speech and thought is to be found in Plato, Sophist 263e.

For here the interior word simultaneously becomes both the principle for the act of speech, and a primary locus for working out the analogia mentis – that is, the relatedness between the soul and God. The analogia mentis is thus conceived as a thoroughly 'verbal' and internal relation, within which the verbum mentis of man constitutes the living sign and image of the divine Verbum.

If the sign theory of the De doctrina christiana is particularly concerned with the interpretation of words and signs already given, reflection on the interior word articulates the creative and expressive power of language.[24] The verbum mentis becomes a symbol for the genesis of language, a properly transcendental symbol which relates that genesis analogically to the ineffable divine Verbum. For while this interior word is signified throughout all speech, it nevertheless transcends its expression in every "word in its outward sounding". Augustine therefore presses beyond all audible language and beyond its simple repetition in the silence of the mind, until he arrives at

> that word which is the word of a reasonable creature, the word of an image of God not born of God but made by him, a word neither producing itself in sound nor object of thought in a likeness of sound; such as must needs belong to a particular language; but the word that precedes all the tokens by which it is signified, and is begotten of the knowledge which remains in the

[24]Markus, loc. cit., pp. 79-82.

> mind, in the moment when that knowledge is spoken inwardly and with truth to itself.[25]

In his earlier reflections on signification, Augustine had sought to establish the limits of language in the distance between words and the realities signified. But here, by insisting upon the verbum mentis as a unity of the mind prior to speech, he elaborates a dialectic of expression and ineffability within the symbolic framework of language itself. The very limits of language find expression in an essentially linguistic symbol, the 'interior word'.

The symbolism of the verbum mentis articulates the relation between God and the soul; indeed, in the image of the 'word' language itself becomes the vivid, living sign for this relation. The question of the genesis of language therefore converges upon that of the ultimate orientation of Augustine's sign theory. In a philosophical sense, both questions find completion in the twofold turn (conversio) towards "our inmost mind" and thence towards the interior teacher or divine Verbum. For Augustine language thus pro-

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[25]Augustine, The Trinity, tr. Burnaby, p. 147 (XV,xi, 20; PL 42, 1072); emphasis added. The interior word is the word "quod omnia quibus significatur signa praecedit, et gignitur de scientia quae manet in animo, quando eadem scientia intus dicitur, sicuti est." At this point Augustine is working out a Trinitarian analogy, where "knowledge... in the mind" reflects the Father, and begets the interior word as image of the divine Verbum. The distinction between the image born (nata) of God and that made (facta) by him indicates the distance between the divine, begotten Verbum and man as created in the image of God; in this distance, the essential unlikeness (dissimilitudo) between creator and creature is retained at the very center of the analogy (cf. De Trinitate XV,xvi,26; PL 42, 1079).

vides a point of departure and the pervasive symbolism for reflection on man and transcendence, for anthropology and metaphysics.

2. Implications for the Hermeneutic of the Divine Names

In its emphasis on both the provisional and relational character of language, Augustine's doctrine of signification has clear implications for the hermeneutic of the divine names. For Augustine's sense of the limitations of language is heightened by his conviction concerning divine ineffability. He therefore writes that

> God, although nothing worthy may be spoken of Him, has accepted the tribute of the human voice and wished us to take joy in praising Him with our words. In this way He is called Deus. Although He is not recognized in the noise of these two syllables, all those who know the Latin language, when this sound reaches their ears, are moved to think of a certain most excellent immortal nature.[26]

Similar remarks could be made regarding the entire range of divine names, from the Scriptural designations derived from creation — such as "a Sun, a Star,... a Cloud, and Archetypal stone"[27] — to the more exalted names of 'Good' and 'One': while the names may vary in appropriateness, all alike are signs whose whole purpose consists in joyful praise and

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[26]Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, p. 11 (I,vi,6; PL 34, 21). Cf. supra, pp. 12-13, & 21.

[27]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 62 (I,6).

reflective orientation towards the ineffable. In this distance between the names of God and divine ineffability, the ultimate inadequacy of religious signs becomes evident — an inadequacy whose structure finds its most radical articulation in the tradition of the Dionysian via negativa.

With the limitations of the divine names in mind, we must nevertheless acknowledge that the hermeneutic of the divine names provides a way for thinking about the relation between man and God. Here the essentially relational character of signification is of prime importance. For if a sign mediates between the reality signified and the subject, then in some fashion the divine names must mediate between God and man. Since the meaning of the sign emerges only in the constitutive relation of significatum, sign and subject, the naming of God indicates — and here we anticipate Cusanus[28] — a fundamental relatedness between the meaning of God and how man looks at God. The process of naming God is an attempt to approach Him who is signified (however inadequately) in the naming. Rooted in faith's quest for meaning, the hermeneutic of the divine names becomes the reflective articulation of the relation between man and transcendence, the soul and God.

Finally, Augustine's account of the interior word suggests the essential role that reflection on language can

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[28]Cf. Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, pp. 112-16 (VI); and infra, pp. 241-42.

play in elaborating the analogia mentis. For Cusanus, too, language provides the locus for this analogy, as he develops a dialectic between the names imposed by reason and "the one ineffable word which is the precise name of all things"[29] — that is, between language and the divine Logos. Further, since "every name is an image of the precise name,"[30] the quest for the genesis of language converges upon the hermeneutic of the divine names. Hence, in the term 'non-aliud' Cusanus discerns both the presupposition of all language and definition, and an unusually appropriate name of God. Yet in the imaging of "the one ineffable word" in the manifold names of language, a principle of limitation emerges along with the principle of relation. Indeed, otherness and negativity are built into the structure of analogy itself, since apart from an element of difference there can be only identity, not image or analogy. Specifically, if the one precise name is expressed in every name, it nevertheless remains beyond and prior to all names as their transcendental origination. In this way Cusanus sets in a wholly linguistic context the Hermetic dictum that God is at once named in all

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[29] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 498 (II): "Unum... verbum ineffabile, quod est praecisum nomen omnium rerum."

[30] Ibid. p. 498 (II): "ut sic omne nomen sit imago praecisi nominis."

things and yet nameless.[31] The polarity of expression and ineffability thus brings into focus the fundamental paradox of the learned ignorance: that of God's theophanic immanence throughout creation, and his absolute transcendence in his own nature. With the articulation of this paradox as our goal, we shall now turn to a more detailed discussion of Cusanus' philosophy of language.

3. Cusanus: The Analogy of the Word

In the Compendium Nicholas of Cusa remarks that "there is no skill (ars) more natural or easier for man than that of speaking, since no complete man is without it."[32] While this natural facility may appear self-evident, it nonetheless indicates both the practical origin and the theoretical function of language. For language and knowledge are essentially related within the context of human needs and activity. As every animal requires knowledge of its food in order to live, man similarly "does not live well and happily without the

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[31] Corpus Hermeticum, ed. A. D. Nock, & French tr. by A.-J. Festugière (Paris: Société d'Edition "Les Belles Lettres", 1945), vol. I, p. 64 (Poimandres V,10); and vol. II, p. 321 (Asclepius VI,20). Cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 61-62 (I,5-7); and Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 16 (XII); Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 500(III); De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 466 (VI); De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 278-80 (I,xxiv).

[32] Cusanus, Compendium, Schriften II, p. 688 (III): "Nulla etiam naturalior ars facilliorque est homini quam dicendi, cum illa nullus perfectus homo careat."

mechanical and liberal arts, ethics and the theological virtues. Therefore, since knowledge is more necessary for man than for other [animals], all men desire by nature to know."[33] Since knowledge can be communicated and handed down only by means of signs, Cusanus then turns to language as the principal field of conventional (ex instituto) signs for this communication, and insists that "the first science consists in designating things with spoken terms which are perceived by the ear."[34] Further, as the quest for understanding find its primary articulation in speech, consideration of language's practical origination turns towards its theoretical function. For in its conventionality and 'art', language reflects the power of man's mind as a whole. Cusanus writes,

> Man is the designer of the sounding word (vocalis verbum), but he does not form the word as a brute animal, but as having a mind, which beasts lack. Therefore, since the mind is the designer of the word, and only forms the word in order to manifest itself, the word is nothing other than the manifestation (ostensio) of the mind. Nor is the variety of words anything other than the diverse manifestation of one mind.[35]

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[33] Ibid. p. 686 (II): "Nam sine artibus mechanicis et liberalibus atque moralibus scientiis virtutibusque theologicis bene et feliciter non subsistit. Cum igitur homini cognitio plus ceteris sit necessaria, hinc omnes homines natura scire desiderant." A clear reference to Aristotle's Metaphysics (I,1; 980a), yet set within the context of human praxis.

[34] Ibid. p. 688 (III): "prima scientia est designandi res in vocabulis, quae aure percipiuntur."

[35] Ibid. p. 706 (VII): "Post advertendum, hominem vocalis verbi formatorem, quomodo non format verbum ut

Grounded in the demands of community and praxis, language becomes the concrete, vivid sign of the mind's creativity and relation to the world.

We may justly begin to suspect that, perhaps to an even greater extent than Augustine, Cusanus develops an epistemology which is fundamentally 'verbal' in character. In a passage remarkably similar to Augustine, he remarks that "the thought with which the mind thinks itself is the word begotten by the mind, namely knowledge of itself. Moreover, the vocal word is the manifestation of this word."[36] Not only does this passage echo the De Trinitate's teaching on the verbum mentis, but — also like Augustine — Cusanus is exploring the mind and its 'word' as living images of the verbum Dei:

> Form a conception of the designer of all things in the same way as of the mind — namely, that he knows himself in the word begotten of him, and that in the creature which is a sign of the uncreated word he manifests himself diversely in various signs. And nothing can exist which is not a sign of the begotten word's manifestation.[37]

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animal brutum, sed ut habens mentem, qua bruta carent. Mens igitur formator verbi cum non formet verbum nisi ut se manifestet, tunc verbum non est nisi mentis ostensio. Nec varietas verborum aliud est quam unius mentis varia ostensio."

[36] Ibid. "Conceptio autem, qua mens se ipsam concipit, est verbum a mente genitum, scilicet sui ipsius cognitio. Verbum autem vocale est illius verbi ostensio."

[37] Ibid.: "Ita de formatore omnium conceptum facito ut de mente quodque ipse de verbo de se genito se cognoscit, in creatura, quae est increati verbi signum, se ostendit in variis signis varie. Et nihil esse potest quod non sit signum ostensionis geniti verbi." In reference to this passage,

Creation is, as it were, the sign and vocalis verbum of the uncreated word. Language thus becomes the paradigmatic symbol for reflection both on the mind in its self-understanding and articulation, and on divinity in its internal constitution and theophanic presence in creation.

For Cusanus reflection of language seeks its completion in epistemology and anthropology, and ultimately in theology and metaphysics. In tracing this progress more closely, we shall have to consider four central themes of Cusanus' philosophy of language: the connection between naming and reason (ratio); the function of reason within the dynamic unity of the mind (mens) as a whole; the relation between the names imposed by reason and the one 'natural' precise name; and the non-aliud, which signifies both the foundation of language and its transcendental orientation.

Among the unities of the mind, it is reason with which Cusanus generally links language. In the De docta ignorantia he writes that "it is reason (which is much lower than intellect) that gives names to things in order to distinguish them

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Cassirer has commented, "Die Beziehung zwischen Gott und Welt und die Beziehung zwischen Gott und dem menschlichen Geist lässt sich nach Cusanus streng genommen weder als die eines 'Ganzen' zu seinem 'Teil', noch als die 'Ursache' zu ihrer 'Wirkung' fassen. Hier herrscht vielmehr ein anderes Verhältnis, das Cusanus durch die Beziehung zwischen 'Darstellungen' und 'Dargestelltem', zwischen einem sprachlich-gedanklich Symbol und seiner Bedeutung bezeichnet." Ernst Cassirer, "Die Bedeutung des Sprachsproblems für die Entstehung der neueren Philosophie", in Festschrift Meinhoff (Gluckstadt & Hamburg: J. J. Augustin, 1927), pp. 511-12.

from one another."[38] The imposition of names is thus bound up with reason's task of differentiation, of defining by means of distinction. In the Idiota de mente we find Cusanus' clearest discussion of the structure of this imposition. The Layman remarks that

> the imposition of the designative term (vocabulum) occurs through the motion of reason. The movement of reason is around the things which fall under the senses; and since reason produces distinction, agreement and differentiation among these objects, there is nothing in reason which has not previously been in the senses. In this way reason imposes designation, and moves to give this name to one thing, and another to something else.[39]

Here Cusanus indicates the range of reason and language's efficacy, and suggests their common limitations and imprecision. For in the relation to the sphere of sensible objects, the bond between language and reason discloses the otherness or alterity (alteritas) under which they operate. As the power of distinction, reason names by distinguishing a "this" from its other (aliud), from what it is not. Names

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[38] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 54; Schriften I, p. 280 (I,xxiv). Cf. also De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 150 (XXXIII); De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 26 (I,viii), & 146 (II,xii); and De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 446 (I), "Oratio seu ratio est definitio."

[39] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 494 (II): "Impositio igitur vocabuli fit motu rationis. Nam motus rationis est circa res, quae sub sensu cadunt, quarum discretionem, concordantiam et differentiam ratio facit, ut nihil sit in ratione, quod prius non fuit in sensu. Sic igitur vocabula imponit et movetur ratio ad dandum hoc nomen uni et aliud alteri rei." Taken in isolation, this passage may sound remarkably like Locke; but as will be made clear, its context differentiates it quite sharply from a self-proclaimed empiricism.

are set over against one another, so that a 'man' is not a 'stone', 'unity' is not 'multiplicity', etc. Reason and language thus find their efficacy within the finite sphere of division and alterity, and are governed by the logic of non-contradiction.

Yet the imprecision of reason and language also emerges within the context of alterity, and here Cusanus can account for the multiplicity of languages and the varying adequacy among names. As the Layman states,

> Just as human reason does not attain to the essential nature of the works of God, neither does the word (vocabulum). For words are imposed by the motion of reason. With unerring reason we name one thing with one word, and someone else names the same thing with another word; one language has more proper terms, while the other has more barbaric and less appropriate terms. Therefore, since the peculiar nature of words admits of the more and less, I see that the precise designation of a word is not known.[40]

At this point the Layman is clearly suggesting a systematic distinction between the vocabula or names imposed by reason, and the verbum or one precise name of all things. "Only a fitting name is imposed, even though it is not precise."[41]

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[40] Ibid. p. 488 (II): "Quemadmodum enim ratio humana quidditatem operum Dei non attingit, sic nec vocabulum. Sunt enim vocabula motu rationis imposita; nominamus enim unam rem vocabulo uno et per certam rationem, et eandem alio per aliam, et una lingua habet propria, alia magis barbara et remotiora vocabula. Ita video, quod cum proprietas vocabulorum recipiat magis et minus, vocabulum praecisum ignorari."

[41] Ibid.: "non arbitror aliud quam congruum nomen imponi, licet non sit praecisum."

Although all the names (vocabula) given in the various languages retain a certain adequacy, the one natural name (verbum) in its precision eludes their grasp. For Cusanus the term 'precision' takes on a technical sense as absolute unity, infinite perfection and a name of God: "God is the precision of all things whatsoever."[42] Alterity and multiplicity are bound to the more and less, as precision is to the absolute maximum. Nor can any progression through the alterity of the more and less attain to the precision of the maximum, since "everything which can be other (alia) always can be other; and thus, in receiving the greater or more, it can never become in actuality that maximum than which there can be no greater."[43] The limitations of language are thus indicated in the fact that "words are not so precise that a thing could not have been named with a more precise word."[44] A relational structure can be established between the many 'fitting' names or vocabula and the one 'natural' name or verbum, which nevertheless remains unattainable in its maximal precision. To articulate this structure, we shall have

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[42] Ibid. p. 500 (III): "Deus est cuiuscumque rei praecisio." Cf. also Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, p. 454 (Bk. II).

[43] Cusanus, Propositiones de virtute ipsius non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 562 (Prop. XVII): ""Quare videt omnia, quae alia esse possent, semper posse alia esse et ideo in recipientibus magis seu maius numquam deveniri ad actu maximum, quo maius esse nequit." For a detailed discussion of the absolute maximum, cf. De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 198-214 (I,ii - vi), & 240-52 (I,xvi - xvii); also, infra, pp. 183ff.

[44] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 150

to turn from alterity to unity, from reason to the comprehensive dynamics of the mind, and from speech to the precision of the 'natural' name and the non-aliud.

For Nicholas of Cusa, reason and its expression in language do not exhaust the reality of the mind. Indeed, they cannot even measure the mind as a totality. While elaborating on the theme of the imago Dei, the Layman states that

> no reason attains to the status of a measure of the mind. Our mind... remains immeasurable for every rational thought, and is itself infinite and unlimitable. Only the uncreated mind measures it, limits it, and acts as its final end, just as truth does for its living image which is created by it, in it and through it.[45]

The mind is constitutively related to transcendence and totality, and is a "living measure", a power for the assimilation of all things.[46] When we come to the discussion of infinity and anthropology in chapter V, the question of the mind's totality and infinity will be considered in detail. At present, however, we need only indicate this dimension as the comprehensive setting within which reason and language function.

(XXXIII): "non sunt vocabula praecisa, quin res possit praecisiori vocabulo nominari."

[45]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 604-06 (XV): "...nullam rationem ad mentis mensuram attingere. Manet... mens nostra omni ratione immensurabilis, infinibilis et interminabilis, quam sola mens increata mensurat, terminat atque finit, sicut veritas suam ex se, in se et per se creatam vivam imaginem."

[46]Cf. ibid., pp. 502-04 (III), & 562 (IX). According to the Layman's etymology, 'mens' is derived from 'mensurare', p. 486 (I).

In the De coniecturis Cusanus distinguishes four unities within the mind: 1) the "highest and most simple unity' or the idea of God; 2) the unity of the intellect or intelligence, which emerges as the first unity turns towards alterity; 3) the unity of the soul or reason, where intelligence is further "contracted" towards alterity; and finally, 4) the unity closest to sheer alterity, the corporeal unity.[47] Nor ought these unities to be considered as static structures or 'faculties', but rather as formative moments within the organic dynamism of the mind. In a solidly Neoplatonic fashion, the unities are related in an on-going dialectic of procession and return.

> In a wonderful and reciprocal progression, the divine and absolute unity descends step by step into intelligence and reason, while the contracted, sensible [unity] ascends through reason into intelligence, and the mind in like manner distinguishes and connects all things.[48]

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[47] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 16 (I,vi). In his discussions of the mind, Cusanus' technical terminology is not always consistent (cf. Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 534-42 [VII], & 548 [VIII]). We shall follow the fourfold division of the De coniecturis as the model which is the clearest and most comprehensive. This division, ultimately derived from Plato, had become a commonplace in the Neoplatonic tradition, as in Proclus' Elements of Theology (ed., tr. & commentary by E. R. Dodds [London: Oxford University Press, 1963], p. 23, proposition 20; cf. Dodds' commentary, pp. 206-07).

[48] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 16 (I,vi): "... ut admiranda in invicem progressione divina atque absoluta unitate gradatim in intelligentia et ratione descendente et contracta sensibili per rationem in intelligentiam ascendente mens omnia distinguat pariterque connectet"; cf. also p. 118 (II,vii). Paul Henry has remarked that Plotinus' system "is not so much metaphysics as meta-psychology" ("Intro-

Within the dynamic circularity of these "progressing regressions",[49] knowledge comes to be seen as a fundamentally relational process, where each unity — the bodily as well as the divine[50] — provides an essential mediation for consciousness as a whole. For example, as the nexus of intelligence and corporeality, the soul or reason turns towards alterity in the body, and towards a higher unity in the intellect. Indeed, the unity of reason consists precisely in this twofold turning. Therefore, from the perspective of an ascending dialectic, "there is nothing in reason which has not previously been in the senses"[51]; but from the perspective of a descending dialectic, the origin and principle of reason lie in the intelligence.

Within this epistemological framework, the question of language comes into sharper focus. Like the Compendium, the De coniecturis employs the symbolism of the word to express the structure of the mind as a whole. Speech is the sensible

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duction" to MacKenna's translation of Plotinus' Enneads [London: Faber & Faber, 1956], p. xlii). From a thematic point of view, Cusanus' setting of the unities and their circular interrelation within an epistemological and psychological framework can be seen as a return to Neoplatonism's point of departure.

[49] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 38 (I,x): "regressionis progressiones". Cf. Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 596-98 (XIV).

[50] Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 508-10 (IV).

[51] Ibid. p. 494 (III): "nihil sit in ratione, quod prius non fuit in sensu." Cf. also Cusanus, Cribatio Alchorani, Schriften III, p. 804 ("Prologus").

manifestation of reason,[52] while reason in turn is the word of the intellect — a relation which grounds both reason and language in the higher unity of the intelligence. For,

> just as the intellect is the root of reason, intellectual terms are the roots of rational terms. Hence, reason is the intellectual word (verbum) in which [the intellect] shines forth as in its image. Therefore, the root of sounding terms is in intellectual speech (sermo).[53]

Similarly, the intelligence can be seen as the expressive word of the first unity, the idea of God. In this interlocking verbal symbolism, the question of language becomes bound up with that of consciousness as a totality, since for each unity of the mind there is an appropriate language (logos).[54] The turn from the names imposed by reason towards the one precise name therefore occurs within the "progressing regressions" of the mind, as reflection traces an ascending dialectic towards the intellectual unity, and thence towards the first "and most precise [unity which] remains ineffable

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[52]Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 146 (II, xii): "in loquela... unitas naturalis rationis relucet."

[53]Ibid. p. 26 (I,viii): "Sicut enim intellectus radix est rationis, ita quidem termini intellectuales radices sunt rationalium. Unde verbum intellectuale ratio est, in quo ut in se imagine relucet. Radix igitur vocalium terminorum sermo est intellectualis."

[54]Cf. Satoshi Oide, "Über die Grundlagen der cusanischen Konjekturenlehre", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, VIII (1970), pp. 160-73; and Josef Koch, Die Ars coniecturalis des Nikolaus von Kues ("Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordhein-Westfalen", vol. 16; Köln & Opladen: Westdeutschen Verlag, 1956), pp. 37-46.

and unattainable to reason as well as to the intellect."[55] Hence, in attempting to articulate the relation between the 'fitting' names (vocabula) and the one 'precise' name (verbum), the entire dynamism of the mind must be brought into play. The 'natural' name and the non-aliud thus become signs for the genesis of language and for the idea of God.

Returning, then, to the relation between the imposed names and the 'natural' designation, we find that this relation entails a convergence of the issues of naming and form. In the Idiota de mente the Layman takes an example from his own craft, that of carving, to specify this convergence. Significantly, he insists that his craft provides a more adequate analogue for the infinite, divine creativity than do the imitative arts of the sculptor or painter. For instead of imitating the shapes of existing things, the Layman finds his exemplars in the simple power of the mind, since "forms such as spoons, bowls and pots are brought to completion through human art alone."[56] In their simplicity and precision, such original forms arise within the creative unity of the intelligence. The task of the craftsman is to render them perceptible — to shape wood, say, into a spoon. Although

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[55] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 22 (I,vii): "praecisissima ineffabilis inattingibilisque tam ratione maneat quam intellectu."

[56] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 492 (II): "Tales enim formae cocleares, scutellares et ollares sola humana arte perficiuntur." Cf. infra, pp. 252-54.

the simple form of spoon-ness remains in the purity of the intellect, it nevertheless becomes manifest in all spoons and "shines forth in various ways — more so in one, less in another, and in none with precision."[57] The unity of form thus becomes visible in the alterity and multiplicity of matter.

It is at this point that the question of language emerges:

> The wood thus receives its name from the form, since the spoon is named from the given proportion in which spoon-ness shines forth. In this way the name is united to the form, although the imposition of the name occurs according to our good pleasure (ad beneplacitum), since another could have been imposed. Although the imposed name is given at our pleasure, it is not completely different and other than the natural name which is united to the form. Rather, the natural designation derived from the form shines forth in all the diverse names imposed by the various peoples of the earth.[58]

In this convergence of naming and form, both the similarity and the distance between imposed names and natural designation take on a new clarity. For the relation between

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[57] Ibid. pp. 492-94 (II): "... varie relucet, magis in uno et minus in alio et in nullo praecise."

[58] Ibid. p. 494 (II): "Et quamvis lignum recipiat nomen ab adventu formae, ut orta proportione, in qua cooclearitas resplendet, coclear nominetur, ut sic nomen formae unitum, tamen impositio nominis fit ad beneplacitum, cum aliud imponi posset. Sic etsi ad beneplacitum, tamen non aliud et penitus diversum a naturali nomine formae unito, sed vocabulum naturale post formae adventum in omnibus variis nominibus per quascumque nationes varie impositis relucet."

intelligible form and visible manifestation provides an analogue for that between the natural and imposed names. On the one hand, just as the multiplicity of spoons manifests the simple form of spoon-ness, the diversity of names manifests the natural designation which is united to the form. In this way the names given by reason are fitting, if not precise. On the other hand, just as the simplicity and truth of spoonness remain hidden within the intellectual unity, the natural designation remains ineffable in its precision. Hence, a polarity of expression and ineffability arises between the two modes of naming: the natural designation is the condition for the possibility of imposed names, and does indeed find 'fitting' expression in each particular name; yet, "the one true name of each thing is necessarily imparticipable and, as it is, ineffable."[59] Therefore, natural designation and intellectual terms can only be expressed symbolically — that is, not in themselves, but in the alterity of reason and language. The dynamic unities of the mind are, so to speak, recapitulated in the naming and language appropriate to their

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[59] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 112 (II, vi): "Unum igitur verum nomen cuiusque imparticipabile atque, uti est, ineffabile esse necesse est." As Karl Apel has correctly stressed, in terms of the debate which received its classical formulation in Plato's Cratylus, "'Physei'- und 'Nomo'-Theorie der Sprache... stehen nicht entgegen, sondern fordern einander, indem die 'Natursprache'... als unendliche Leitidee gefasst werden muss, die das Verfahren der menschlichen Namengebung regelt" ("Die Idee der Sprache bei Nicolaus von Cues", Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte, I [1955], p. 210).

respective unities. Within this context the exemplum from the Layman's craft articulates the turn from the language of reason to the higher unity of the intellect.

The ascending dialectic which we have been tracing finds its completion only in the first unity of the mind, the idea of God. Here consciousness' foundation and final limit, its "initium et consummatio",[60] are brought into focus in the idea of totality and infinity. As reflection turns towards this unity, the forms and terms of the intelligence are led back to their origin and first principle in the simple unity of infinity. Hence, the Layman insists that

> Just as this Orator here will explain to you in greater detail what he hears from me, so the infinite form alone is one and absolutely simple, and yet shines forth in all things as the absolutely precise exemplar of all singular things capable of receiving form. Therefore, it is perfectly true that there are not many separate exemplars and many ideas of things.[61]

The manifold forms given in the intellect are thus reduced to the primordial unity of the infinite form. Recollecting the connection between form and naming, the Layman continues:

> No reason can attain this infinite form. It is ineffable, and cannot be comprehended through all the designative terms imposed by the operation of reason.

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[60] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 38 (I,x).

[61] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 498 (II): "Nam sicut orator hic praesens tibi latius ex iis, quae a me habet, explanabit, tunc infinita forma est solum una et simplicissima, quae in omnibus rebus resplendet tamquam omnium et singulorum formabilium adequatissimum exemplar. Unde verissimum erit non esse multa separata exemplaria ac multas rerum ideas."

> Hence, the object which comes under designation is an image of the ineffable, proper and precise exemplar. There is one ineffable word (verbum) which is the precise name of all things, and through which all things come under designation in reason's operation. Indeed, this ineffable name shines forth in all names in its own way, as the infinite namability of all names, and as the infinite effability (vocabilitas) of everything expressible by voice. In this way every name is an image of the precise name.[62]

With a refined sense of paradox, Cusanus here sets the dialectic of expression and ineffability within its most comprehensive scope. As in the Compendium, language becomes the paradigmatic symbol for creation, and the quest for the one precise name turns towards the transcendence of the verbum Dei, so that "the word of God is the precision of all namable names."[63] The ineffable word which is the infinite effability of all that can be said, the ineffable name which is the infinite namability of all names: here the absolute presupposition of language coincides with the unconditional tran-

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[62] Ibid.: "Quam quidem infinitam formam nulla ratio attingere potest. Hinc per omnia vocabula rationis motu imposita ineffabilis non comprehenditur. Unde res, ut sub vocabulo cadit, imago est ineffabilis exempli sui proprii et adaequati. Unum est igitur verbum ineffabile, quod est praecisum nomen omnium rerum, ut motu rationis sub vocabulo cadunt. Quod quidem ineffabile nomen in omnibus nominibus suo modo relucet, quia infinita nominabilitas omnium nominum, et infinita vocabilitas omnium voce expressibilium, ut sic omne nomen sit imago praecisi nominis." Cf. also De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 150-51 (XXXIII); also Augustine, Sermo 117c. 3n. 3: "Verbum sempiterne dicitur, et eo sempiterne dicuntur omnia. Ergo est [verbum] forma omnium rerum, forma infabricata" (cited Apel, loc. cit., pp. 210-02); and Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 501D-502A: "Ex forma enim omnium, unigenito videlicet Patris Verbo, omnis forma... creata est."

[63] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 502 (III): "verbum Dei sit praecisio omnis nominis nominabilis."

scendence of the verbum Dei.

This polarity of foundation and transcendence, expression and ineffability is given within the very structure of the Layman's exemplarism. Particular names (vocabula) are images of "the one ineffable word" (verbum), which is, so to speak, refracted through the prismatic unities of the mind. In this imaging the precise name is made manifest, and constitutes the condition for the possibility of language. Yet, and here we must risk a tautology, this manifestation can occur only symbolically; that is, the one ineffable word is expressed only through the mediating alterity of the mind and language, and not in the precision of its truth. The alterity of the mind is at once the condition and the principle of limitation for knowledge of God and expression of the one precise name, which is nothing less than the verbum Dei. For the first unity of the mind, the idea of totality and unity, constitutes an image of God in man, and is not the unmediated truth of divinity itself;[64] since the essential distance between image and exemplar is thus retained, the mind remains other than God. Similarly, the verbum Dei can be expressed only through the alterity of language. Hence,

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[64]Cf. Cusanus' discussion of this crucial issue in the Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 504-06 (III), & 534ff (VII). A more detailed commentary on this distinction will be presented in chapter V, section 2.

> Other than in alterity, truth is imparticipable. Therefore, the one true name of each thing is necessarily imparticipable and, as it is, remains ineffable. Hence, [it is] in alterity that effable names participate in truth itself, just as [they participate in] the intellectual name in reason or cause, since reason is the alterity of the intellectual unity.[65]

Once this fundamental mediating role of the thinking and speaking subject has been taken into account, the 'conjectural' character of knowledge and expression come to the fore: "A conjecture is... a positive assertion which in alterity participates in truth as it is."[66] Since conjectures, like names, can be more or less appropriate, the adequacy and limitations of our modes of thought become central issues for reflection; indeed, the recollection of the boundaries of our knowledge constitutes learned ignorance. Similarly, in terms of the coordinate themes of alterity and conjecture, the quest for the presuppositions of language entails the question of the limits of language as well. The paradox of

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[65]Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 112 (II, vi): "Vides verum aliter quam in alteritate imparticipabile. Unum igitur verum nomen cuiusque imparticipabile atque, uti est, ineffabile esse necesse esse est. Effabilia igitur nomina in alteritate verum ipsum tantum intellectuale nomen in ratione participant seu causa, quia ratio ipsa intellectualis unitatis alteritas est." Cf. also pp. 56-58 (I,xiii); and Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 502 (II).

[66]Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 60 (I, xiii): "Coniectura... est positiva assertio in alteritate veritatem, uti est, participans." Maurice de Gandillac has suggested a correlation between Cusanus' use of the term 'coniectura' and his derivation of 'mens' from 'mensura': "Et c'est sans doute dans sa propre langue qu'il pense le mot ['coniectura']: par coniectura entendons, en effet, Mutmassung, c'est-à-dire 'mensuration mentale'" (La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues [Paris: Aubier - Editions Montaigne, 1941], p. 165).

expression and ineffability, foundation and transcendence thus forms a basic polarity within the question of language. For by articulating this comprehensive polarity, conjecture does not simply come to rest in the limited scope and power of language, but rather seeks to manifest the precision of the originating verbum ever more adequately through the alterity of the mind and its designations (vocabula). The function of a conjectural philosophy of language is thus two-fold: to recollect the limits of language, and to articulate the reflective turn of naming towards its genesis in the transcendent verbum.

Now, among Cusanus' boldest conjectures concerning the polarity of foundation and transcendence is that of the non-aliud. For in the non-aliud Cusanus discerns the primary symbol for both the absolute presupposition of language, and for its transcendent principle of limitation. A peculiar grammatical construct, the definition of the non-aliud appears circular, if not simply tautologous: "The not-other is not other than the not-other (non-aliud est non aliud quam non aliud)."[67] Indeed, it is precisely this self-defining circularity which renders it so attractive to Cusanus, as he comments, "I see the same non-aliud defining itself, and therefore all things that can be named."[68] As

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[67] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 446 (I).

[68] Ibid. p. 460 (V): "Video ipsum non-aliud se definire ideoque et omnia, quae nominari possunt."

the coincidence of defining and defined, the non-aliud expresses the precision of definition itself. In the polarity of the other (aliud) and the not-other (non-aliud) the simplicity and power of the non-aliud become evident. For while the 'other' cannot define the 'not-other', the non-aliud is the principle of definition for all alterity. Hence, Nicholas asks,

> What would you respond if someone asked you what the other (aliud) is? Wouldn't you say: not other than the other (non aliud quam aliud)? In the same way, /regarding/ what the heavens /are/, you would respond, not other than the heavens.[69]

In this way the non-aliud not only defines itself, but provides a rule for every other definition as well. The structure of definition may therefore be expressed as, "A est non aliud quam A." In this way the non-aliud brings forth and, insofar as it manifests the unity of the verbum, constitutes the presupposition of language and thought.

The self-evidence of this form of definition nevertheless conceals an internal dialectic which is fundamental for Cusanus' epistemology and philosophy of language: that of alterity and its negation. This dialectic is given within

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[69] Ibid., p. 448 (I): "Quid enim responderes, si quis te quid est aliud interrogaret? Nonne diceres: non aliud quam aliud? Sic, quid caelum, responderes: non aliud quam caelum."

the very structure of the term 'non-aliud'. We have noted previously that reason and language proceed by distinguishing objects and names from one another; that is, that they proceed under the condition of the aliud. This alterity is called into play in the very process of definition, as the indefinite pronoun 'aliud' sets the object under consideration among any number of other objects. The heavens, for instance, are other than the earth, than fire, than humanity, etc. As one commentator has remarked, "The aliud therefore erects the absolute, indefinite-infinite horizon of 'others' and places the heavens within the series of 'alia et alia'."[70] On the other hand, the negative 'non' immediately restricts this horizon to the identity of the object itself: "The heavens are not other than the heavens." Negation is therefore implicated within the very structure of definition. At this point, the circularity of the non-aliud can no longer be seen as a mere tautology, since through the reciprocal expansion towards alterity and its restriction in negation, the non-aliud articulates not only the form of definition, but also the dynamism of thought in the act of defining.

If we turn, then, to the self-defining character of the non-aliud, we find that in its precision it transcends every

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[70] Siegfried Dangelmayr, Gotteserkenntnis und Gottesbegriff in den philosophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1969), p. 247.

particular definition. For in its negativity the non-aliud denies language's proper mode of operation — the aliud. In itself the non-aliud remains unconditionally beyond and prior to alterity; it is essentially not the 'other'. By thus pointing beyond all names and definitions, the non-aliud signifies a unity and totality prior to the alterity of reason and language. Yet this negation and prior unity are at the same time constitutive for the truth of all propositions and names. Only in the non-aliud is negation not opposed to affirmation. For the non-aliud is not opposed to the aliud, because it defines and precedes it."[71] Therefore, as both a unity prior to language and its constitutive principle, the non-aliud — like the Augustinian 'interior word' — becomes the symbol for the transcendent genesis of thought and language. "Non-aliud est non aliud quam non aliud"; here the circularity of self-definition suggests the coincidence of initium and consummatio as reflection seeks out its first principle and origin. The dynamism of thought, evident in the very term 'non-aliud', recollects its own unity and totality in the self-definition of the non-aliud. As Cusanus remarks,

> Every human concept is a concept of something or other. But the non-aliud is before the concept, since in fact a concept is not other (non aliud) than a concept. The

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[71] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 66 (XIV): "Negatio non opponitur affirmationi. Nam li non aliud non opponitur li aliud, cum ipsum definiat et praecedat."

> non-aliud is therefore called the absolute concept, which is indeed seen in the mind, but is not conceived.[72]

In terms of the De coniecturis, this absolute concept provides a remarkably adequate approach to the first unity of the mind, the idea of totality and infinity. As the definition of definition, the non-aliud is not one concept or name among others, but rather the transcendental ground and principle for every concept and name. Nor can this principle be anything other than the first mental unity itself, the idea of God.

Since the idea of totality constitutes the primary locus for the analogia mentis, the twofold theme of man as imago Dei and the hermeneutic of the divine names emerges here with peculiar clarity. For in tracing the genesis of language to the first unity of the mind, reflection simultaneously seeks to name God through this unity, as through the living image within which the truth of divinity is reflected. The questions of language and anthropology thus establish the essential conditions for the hermeneutic of the divine names, because it is only through the synthesis

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[72] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 536 (XX): "Omnis enim humanus conceptus unius alicuius conceptus est. Verum ante conceptum non-aliud est, quando quidem conceptus non aliud quam conceptus est. Vocetur igitur ipsum non-aliud conceptus absolutus, qui videtur quidem mente, ceterum non concipitur." As Dangelmayr comments, "Nicht also nur ein Begriff der mens ist das non-aliud, sondern die wesentliche formale Gestalt des Wissens" (op. cit., p. 240).

of language and the imago Dei that the task of naming God can be undertaken.

In this context the non-aliud comes to be seen as a peculiarly fitting symbol for the ineffable word and "unnamable name of God."[73] By insisting on the ineradicable mediation of thought, Cusanus emphasizes the conjectural character of the non-aliud as a name of God:

> I do not say that the non-aliud is the name of that [i.e., the first, primum... ante omne nominabile] whose name is above every name. Rather, by means of the non-aliud I bring to light the name of my concept for the first itself. Nor does a more precise name suggest itself to me for expressing my concept of the unnamable, which is no thing against another.[74]

The distance between image and exemplar, created and uncreated, is thus retained within even our most precise reflections on transcendence. Therefore, while the absolute concept of the non-aliud may articulate the idea of totality and infinity, it nevertheless remains strictly conjectural with regard to the archetypal truth of the divine nature. Keeping this conjectural character of the non-aliud firmly in mind, we may now turn to its place in the hermeneutic of the divine names.

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[73] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 450 (II): "innominabile nomen Dei".

[74] Ibid. p. 542 (XXII): "Sed ipsum non-aliud non dico equidem illius nomen, cuius est super omne nomen nuncupatio. Sed de ipso primo conceptus mei nomen per ipsum non-aliud tibi patefacio. Neque mihi praecisius occurrit conceptum meum exprimens nomen de innominabili, quod quidem a nullo aliud est."

In the De non-aliud, following extensive citations from the entire Corpus Areopagiticum, Cusanus takes up the discussion of the Dionysian teaching on the 'superessential One'.[75] Since for Dionysius — as for Plotinus and Proclus — this is clearly the most exalted among the divine names, its relation to the non-aliud provides a basic insight into Cusanus' understanding of the hermeneutic of the divine names. It is therefore essential to note that Cusanus insists that the 'One' presupposes the non-aliud, just as every other designation does. Here we must cite his argument in some detail.

> Ferdinand: Although the one comes near to the non-aliud, he [Dionysius] nevertheless says that before the one there is the superessential one...
> Nicholas: ... If, as he says, the [superessential] one is before the limit and infinity, limiting all infinity, extending to all things at once and remaining incomprehensible apart from all, defining each particular and every multiplicity — then the A [i.e., the non-aliud] precedes even this [superessential] one which defines the one-that-is-other. For since the one is not other than the one, if the A were taken away, the [superessential] one would perish.
> Ferdinand: ... Therefore, the A determines the [superessential] one and all things since, he says, this one is definitive of every unity and multiplicity.[76]

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[75] Ibid. pp. 498-514 (XIV). As Cusanus states, his citations are from the fifteenth century Latin translation by Ambrosius Camaldulensius (Traversi). On the character of this translation and its importance for Cusanus, cf. L. Baur, op. cit., pp. 12-15. The particular Dionysian text concerning the 'superessential One' is from On the Divine Names, XIII, 1-3.

[76] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 514-16 (XV): "Fredinandus: Quia licet ipsum unum propinque ad ipsum non-aliud accedat, adhuc tamen fatetur ante unum esse supersubstantiale unum.... Nicolaus: ...Si autem, ut ait, unum est ante finem et infinitatem omnem terminans infinitatem, ad

The non-aliud thus functions as the presupposition of the 'superessential One' in both a formal and a properly speculative sense. Formally, the non-aliud is simply the principle of definition for the 'One': "unum sit non aliud quam unum." More fundamentally, however, Cusanus sees the non-aliud as the completion of the Dionysian dialectic of the divine names. The formal precision of the non-aliud articulates the relation between the apophatic and cataphatic ways, between transcendence and theophany, with greater clarity than could the ascent to 'superessential unity'. Moreover, this articulation is set within the framework of language and the symbolism of the word.

In its priority to even the Neoplatonic 'One', the non-aliud signifies divine transcendence and thus gives rise to the via negativa. Only in its self-defining circularity does the precision of the non-aliud become manifest; no other name can exhaust the power of this absolute concept. Indeed, the negativity built into the non-aliud directs our attention

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omnia simul pertingens et ab omnibus incomprehensibile manens uniusque et omnis multitudinis definitivum, utique A ipsum unum definiens ipsum unum sane, quod est aliud, antecedit. Nam cum unum sit non aliud quam unum, tunc A subtracto unum desineret. Ferdinandus: ...Determinat igitur A unum et omnia, cum, ut dicit, ipsum unum omnis unius et multitudinis sit definitivum." Cf. also pp. 454-56 (IV). On the other hand, in the De beryllo Cusanus had written, "Videtur autem ipsi Deo magis convenire ipsum unum quam aliud nomen" (Schriften III, p. 16 / XII 7); cf. also the thoroughly Procline discussion of the names 'unum' and 'authypostaton' in the De principio, Schriften II, pp. 212ff (printed in the early editions of Cusanus as a "sermon", under the title, Tu qui es; e.g., the Basle ed. of 1565, pp. 349-75).

beyond the finite sphere of alterity and opposition,[77] and towards the infinite unity of totality. Hence, Cusanus claims that in the non-aliud he has found what he had been seeking by means of the coincidence of opposites: an absolutely simple unity which in its precision is "unutterable and inexpressible through the other."[78] In reason and speech, thought and word are given only in alterity and according to the general principle of non-contradiction, so that "all things that can be said or thought are not the first [which is] signified by the non-aliud, since all of these are in opposition to another."[79] If the coincidence of opposites consists in a procedure for overcoming alterity by integrating opposites into a higher unity, the non-aliud completes this procedure in a single stroke by negating both alterity and opposition. Therefore, in its apophatic and transcendental orientation, the non-aliud becomes a structural principle for the learned ignorance. Commenting on Dionysius' first Letter to Gaius, Cusanus writes:

> Before the other (aliud) nothing can be seen except the non-aliud.... The non-aliud directs us towards the

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[77] Cf. Dangelmayr, op. cit., pp. 231-32, & 247.

[78] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 456 (IV): "... esse per aliudque ineloquibile atque inexpressibile." Concerning coincidence, cf. infra, pp. 178ff.

[79] Ibid. p. 466 (VI): "Omnia, quae dici aut cogitari possunt, ideo non sunt primum per non-aliud significatum, quia ea omnis a suis oppositis alia sunt." Cf. also p. 524 (XVII).

> beginning which surpasses understanding, the other, something and everything, and /which/ precedes the intelligible. The theologian /Dionysius/ expresses this here, and also how perfect knowledge of the non-aliud can be said to be ignorance, since it is knowledge of that which is above everything that is known.[80]

In its precision the non-aliud articulates the limits of language, and thereby becomes the symbol both for the ineffable transcendence of the divine nature in itself, and for our ultimate ignorance of this nature.

However, the non-aliud symbolizes not only divine transcendence, but also theophanic presence. For as the absolute presupposition of language and definition, the non-aliud is made manifest in all speech and thought. For the non-aliud is not set over against the aliud as its opposite, but rather constitutes the principle and ground for alterity itself, since "aliud est non aliud quam aliud." Throughout the rich diversity of names and languages, the non-aliud — like the one ineffable word — is signified and embodied through the mediation of alterity. In its precision the non-aliud remains unnamable, yet it becomes manifest symbolically via the aliud in every particular name as the ineradicable

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[80] Ibid. p. 524 (XVII): "Ante aliud nil nisi non-aliud videri potest. Habes igitur quononaliud in principium nos dirigit intellectum et aliud et aliquid et omne excellens et antecedens intelligibile. Haec ibidem theologus declarat, atque etiam, quomodo ipsius non-aliud cognitio perfecta dici potest ignorantia, quando quidem eius, qui est super omnia, quae cognoscuntur, est cognitio." Cf. Dionysius, Letter I, PG 3, 1065A - B.

condition of its truth: "In all names it is the non-aliud that is signified."[81] In this polarity of ineffability and expression, precision and manifestation, the non-aliud provides a particularly appropriate name of God. As Cusanus writes,

> God is the non-aliud because he is not other in respect to another, even though the non-aliud and the aliud seem opposed; but... the other is not opposed to that from which it possesses what is other. Now you see how rightly the theologians affirm that God is all things in all things, although He is nothing of all things.[82]

The relation between the non-aliud and the aliud is thus that between principium and principiatum, and not that between opposites, since the latter arise only within the sphere of alterity. Further, in a genuinely Neoplatonic fashion, this relation of principium and principiatum is conceived in terms of participation. Concerning the polarity of precision and manifestation, Cusanus states that

> the non-aliud is unnamable because no name attains to it, since it precedes everything. However, every name is what it is through participation of it; it is therefore called the least namable. In this way the imparticipable is participated in all [names].[83]

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[81] Ibid. p. 536 (XX): "In omnibus igitur nominibus non-aliud est, quod significatur"; cf. also p. 474 (VIII).

[82] Ibid. p. 466 (VI): "Deus autem, quia non aliud est ab alio, non est aliud, quamvis non aliud et aliud videantur opponi; sed non opponitur aliud ipsi, a quo habet quod est aliud, ut praediximus. Nuno vides, quomodo recte theologi affirmarunt Deum in omnibus omnia, licet omnium nihil." Cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, V, 8.

[83] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 480 (X): "Primum tu vides quidem ipsum non-aliud innominabile, quia

As one commentator has remarked, here we encounter "the other face of negative theology.... While we are not able to name Him [God], he is always involved in our language, not as a possible term of designation, but as its condition and source."[84]

In the verbal symbolism of the non-aliud, therefore, the entire hermeneutic of the divine names unfolds. On the one hand, in its negativity and precision, the non-aliud is prior to every particular name, and hence necessitates the apophatic way. On the other hand, as the presupposition and principle within which all names participate, the non-aliud establishes the foundations for the cataphatic way and its 'fitting' names of God. What may be called the analogy of the word thus provides an extraordinarily fruitful introduction to the hermeneutic of the divine names. For although the verbum mentis and God remain ineffable in their essential natures, they nevertheless find their respective manifestations (ostensiones) in language and creation. The question of language thus brings into focus the central paradox of

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nullum nomen ad ipsum attingit, cum omnia praecedat. Omne nomen tamen id est, quod est, ipsius participatione; nominatur igitur minime nominabile. Sic in omnibus imparticipabile participatur." Cf. De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 66 (XIV).

[84]Martínez Gómez, art. cit., p. 95. Cf. also Karsten Harries, "Cusanus and the Platonic Idea", New Scholasticism, XXXVIII (1963), pp. 196-97.

the learned ignorance: the ineffable transcendence and theophanic immanence of God. In terms of the Hermetic dictum, God is named in all things and yet nameless. Reflection must therefore turn from the analogies of the mind and word, and towards the analogia entis.

CHAPTER THREE

The Fundamental Paradox: Theophany and Transcendence

If the learned ignorance is to be a comprehensive metaphysic, it must account for the entire triad of God, man and world. In the analogy of the word, language provides a paradigmatic symbol for this threefold relation from the perspective of the thinking and speaking subject; the analogy of the word articulates the *analogia mentis*. Yet the polarity within language between ineffability and expression reflects an ontological polarity between divine transcendence and theophanic presence in creation. The paradox of the one precise name, which is expressed in all names and yet nameless, thus leads into the still deeper paradox of the God who is the 'essence' of all things and yet nothing of all things.[1] By turning towards the relation between the world and God, the *analogia entis* provides the condition and completion for the analogy of the word: the condition, because it articulates the ontological ground for the analogy of the word; the completion, because in this articulation the whole

[1]Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, pp. 136 (V,5), & 152 (VIII,3); *The Celestial Hierarchy*, IV,1 (PG 3, 177D).

triadic relation of God, man and world emerges with greater clarity.

In this way the analogies of the word and of being find a fundamental correlation within the learned ignorance as a unified speculative structure. For language and symbolism assume a properly ontological depth and foundation, while simultaneously providing concrete mediation for the analogia entis. Through the assimilative power of mind and language, the logic of the divine names is rooted in the paradoxical ontology of theophany and transcendence. Hence, conceived as the hermeneutic of the divine names, the learned ignorance takes on the dimensions of a comprehensive metaphysic, as it establishes a threefold relation: creation as an inexhaustible, theophanic source for names; man and language as the dynamic center of the act of naming God; and God as the transcendentally elusive Deus absconditus who is yet named throughout creation. As one commentator has remarked concerning Dionysius' methodology,

> All the names which God bears... come from the relations of creatures to the superessential creator, and lead thence to that [name] which signifies God's superessentiality, his being which towers above all creatures that are not free of their multiplicity: God, the One.[2]

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[2]Otto Semmelroth, "Gottes überwesentliche Einheit: Zür Gotteslehre des Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita", Scholastik, XXV (1950), p. 215. Cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 151-52 (VII,3); and Cusanus' gloss on this passage in the De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 138 (XXX).

The task of naming God thus takes its orientation within the tension of creation and superessential unity, of theophany and transcendence. Specifically, the two principal modes of philosophical-theological discourse — the cataphatic or positive, and the apophatic or negative ways — are established in constitutive relation to the issues of theophany and transcendence.

In this chapter we shall discuss in detail the central paradox of transcendence and theophany in the formulations of Dionysius, John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa. In the following chapter we shall trace the implications of this paradox for the logic of the divine names, in the ways of both affirmation and negation. However, before proceeding to these detailed analyses, it may be well to sketch our argument in its broadest outlines, so that its entire structure may be clearly delineated at the outset.

1. The Comprehensive Framework

So that these preliminary remarks may be reasonably concise, we shall focus our discussion primarily in terms of Dionysius and the speculative tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, for which Dionysius is both witness and formative influence. Within this tradition, creation is interpreted as the self-manifestation of the divine. There being no distinction between nature and a 'supernature' conceived as intermediary

between God and creation,[3] creation is itself grasped as an on-going revelation of its uncreated Lord. Hence, for Dionysius "all creation is 'theophany'"[4] — that is, the showing forth or disclosing of God himself. There is, therefore, a radically active presence or immanence of the divine in creation, in the things of the earth themselves. Within Eastern Orthodoxy we may thus speak of a radical interpretation of the analogia entis as the condition for philosophical-theological speculation, since this analogy inheres throughout the entire theophanic structure of the created order. Following Dionysius, John the Scot states this doctrine most strongly when he writes that "He is the Essence of all things Who alone truly is."[5] This 'essential' inherence of the divine in creation establishes the condition for God's possessing "the names of all things" — that is, the condition for the truth of the cataphatic way in affirming creaturely

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[3]Cf. Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, pp. 88, & 101.

[4]Vanneste, Le mystère de Dieu, p. 26. Cf. Cusanus, De dato patris luminum, Schriften II, p. 670: "Sed omnis creatura est ostensio patris participans ostensionem filii varie et contracte; et aliae creaturae obscurius, aliae clarius ostendunt eum secundum varietatem theophaniarum seu apparitionum Dei"; also Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, ed. H. F. Dondaine, Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge, XVIII (1950-51), p. 267 (IV,12): "Omnis... creatura, siue uisibilis siue inuisibilis, ratione approbante, theophania, hoc est Dei apparitio, et est et dicitur."

[5]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 39 (443B): "Ipsa nanque omnium essentia est qui solus uere est." Cf. also De divisione naturae 454A, 516C, 518A;

names of the uncreated Lord of creation. It is by the presence of God within the earth, understood as the self-manifestation of the divine, that it becomes possible to speak of God as "Sun, Star, Fire and Water, Wind or Spirit, Dew, Cloud... and All Creation."[6] For the symbolism of the divine names reflects the theophanic, and hence fundamentally symbolic, character of creation itself.

Were the analysis of the relatedness between God and the world to halt at this stage, however, it would be somewhat justly open to the accusations of pantheism, "emanationism" (whether this latter is a reproach may be questioned), and sheer magical nonsense. The alarmingly consistent misinterpretation of Eastern Orthodox thought found within the orbit of Rome, and in Western Christendom generally, would gain in credibility — as would the critiques of the "pantheism" in the writings of John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa, two of the Western thinkers most strongly formed within the Greek traditions.[7]

Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, p. 252 (289B); Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, IV,1 (PG3, 177D); Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 340 (II,iv).

[6]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 62 (I,6).

[7]In his earlier work, Maurice de Wulf dismissed John the Scot as a pantheist (Histoire de la philosophie médiévale, 5th ed., I, p. 130). More recently, Branko Bošnjak has written that "Eriugena's pantheism is in essence a mystical materialism" ("Der Begriff der Natur bei J. S. Eriugena", La filosofia della natura nel medioevo: Atti del Terzo Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia Medioevale / Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensero, 1966 /, p. 271). Similarly, T. Whittaker states that "In a more generalized sense of the term,

Yet the analysis of the relatedness between God and creation does not grind to a halt at the stage of theophany. For the doctrine of the divine nature's radical indwelling of the world is set within a yet larger doctrine and a more fundamental paradox. As Dionysius himself states the problem, "All divine things, even those that are revealed to us, are known only by their Communications. Their ultimate nature, which they possess in their own original being, is beyond Mind and beyond all Being and Knowledge."[8] A distinction must therefore be drawn between the communications, distinctions or "emanations"[9] whereby the divine is both immanent and knowable on the one hand, and on the other the ultimate nature, original being or "unity" wherein the divine remains unknowable and ineffable. Radically immanent in the world through the theophanic "uncreated energies", God nonetheless remains absolutely transcendent in his own nature. To employ the terminology of John the Scot, "the Essence of all things Who alone truly is" is himself superessential. This paradox must be stated as vigorously as possible:

'pantheism', I do not see how the reasoned philosophy of Cusanus can be called anything else" ("Nicholas of Cusa", Mind, XXXIV [1925], p. 449).

[8]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 74 (II,7); emphasis added. Cf. Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 80-82 (XVIII). For an earlier formulation of the distinction between divine essence and communicative power, cf. Philo, On the Migration of Abraham, ch. XXXII.

[9]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 56 (I,4).

> This distinction is that between the essence of God, or His nature, properly so-called, which is inaccessible, unknowable and incommunicable; and the energies or divine operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates and gives Himself.[10]

Within this twofold distinction, the whole task of philosophical-theological speculation becomes possible. For as theophanic immanence establishes the condition for the possibility of the way of affirmation, the absolute transcendence of the Deus absconditus with regard to its "own original being" necessitates the way of negation. As Lossky comments,

> The contrast between the two ways in the knowledge of God, between negative and positive theology, is for Dionysius founded upon this inaffable but real distinction between the unknowable essence and the self-revealing energies of the Divinity, between the 'unions' and the 'distinctions'.[11]

Hence, Dionysius reiterates the Hermetic dictum and insists that the Godhead "must both be nameless and also possess the

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[10] Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 70. Cf. Ivánka, Plato Christianus, p. 179.

[11] Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 72. Cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 65-81 (II). Vanneste writes of Dionysius that "In his exposition of the knowledge of God, two motifs which condition everything are continually opposed one to the other: the manifestation of God — which is illumination and participation — and his transcendence. To employ two terms of the same order, we will say: universal causality and absolute transcendence" (Le mystère de Dieu, p. 130). Cf. also J. Douglass, "The Negative Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite", Downside Review, LXXXI (1963), p. 117.

names of all things."[12] Within the twofold structure of divinity's superessential nature and self-manifesting energies, the entire logic of the divine names arises: from God's possessing the names of all things, the cataphatic way derives its vigor and truth; from his being nameless and ineffable, the apophatic way necessarily negates the affirmations of the cataphatic way as inadequate to the unknowable essence of the divine nature. The ways of affirmation and negation thus form a complementary, integral structure, reflecting the indissoluble polarity of theophany and transcendence. In this way the logic and religious epistemology of the learned ignorance are founded upon the paradoxical ontology of the relatedness between creation and its Lord — a relatedness characterized by radical immanence and presence of the divine on the one hand, and by its absolute transcendence and distance on the other.

While the central paradox and its general implications for the hermeneutic of the divine names are thus clear, it remains for us to document the particular formulations given by Dionysius, John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa, each of whom created distinctive metaphors and speculative structures to explicate this paradox. For clarity of presentation, we shall first emphasize the issue of theophany, and then that of

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[12]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 62 (I,7). Cf. supra, p. 47, n. 31.

transcendence. Given the mutually conditioning reciprocity between these issues, however, it will be neither possible nor desirable to isolate either of them completely from the other. Accordingly, we shall be compelled to recollect transcendence during the course of our discussion of theophany, and the discussion of transcendence will in large measure consist in a restoration of the entire polarity to some of the themes which elucidate theophany.

2. Theophany

Dionysius clearly delimits the scope of his undertaking in On the Divine Names in terms of the fundamental paradox of theophany and transcendence. Concerning the name 'Being', he remarks that

> It is not the purpose of our discourse to reveal the Super-Essential Being in its Super-Essential Nature..., but only to celebrate the emanation (proodos) of the Absolute Divine Essence into the universe of things.[13]

As we have seen, this emanation or communication establishes the condition for the possibility of knowledge and discourse concerning the divine nature; only through his self-revealing theophanies does God become manifest and approachable.[14] Moreover, this emanation constitutes the essential ground for

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[13]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 131 (V,1); cf. also p. 74 (II,7); and Semmelroth, "Gottes überwesentliche Einheit", p. 214.

[14]Cf. Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy IV,3 (PG 3, 181C).

the very being of the created order. For just as the one precise name finds expression only through the alterity of the mind and language, superessential being becomes manifest only in the alterity of the created world. The dynamics of this manifestation arise from the radical fecundity of the divine nature which, "under the form of Good-Being (os ousiodes agathon), extends Its goodness by the very fact of Its existence unto all things."[15] In this way, the Dionysian teaching on theophany results in a bold conflation of the themes of creation, causality and emanation.

At one point, after insisting on divine transcendence and the via negativa, Dionysius emphasizes the providential causality of God and the concomitant necessity for the affirmative way:

> Since, as the Subsistence of goodness, It [the Thearchy] by the very fact of Its existence is the Cause (aitia) of all things, in celebrating the bountiful Providence of the Supreme Godhead we must draw upon the whole creation. For It is both the central Force of all things, and also the final Purpose, and is Itself before them all, and they subsist in It; and through the fact of Its existence the world is brought into being and maintained; and It is that which all things desire.[16]

In this passage two points need to be noted. First, causality is neither extrinsic and mechanical, nor the task of a demiurgic power subordinate to divinity itself. Hence, Dionysius'

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[15]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 86 (IV,1); cf. also pp. 101-02 (IV,10).

[16]Ibid. pp. 60-61 (I, 5); cf. also pp. 63 (I,7), & 100-01 (IV,10).

cosmology can be reduced neither to that of Aristotle's efficient causality and unmoved mover, nor to that of the Timaeus. Secondly, Dionysius binds the various modes of causality — beginning, cohesive power, and end — into a dynamic of manifestation and subsistent inherence. Cosmogenesis coincides with theophany, the self-manifestation of the transcendent Good. Perhaps Maximus the Confessor was the earliest of the Dionysian commentators to grasp this theophanic dialectic in its full force. Citing Maximus' Scholia to The Celestial Hierarchy, Lossky writes that

> The relation of cause to effect is manifestation (ekphansis): the invisible and secret causes become visible and knowable in the effect. God manifests himself in creatures (theophaneia). The relation of effect to the cause which determines it is that which one calls participation (methexis) or imitation (mimesis), in virtue of which the effect becomes the image (eikon) of the cause.[17]

The terminology of Dionysius and Maximus is itself instructive: the Good, emanation, manifestation, participation and image. When the pervasive theme of the One and unity is recalled, it is evident that the canon of Neoplatonic metaphysics has been brought into play. Indeed, the structure of Dionysius' interpretation of causality can be seen with greatest clarity in the maxim of Proclus: "Every effect

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[17] Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite", p. 217. Cf. also Lossky, "La notion des 'analogies' chez Denys le pseudo-Aréopagite", Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge, V (1930), p. 258; also the definition of hierarchy in The Celestial Hierarchy III,1 (PG 3, 164D).

remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it."[18] In the distinctively Neoplatonic schema of emanation (proodos) and return (epistrophe), causality is set within a dynamic circularity: the unfolding of the creative power of the Good into alterity, and the subsequent reversion towards the simplicity of the One. And within this dialectic, a reciprocity is maintained, as the effect simultaneously manifests and remains within the cause.

While the dialectic of procession and return assumes an almost choreographic symmetry in the interlocking triads of The Celestial Hierarchy, perhaps Dionysius' most vigorous and succinct treatment of this theme occurs in his discussion of 'yearning' or 'love' (eros) as a name of God. Through eros the creator "is drawn from His transcendent throne above all things, to dwell within the heart of things, through a supra-essential and ecstatic power whereby He yet stays within Himself."[19] In a passage of cumulative and almost lyrical force, Dionysius writes that God

> moves and leads onward Himself unto Himself. Therefore on the one hand they call Him the Object of Love and Yearning as being Beautiful and Good, and on the other they call Him Yearning and Love as being a Motive-Power leading all things to Himself, Who is the only ultimate Beautiful and Good — yea, as being His own Self-Revelation and the Bounteous Emanation of His own Tran-

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[18]Proclus, The Elements of Theology, p. 39 (prop. 35).

[19]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 106 (IV,13); cf. also p. 102 (IV,10).

> scendent Unity, a Motion of Yearning simple, self-moved, self-acting, pre-existent in the Good, and overflowing from the Good into creation, and once again returning to the Good.[20]

The ecstatic movement of divine eros thus coincides with the dialectic of procession and return, and articulates the affective dynamics of theophany. Within the tradition of Neoplatonic exegesis of the Republic, Dionysius conceives the Good not only as final cause, but also as efficient cause. The Good is not simply the transcendent, ultimate and immobile object of love, whose beauty acts as a lure for an ascending movement through the cosmic order. Rather, in its "excessive yearning", the fecundity of the Good itself becomes the creative power of cosmic eros, as in its self-manifestation the Good descends to dwell "within the heart of things". The dialectic of procession and return therefore constitutes a perfect circularity, within which eros and the Good are implicated at every moment.

Within this 'erotic' dialectic of manifestation and participation, Dionysius is led to his most radical formulations concerning theophanic immanence. By means of a thoroughgoing reductio, he traces the categories of our thought and

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[20] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 107 (IV,14). Cf. Thery, "Scot Erigène, introducteur de Denys", p. 96. Dionysius is clearly influenced by the Neoplatonic elaboration on the Platonic theme of eros, which he in all probability derives from Proclus. Eriugena reiterates and amplifies Dionysius' discussion of divine eros in the De divisione naturae, 518C ff.

the diverse modes of existence back to their ultimate truth within divinity itself. The multiplicity of divine names, derived from the whole of creation, signifies that God possesses

> a Super-Essential Existence fulfilling all our categories, and is the Cause producing every mode of existence.... He is all things as being the Cause of them all, and as holding together and anticipating in Himself all the beginnings and all the fulfillments of all things.[21]

More simply and directly stated, the Thearchy is "the Cause (aitia) and Origin (archē) and Being (ousia) and Life of all creation."[22] Therefore, the dynamic circularity of emanation and return modifies the interpretation of being and essence, as well as that of causality. More precisely, the theophanic interpretation of causality itself entails a fundamental modification in the doctrine of being and essence. For within the dialectic of manifestation and participation, the transcendent Good is immanent throughout the entire hierarchic procession of being.[23] Hence, in discussing 'Being' as a divine name, Dionysius states that

> there is no existent thing whose essence and eternal nature is not very Being. Hence God receives His Name

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[21]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 139 (V,8). Dionysius stresses the full polarity of theophany and transcendence as he continues, "and He is above them all in that He, anterior to their existence, super-essentially transcends them all. Hence all attributes may be affirmed at once of Him, and yet He is No Thing."

[22]Ibid. p. 55 (I,3).

[23]Cf. Ivánka, Plato Christianus, pp. 258-59, & 278-79.

> from the most primary of His gifts when... He is called in a special manner above all things, 'He which is'.[24]

Here the first term of the Proclinе triad of being, life and intelligence[25] is brought to bear upon Exodus' enigmatic name of God. The Dionysian reductio thus traces the truth of "existent things" back towards the "eternal nature" of the divine communication in being, which in turn functions as a name of God. Being and essence are therefore not determinate, static structures, but relational terms which bind the created order to divine transcendence. In this way, the constitutive presence of God becomes manifest throughout creation, since "the 'to be' of all things is the Divinity above Being Itself."[26]

As we have remarked previously, John the Scot follows Dionysius in this radical affirmation concerning the relation

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[24]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 136 (V,5); reference to Exodus 3:14. Cf. Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 284.

[25]Concerning this triad in Proclus, cf. Werner Beierwaltes, Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1965), pp. 93-118.

[26]Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, tr. editors of the Shrine of Wisdom (Fintry, Brook, Nr. Godalming, Surrey: Shrine of Wisdom, 1965), p. 32 (IV,1; PG 3, 177D): "to gar einai panton estin e hyper to einai theotes." Dionysius continues with similar remarks about the remaining terms of the Proclinе triad, life and intelligence or wisdom; cf. also On the Divine Names, pp. 144-51 (VI,1 - VII,2). Regarding the status of being, life, et al. within the "innergöttlichen Bereich", cf. Otto Semmelroth, "Gottes geeinte Vielheit: Zur Gotteslehre des Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita", Scholastik, XXV (1950), pp. 392ff.

between God and creation: "He is the Essence of all things Who alone truly is."[27] Indeed, this 'essential' inherence of the uncreated nature within the created order becomes a recurring theme in the De divisione naturae, and is often formulated in explicit reference to The Celestial Hierarchy.[28] Further, like Dionysius, Eriugena conceives this doctrine in relation to theophany and the schema of procession and return. Hence, while emphasizing the transcendence of the divine Good in the name 'nothing' (nihil), John the Scot simultaneously describes its manifestation throughout creation. On the one hand, the transcendent Good, "when thought through itself", remains above all essence and being, and hence is appropriately designated as 'nothing'; but on the other hand,

> when, through a certain ineffable condescension, it is considered by the contemplation of the mind in those things that are, it alone is found to be (esse) in all things.... Indeed, beginning to appear in its theophanies, it is said to proceed as though from nothing into something. What is properly judged /to be/ above all essence is also known properly in every essence, and for this reason every visible and invisible creature can be called a 'theophany', i.e., a divine appearance.[29]

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[27] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 39 (443B). Cf. supra, p. 81.

[28] Cf. De divisione naturae, 516C, 644A-B, 903A-C, where Eriugena cites his own translation of The Celestial Hierarchy IV, 1 (PG 3, 177D; PL 122, 1046B-C); similar formulations occur at De divisione naturae 454A, 518A, 671B (citing Maximus); Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, pp. 253-57 (289B-D). Cf. Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, pp. 349-51.

[29] De divisione naturae, 680D-681A: "Dum vero per condescensionem quandam ineffabilem in ea, quae sunt, mentis obtutibus inspicitur, ipsa sola in omnibus invenitur esse.... At vero in suis theophaniis incipiens apparere, veluti ex

Here the entire polarity of transcendence and theophany once again comes into focus. We shall return to Eriugena's conception of transcendence, 'nothing' and negation in the following section. For the moment, however, it is sufficient to recollect this comprehensive polarity, before proceeding to John the Scot's interpretation of theophany as the divine nature's 'procession' from transcendental negativity into 'something'.

For Eriugena theophany is intrinsically linked to the division of nature. In describing his fundamental speculative framework, he enumerates a division of nature into four 'species':

> first into that which creates and is not created, secondly into that which is created and also creates, thirdly into that which is created and does not create, while the fourth neither creates nor is created.[30]

Now, the relation among these divisions unfolds as a complex interlocking dialectic. The uncreated nature creates the primordial causes, which in turn produce "those things that

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nihilo in aliquid dicitur procedere, et quae proprie supra omnem essentiam existimatur, proprie quoque in omni essentia cognoscitur, ideoque omnis visibilis et invisibilis creatura theophania, id est, divina apparitio potest appelari." Cf. also 446C-D. Compare with Dionysius' statement that God "is All things in all things and Nothing in any" (On the Divine Names, p. 152 [VII,3]).

[30] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 37 (441B): "prima est in eam quae creat et non creatur, secunda in eam quae et creatur et creat, tertia in eam quae creatur et non creat, quarta nec creat nec creatur."

become manifest through coming into being in times and places."[31] The fourth division, which neither creates nor is created, constitutes the final cause towards which created natures are directed, and within which they will ultimately be restored to unity.[32] The two central divisions thus constitute the sphere of creation, while the first and fourth divisions indicate the divine nature, conceived respectively as efficient, productive cause and as telos. In this way, John the Scot maintains a fundamental distinction between creation and the divine, uncreated nature. Since God is both the beginning and end of creation, the first and fourth divisions coincide in absolute simplicity; the distinction between modes of causality in these divisions is therefore a conjectural construct, arising from "the twofold intentionality of our contemplation."[33] With the actual coincidence of beginning and end, the relatedness among the four

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[31] Ibid. p. 39 (442B).

[32] Regarding the stages of division and return, Eriugena follows Maximus the Confessor closely. Cf. De divisione naturae, 893Aff; and Lars Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1965), pp. 396ff. Thunberg provides a detailed, masterful account of the stages of restoration in Maximus and in his predecessors.

[33] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 527B: "Non enim in Deo prima forma a quarta discernitur. In ipso siquidem non duo quaedam, sed unum sunt, in nostra vero theoria dum aliam rationem de Deo concipimus secundum considerationem principii, aliam vero juxta finis contemplationem, duae veluti quaedam formae esse videntur, ex una eademque simplicitate divinae naturae propter duplicem nostrae contemplationis intentionem formatae."

divisions forms a dynamic circularity, which reflects the creative and integrative movement of the Dionysian eros. Hence, we must concur with Cappuyns' judgment that

> Eriugena's explications of the four "species of natures" show us that what is in reality hidden beneath his ingenious formulations is nothing other than the double schema of the Neoplatonists: the processio of the cause to the causes and down to the effects; and then, the reversio of these [effects], through those [causes], up to the cause.[34]

Yet John the Scot simply repeats neither the Neoplatonic schema, nor the modified formulations given to it by Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. Rather, he adapts this schema to a comprehensive metaphysic which bears a distinctively personal stamp, both in its novel framework of the divisio naturae, and in the bold metaphor which articulates its internal dynamics: the self-creation of God. For although the themes of essential inherence, theophany, division of nature, emanation and return clearly implicate one another, their fusion into a structural unity occurs in Eriugena's metaphor of divine self-creation.

John the Scot was fully aware of the novelty and the radical character of this metaphor. Concerning the doctrine that "God Himself is both the Maker of all things and is made in all things," the Student remarks with unconcealed astonishment that

> Like almost everyone else, I was unfamiliar with this view before and had not even heard of it. If it is

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[34] Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, p. 310.

> true, anyone would immediately shout and proclaim: "And so God is all things and all things are God." Such a judgment will be regarded as monstrous.[35]

Since in the divisions of nature the fundamental distinction is that between the uncreated and the created, does not this metaphor entail the collapse of the entire dialectic which has been so carefully elaborated? Indeed, the Master claims that

> We should not therefore understand God and creation as two different things, but as one and the same. For creation subsists in God, and God is created in creation in a remarkable and ineffable way.[36]

Confronted with this striking paradox, we may well share the Student's surprise, and perhaps even his indignation; but we must also participate in his effort to comprehend this doctrine of divine self-creation. Towards this end, we shall first demonstrate its synthetic power within Eriugena's interpretation of theophany, and then insist on its properly

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[35]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 650C - D: "Deum et omnium factorem esse, et in omnibus factum." Cited from the forthcoming edition of On the Division of Nature, translated by Myra L. Uhlfelder, with introduction and summations by Jean A. Potter ("Library of the Liberal Arts"; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill). Citations from this edition will be noted, with gratitude, as "tr. Uhlfelder", with pagination from the Floss edition (PL 122).

[36]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 678C; cf. also 528B, & 517C - D: "D. Deus ergo non erat prius quam omnia faceret? M. Non erat.... [Si enim esset] temporeque praecederet actionem suam, quae nec sibi coessentialis erat nec coaeterna. D. Coaeternum igitur est Deo suum facere et coessentiale? M. Ita credo et intelligo." Concerning the coincidence of creare, creari and esse in God, cf. Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 144 (XII); and Cusanus' marginal gloss on De divisione naturae, 517C - D: "Intendit ostendere deum prius non fuisse antequam omnia faceret, quia

figurative character.

The metaphor of divine self-creation expresses the relational dynamics inherent in conceiving creation as theophany. Hence, the Master comments that

> When it is said that it [the divine nature] creates itself the true meaning is nothing else but that it is establishing the natures of things. For the creation of itself, that is, the manifestation of itself in something, is surely that by which all things subsist.[37]

Similarly, Eriugena writes that the Logos "is the creative Cause of everything and is created and made (creari et fieri) in everything which It creates, and contains everything in which It is created and made."[38] In this convergence of creare and creari, the dialectic of manifestation and participation takes on a new clarity and force. For the divine self-creation not only coincides with theophany, but also unfolds the constitutive dynamic which binds uncreated transcendence to the created order. The divine nature's creation of itself provides a middle term, so to speak, between the first and second divisions of nature: the theophanic creari links the uncreated divinity with the primordial causes, and

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facere et ei [esse] dei unum sunt" (British Museum Codex Addit. 11035, 80r, printed by the Institut für Cusanusforschung, "Kritisches Verzeichnis der Londoner Handschriften aus dem Besitz des Nikolaus von Kues", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, III [1963], p. 98).

[37] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 67 (155B): "Nam cum dicitur se ipsam creare nil aliud recte intelligitur nisi naturas rerum condere. Ipsius namque creatio, hoc est aliquo manifestatio, omnium existentium profecto est substitutio."

[38] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 646A. Compare with the remarks about the divine will at 453C - D.

hence initiates the descending dialectic of the first three divisions of nature. In a passage charged with the full impetus of the Neoplatonic tradition, John the Scot describes the divine nature's intentional emergence (volens emergere) from its infinite transcendence, and its creative descent through the primordial causes and into their effects. And this entire procession into the subordinate divisions of nature is expressed in terms of the uncreated divinity's creare and creari, so that the divine nature

> is created and creates in the primordial causes; but in their [i.e., the causes'] effects it is created and does not create. And not without reason, since in these [effects] it establishes the end of its descent, that is, of its appearance. In the Scriptures, therefore, every corporeal and visible creature which falls under the senses is generally called — and not inappropriately — an outermost trace of the divine nature.[39]

Theophanic immanence could scarcely receive a more radical expression than it does here, where the dialectic of creare

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[39] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 689B - C: "Creatur ergo et creat in primordialibus causis; in earum vero effectibus creatur, et non creat. Nec immerito, quoniam in ipsis finem descensionis suae, hoc est, apparitionis suae constituit. Atque ideo omnis creatura corporalis, atque visibilis, sensibusque succumbens extremum divinae naturae vestigium non incongrue solet in Scripturis appelari." Eriugena cites in this connection I Corinthians 15:28, "God shall be all in all" (689A); cf. 450D, where this passage is set in a properly eschatological context, "Erit enim Deus omnia in omnibus, ac si aperte scriptura diceret: solus deus apparebit in omnibus." In Bonaventure the term 'vestigium' takes on a nearly technical sense as a description of the divine nature's immanence in sensible creation; cf. Itinerarium mentis in Deum, ch. II; also Cousins, "Myth and Symbol in Bonaventure", pp. 90-91.

and creari articulates the descending self-manifestion of God. Further, given the constitutive character of this descent as the unfolding of the divine unity, the creator "is said to be made in His creatures generally because in them He, without whom they cannot be, is not only understood to be, but also is their Essence."[40] The integrative power of Eriugena's metaphor is therefore clear, as it provides a single, vivid expressive form for the coordinate themes of theophany, procession, division of nature and essential inherence.

Here it may seem that the analogia entis has collapsed into an undifferentiated identitas entis. In the tradition of Plotinus and Proclus, Eriugena's and Dionysius' procedure is surely not to construct an analogical relation between entities or orders of being which are conceived as initially distinct and self-contained. Substances do not ground the relational structure of procession and return, but rather emerge within it. Yet this primacy of the relational may entail other modes of distinction than those between substances. In fact, John the Scot and Dionysius maintain a fundamental distinction between the divine nature subsisting in itself, and its manifestation in the created order — that

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[40] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 205 (516C); John the Scot again cites The Celestial Hierarchy (IV,1; PG 3, 177D) as a proof text, "Esse omnium est super esse divinitas." Cf. also 632D-634A.

is, between transcendence and theophany. Hence, Eriugena insists upon the properly metaphorical character of divine self-creation, and states that "when... God is said to be made, this is said obviously by a figure of speech."[41] In this respect, the doctrine of the divinity's self-creation shares in the figurative character of every affirmation concerning the nature of God. But in another, more crucial sense, it indicates the condition for all knowledge and discourse about the divine nature:

> The Divine Essence which when it subsists by itself surpasses every intellect is correctly said to be created in those things which are made by itself and through itself and in itself and for itself, so that in them either by intellect, if they are only intellectual, or by sense, if they are sensible, it comes to be known by those who investigate it in the right spirit.[42]

Significantly, the analogue which Eriugena posits for the transcendence and self-creating accessibility of God is Man's intellect and its formative expression in phantasiae and language. In itself "invisible and known only to God and ourselves", the mind assumes sensible form in its phantasiae and symbolic expressions.[43] The theophanic interpretation of

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[41] Ibid. p. 205 (516C): "Dum... fieri Deus dicitur figurata quadam locutione dici manifestum est." The immediate context here is a discussion of Aristotle's category of passio. Cf. also 458A: "metaphorica... id est a creatura ad creatorem translata."

[42] Ibid. pp. 65-67 (454C - D).

[43] Ibid. p. 65 (454B).

the analogia entis thus returns to the analogies of the mind and word, and thereby achieves a new speculative unity. For the relation between theophany and transcendence must be conceived as symbolic in the most comprehensive sense of the term, since symbolic expression provides a paradigm for Dionysius' and Eriugena's ontology. A symbol's truth lies in the reality which it makes manifest, yet apart from the symbol, the reality and its meaning remain inaccessible. Further, just as Cusanus' first unity of the mind constitutes a transcendental totality within the mind's progressing circularity, the intellect for John the Scot remains in its simple unity in relation to its manifold expressions:

> Our intellect..., although invisible and incomprehensible in itself, is manifested and comprehended by certain signs when it is, as it were, embodied in sounds or letters or gestures. Although it is thus made apparent without, it always remains invisible within; and while it bursts out into various forms comprehensible to the senses, it does not abandon the always incomprehensible condition of its nature.[44]

With the model of the intellect and its symbolic expression in mind, we may now turn to Eriugena's elaborate paradoxes concerning transcendence and theophany, and see them with a new clarity. Regarding the unity of God and creation, he writes that

> creation subsists in God, and God is created in creation in a remarkable and ineffable way, manifesting

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[44]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 633B-C. Here John the Scot echoes Augustine's teaching on the 'interior word' and its expression as an image of the verbum Dei and Incarnation; cf. supra, pp. 41-43.

> Himself, and, though invisible, making Himself visible; and, though incomprehensible, making Himself comprehensible; and, though hidden, revealing Himself;...though superessential, making Himself essential;... though simple, making Himself compound;... though infinite, making Himself finite; though uncircumscribed, making Himself circumscribed.... The Maker of all, made in all, begins to be eternal and, though motionless, moves into everything and becomes all things in all things.[45]

Subsisting in itself, divinity remains transcendent and ineffable, and cannot be known properly in the precision of its nature. Yet the truth of the created, hierarchic order of being lies precisely in the uncreated first principle which it manifests, as the truth of symbols lies in the expressive power of the intellect. Moreover, this manifestation constitutes the 'essence' of creation, and thereby establishes the condition for the possibility of knowledge and discourse (albeit metaphorical and conjectural) concerning the divine nature. Symbolic expression thus takes on an ontological bearing, as the locus for the analogies of being and of the mind. For, as Chenu has remarked concerning Dionysius, "The symbol is the true expression of reality; or better yet, it is through it [i.e., the symbol] that reality fulfills itself."[46] As in Augustine's and Cusanus' interpretations of the analogy of the word, the universe of things subsists in

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[45] Ibid. 678C - D.

[46] Chenu, La théologie au douzième siècle, p. 177; cf. René Roques, L'univers dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le pseudo-Denys (Paris: Aubier - Editions Montaigne, 1954), p. 104.

and through the divine Verbum, and creation is the expression of this Verbum in alterity and multiplicity.[47] In this way, creation comes to be conceived as a symbolic field, manifesting its uncreated Lord.

As we noted in the previous chapter, Cusanus also makes extensive use of the expressionist paradigm; indeed, it provides the structural principle for the analogy of the word. In the Compendium the manifestation of the mind in speech becomes an analogue for the uncreated Logos' self-manifestation in creation.[48] Similarly the non-aliud indicates not only the presupposition of thought and language, but also the quidditas which underlies all being. The non-aliud therefore signifies the nexus of the analogies of the mind and of being. Commenting on Aristotle's critique of previous attempts to specify the first principle of all things, Cusanus claims to find the resolution of this critique in the non-aliud. For Aristotle "saw that the substance of

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[47] Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae 642C - 643B, where John the Scot is commenting on Dionysius' discussion of 'perfection' as a divine name (On the Divine Names, XIII). The relation between the Father, the Word and creation forms the central theme of Eriugena's Homélie sur le prologue de Jean; cf. pp. 320-32 (287A), 238-40 (287D - 288A), 246 (288D), 288 (293C); also pp. 269-73 (291B - C), where Eriugena argues for a correlation between the four senses of Scripture and the four elements of the world — a truly bizarre analogy, unless we recall that both Scripture and creation are expressions of the divine Verbum.

[48] Cusanus, Compendium, Schriften II, p. 706 (VII); cf. supra, pp. 49-50; also Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 558 (prop. XII): "Creatura igitur est ipsius creatoris sese definientis seu lucis, quae Deus est, se ipsam manifestatio, quasi mentis se ipsam definientis propalatio, qua

things is not something [over against] another," and hence questioned the definitions of this primary substance as one, fire, water, etc., since "he observed that all these are something other."[49] Every designation is knit within a fabric of multiplicity and alterity; consequently, the quest for the absolute quidditas of things must ultimately lead to the non-aliud:

> For the other itself denies that it is the object sought for. But if it [i.e., the primary substance] ought to be not other, then clearly it must be not-other from every other. However, that which ought to be not other from every other certainly cannot be named differently. It is therefore correctly named 'the non-aliud'.[50]

The dialectic of alterity and negation, whereby Cusanus establishes the foundation of language and thought in the non-aliud, here assumes a properly ontological function, expressing the integral principle of being. For in its simplicity and totality, the non-aliud at once transcends and grounds the alterity of beings.

Further, since the non-aliud signifies both the pervasive condition of 'substance' and a name of God, it articu-

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praesentibus fit per vivam orationem et remotis per nuntium aut scripturam."

[49] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 526 (XVIII): "Vidit enim rerum substantiam non esse aliud quidquam et ideo de ente et de uno... et omnibus dubitavit, an aliquid horum foret rerum substantia, quoniam illa omnia aliud esse perspiciebat." Cusanus cites Aristotle, Metaphysics, 996a & 1028b.

[50] Ibid. p. 528 (XVIII): "Aliud enim se ipsum quaesitum negat. Quodsi non aliud esse debet, ab omni sane alio non-aliud esse necesse est. Sed hoc, quod ab omni alio aliud esse non debet, certe aliter nominari non potest. Non-aliud igitur recte nominabitur."

lates the constitutive relatedness between God and creation. As the absolute presupposition and defining power of language, the non-aliud contains all language within itself and becomes manifest through the alterity of speech. Similarly, within the context of the analogia entis, the non-aliud contains all being within a simple unity, and becomes manifest in the alterity of creation:

> Through that which I see God beforehand (anterioriter) in the A / non-aliud /, I see that in Him all things are He himself; but through that which I see God afterwards (posterioriter) in the other, I perceive that He is all things in all things.[51]

The non-aliud thus expresses both the inherence of all things within the divine nature, and the manifestation of God throughout the created order. In terms of Dionysius and John the Scot, all things inhere in God as in their 'essential' truth, and creation is itself theophany.

Yet Cusanus' contribution to the theophanic interpretation of creation is not limited to his analyses of the non-aliud and the analogy of the word. Indeed, he formulates still other structural principles which present theophany

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[51] Ibid. p. 516 (XV): "Per hoc igitur, quod Deum anterioriter ipsum A video, omnia in ipso ipsum video; per hoc vero, quod Deum posterioriter cerno in alio, ipsum in omnibus omnia esse cerno." At this point Cusanus is commenting on Dionysius' remarks concerning God as before (ante) all ages and as the 'age of ages' (On the Divine Names, X, 2-3). Cf. also De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 120 (II,vii): "Non enim aliud est Deum esse in mundo quam mundum esse in Deo"; and similarly De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 174 (I, xxii); De possest, Schriften II, p. 282.

with remarkable clarity and precision. Among these are some of Cusanus' most novel and distinctive themes: the couple complicatio-explicatio, and the coordination of the possibility-of-becoming (posse-fieri) and the unconditioned plenitude of power (Possest or Posse ipsum). Therefore, we shall conclude our discussion of theophany with a presentation of these themes in their interrelation.

The simplest point of departure for understanding Cusanus' use of the terms 'complicatio' and 'explicatio' may be found among his recurring mathematical analogies. Complicatio and explicatio are given only in an indissoluble polarity, since out of the 'complicating' or enfolding point and unity, the line and number respectively are 'explicated' or unfolded.[52] Unity contains (complicat) within itself the entire ordered multiplicity of number; and in its simplicity the point contains not only the line, but also its further explications, the plane surface and the bodily solid. The term 'complicatio' thus indicates a radically simple unity within which subsequent 'explications' are present not as plurality or magnitude within an alien container, but as the complicative unity itself: in the point all lines and magnitude are the point, just as in unity all number is one. Moreover, nowhere in the line — and hence in every geometric

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[52]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 558 (IX); and, concerning the "punoti potentia", Augustine, De quantitate animae XI,18 - XII,21 (PL 32, 1045-47).

construct — is anything other than the point to be found; nor is anything to be found in number except unity. For number and magnitude unfold or manifest unity and the point in plurality and extension. By means of a reductio, Cusanus therefore discerns the principle and condition for the possibility of the line in the point, and those of number in unity:

> The line is the development (evolutio) of the point, the surface that of the line, and bodily solidity that of the surface. Hence, if you abolish the point, all magnitude vanishes; and if you abolish unity, all multiplicity vanishes.[53]

Similarly, the reciprocity of complicatio and explicatio provides a rule for understanding the relations between rest and motion, the present and time, etc. Motion explicates the complicative unity of rest, as time does that of the present or nunc.[54]

When taken in its full symbolic force and applied to the relatedness between God and creation, the polarity of complicatio and explicatio illumines both the inherence of all things in God, and the theophanic manifestation of God in

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[53]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 556 (IX): "Linea itaque est puncti evolutio et superficies linae et soliditas superficiei. Unde si tollis punctum deficit omnis magnitudo; si tollis unitatem, deficit omnis multitudo." Cusanus immediately proceeds to define 'evolutio': "Evolutionem id est explicationem." Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 330ff (II,iii); De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 32 (I,x); also, Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 137 (V,6); and, for similar formulations concerning the unit or monad, Eriugena, De divisione naturae 621C, 639C - D, 652C - D, 881C - 882D, 901A - B.

[54]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 560 (IX).

all things.

> God is the complicatio and explicatio of all things; and since He is the complicatio, everything in Him is He himself; and since He is the explicatio, in all things He is that which they are, just as truth [is] in its image.[55]

The truth, precision and quiddity of all things thus lies in the infinite unity of divine power, conceived as the "complicationum complicatio".[56] Like Eriugena's metaphor of divine self-creation, the complicatio-explicatio polarity signifies a relational structure within which the created universe manifests —or more precisely, unfolds — the unity and unconditional simplicity of the divine nature in alterity and multiplicity. Nor ought the immediacy of this relatedness to be understated. For just as the point and unity are constitutively present in every magnitude and number, the unfolding of absolute unity entails "the presence, whole and entire, of the 'complicating' unity in each of its 'explications'."[57]

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[55]Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 336 (II,iii): "Scias Deum omnium rerum complicationem et explicationem, et ut est complicatio omnia in ipso esse ipse, et ut est explicatio ipsum in omnibus esse id quod sunt, sicut veritas in imagine." Heron's translation of this passage has not been cited, because it obscures the play between complicatio and explicatio (Of Learned Ignorance, p. 79).

[56]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 506 (IV); cf. also p. 560 (IX); and De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 44 (XXIII): "Bene vidit Aristoteles in Metaphysica [1072a] quomodo omnia in principio primo ipsum sunt."

[57]Maurice de Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues (Paris: Aubier, 1941), p. 126; emphasis in text. Cf. also Thomas P. McTighe, "Meaning of the Couple Complicatio-Explicatio in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa", American

While the couple complicatio-explicatio thus brings the clarity of a precise structural principle to the interpretation of theophany, it may nevertheless appear excessively formal and abstract. Its very simplicity may suggest an artifice of Pythagorean magic. Yet for Cusanus the entire question of mathematics is bound up with the mind's creativity and quest for knowledge. For not only does mathematics provide the most adequate symbols in the hunt for wisdom,[58] but also "the mind alone numbers; if the mind is removed, number is no longer distinguished."[59] Numbers and geometric forms are neither eternal nor objectified entities, but constructs of the mind as it seeks a dynamic assimilation between itself and the world.[60] Therefore, the locus for the mathematical complicationes of unity and the point lies in the mind, from whose creative power the explications of magnitude and plurality emerge. With this crucial considera-

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Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings, XXXII (1958), pp. 210-11.

[58] Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 230 (I, xi).

[59] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 526 (VI): "Nam sola mens numerat; sublata mente numerus discretus non est"; cf. also p. 528 (VI), regarding the necessity of number for knowledge and assimilation; and Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 207.

[60] In this respect Cusanus' view of mathematics differs from that of Augustine, for whom mathematics discloses a region of immutable certainty which is independent of the mind and its constructive power. Cf. Augustine, De quantitate animae VI, 10 - XII, 21 (PL 32, 1041-47); and F. Edward Cranz, "St. Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa in the Tradition of Western Christian Thought", Speculum, XXVIII (1953), pp. 314-15.

tion before us, it becomes clear that the genesis of number and magnitude within the mind provides the ground for the analogical use of the complicatio-explicatio polarity as a metaphysical principle. For it is from the analogia mentis that this principle derives its force:

> Number, which is a development (explicatio) of unity, presupposes an act of reason.... Number, then, is accounted for by our mind, which distinguishes the many individuals that share a common nature; and similarly the plurality of things is accounted for by God's mind, in which by reason of its all-embracing (complicante) unity, the multiplicity of things exists without plurality.[61]

As distinguishing, integrative and numbering power, the mind images the infinite creative power of God; mathematical number, like language, unfolds the mind's power, as the plurality of existing things manifests divine creativity. Indeed, the multiplicity of things comes to be seen as the number of the divine mind. Hence, commenting on the Pythagoreans, Cusanus' Layman remarks that

> they speak symbolically and rationally of the number which proceeds from the divine mind, and of which mathematical number is the image. For just as our mind is related to the infinite, eternal mind, so is the number of our mind related to that number.[62]

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[61] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 77; Schriften I, p. 332 (II,111); cf. also De possest, Schriften II, p. 318.

[62] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 522 (VI): "symbolice ac rationabiliter locuti sunt de numero, qui ex divina mente procedit, cuius mathematicus est imago. Siout enim mens nostra se habet ad infinitam aeternam mentem, ita numerus nostrae mentis ad numerum illum."

Within this context of the analogia mentis, the metaphysical import of the complicatio-explicatio polarity rests not simply on the reification of a formal principle, but on its character as the sign for the dynamic relatedness between the mind and its constructs, and between the divine nature and the created world.

Cusanus emphasizes the dynamics of the complicatio and explicatio polarity by integrating it within the framework of the power inherent in creation (posse-fieri) and the novel names of God, Possest and Posse ipsum. In the De visione Dei Cusanus presents a reflective movement which leads from the generative power (virtus seminalis) of a tree's seed, to the absolute power of God. Contemplating a large, spreading nut tree, Cusanus first notes the tremendous, yet limited, complicative power of its seed:

> I perceive with the eye of the mind that the tree existed in its seed, not as I now behold it, but potentially (virtualiter). I consider with care the marvellous might (virtus) of that seed, wherein the entire tree, and all its nuts, and all trees existed in the generative power of the nuts. And I perceive how that power can never be fully explicated (explicabilis) in any time measured by the motions of the heavens, yet how that same power, though beyond explication, is still limited (contracta), because it availeth only in this particular species of nuts.[63]

Because of the necessary limitation of its power, the seed

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[63] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Emma G. Salter (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960, reprint of the 1928 ed.), pp. 28-29; Schriften III, p. 118 (VII).

of no particular species can contain (complicare) all the possibilities of becoming. The acorn cannot develop into the pine or maple, to say nothing of species beyond the arboreal. Nor, given this alterity among species and their seeds, can their simple sum total account for the power inherent throughout creation. A principle must be sought which, like the non-aliud, grounds the reciprocally limiting alterity of these powers in a radically complicative unity. Hence, Cusanus presses beyond the conception of generative power to that of an unlimited, absolute creativity, which is "the principle giving being to every seminal and non-seminal power"[64]:

> This Power (virtus)... giveth to every generative power that power in which it enfoldeth (complicat) the virtual tree, together with all things necessary to an actual tree...; wherefore this principle and cause containeth in itself, as cause, alike enfolded (complicite) and absolutely, whatever it giveth to its effect.... Whence I behold in it that nut-tree, not in its limited, generative power, but as in the cause and creating energy (vis) of that generative power. Accordingly, I see that tree as a certain explication of generative power, and the seed as a certain explication of almighty power.[65]

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[64]Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 118 (VII): "principium dans esse omni virtute seminali et non seminali." Salter is less literal at this point, reading "this Power... which giveth being to all generative, and other power."

[65]Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter; pp. 29-30; Schriften III, p. 118 (VII): "... ubi video arborem illam nucum non ut in contracta virtute sua seminali, sed ut in causa et vi conditrice illius virtutis seminalis. Et video arborem illam quandam explicationem virtutis seminalis et semen quandam explicationem omnipotentis virtutis."

Completing the dialectic of complicatio and explicatio, Cusanus insists on the simple identity within the complicative powers. For, "just as in the seed the tree is not a tree but generative power,... so the generative power in its cause, which is the power of powers (virtus virtutum) is not generative power, but Absolute Power."[66] Hence, through the interlacing themes of power and complicatio-explicatio, Cusanus concludes with the invocation that "Thou, my God, art Absolute Power and, by reason of this, the Nature of all natures."[67]

The example of the nut tree and seed brings into focus one of Cusanus' fundamental relational structures, that of the posse-fieri and the Possest or Posse ipsum. In the De venatione sapientiae, Cusanus seeks the indubitable presupposition for philosophy, and claims to find it in the maxim: quod impossibile fieri non fit, what cannot become is not.[68] In this apparent tautology, Cusanus discerns the condition for all being in the possibility of its becoming. For it is precisely the becoming of things with which he is concerned, and with the quest for the principle of that genesis. Some-

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[66] Ibid. p. 30; Schriften III, p. 120 (VII). Cf. also Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 276.

[67] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 30; Schriften III, p. 120 (VII): "Sed tu Deus meus est vis absoluta et ob hoc natura naturarum omnium."

[68] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 12; (II). Cusanus claims the authority of Aristotle for this principle; cf. De caelo 274b.

thing is only what it can become, as the nut tree develops out of its seed's power. Yet the maxim, quod impossibile fieri non fit, encompasses more than this simple tautology, since it also accounts for the inadequacy of something's actual achievement to its possibility-of-becoming (posse-fieri). As a sapling, a nut tree does not exhaust the power in its seed; indeed, this seminal power can be fully explicated neither in the tree's maturity, nor even "in any time measured by the motions of the heavens."[69] Similarly, no individual person can exhaust the total power of humanity. For

> although the possibility-of-becoming man is determined actually in you in such a way that you are, and this determination is your essence, nevertheless the posse-fieri of man is in no way perfected and determined in you.[70]

A man can become a rhetor, mathematician, philosopher or mechanic, yet he can never fully achieve all the things possible to humanity.[71] In the sphere of becoming, there can always be greater and less, more or less precision, and a coincidence of posse and esse here becomes inconceivable.

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[69] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, pp. 28-29; Schriften III, p. 118 (VII).

[70] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 136 (XXIX): "Posse fieri hominem licet in te sit actu modo tali, uti es, determinatum, quae determinatio est essentia tua, tamen posse fieri hominis nequaquam est in te perfectum et determinatum."

[71] Ibid.

Therefore, since no creature is fully what it can be, there is inherent in creation a division between actuality (esse) and power or capacity (posse). Conceived as the general and perpetual condition for the created order, the posse-fieri is presupposed and explicated in every actuality, and yet nowhere does it find a total articulation. The posse-fieri thus signifies both the dynamic constitution of actuality out of possibility, and the inadequacy of created being to its power and principle.

In its twofold function as constitutive and yet never entirely actual, the posse-fieri cannot itself be the ultimate ground for the genesis of all things. For Cusanus, the conception of an absolute power or cause requires a radically complicative unity of actuality and power. He therefore insists upon an ultimate coincidence of posse-fieri and actual being in eternity,[72] and proceeds to formulate a new name of God: 'Possest', an amalgam of 'posse' and 'est' which indicates that "god alone is that which He can be."[73] Still more precisely and emphatically, "Posse est, that is, 'can-be itself is'. And since what is, is in act, therefore 'can-be is' is equivalent to 'can-be is in act'. Let it be called

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[72] Ibid. p. 58 (XIII).

[73] Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 274: "Solus Deus id sit, quod esse potest." Cf. Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 56 (XIII).

'possest'."[74] In light of this novel divine name, the relatedness between God and creation comes to be interpreted as that between the Possest and the posse-fieri. Cusanus' general conception of potency or power in terms of a dynamic fecundity[75] provides a firm bond between the generative power inherent in creation and the infinite creativity of God. For within the structure of 'posse-fieri' and 'Possest', the common element of 'posse' makes explicit the dynamic interrelation between both terms. While the Possest is the absolute complicatio of all power and possibility, the posse-fieri is the perpetual, moving image or "participable likeness of God."[76] Creation is thus not an autonomous realm over against uncreated divinity, but rather its manifestation or appearance through the posse-fieri. "What therefore is the world, if not the appearance (apparitio)of the invisible God? ... The world reveals the creator so that he may be known."[77]

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[74]Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 284: "posse est, scilicet quod ipsum posse sit. Et quia, quod est, actu est, ideo posse esse est tantum quantum posse esse actu. Puta vocetur possest." Cusanus follows this definition with a reference to Exodus 3:14. Cf. also Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 56 (XIII).

[75]Cf. Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 301; and Carlos Valverde, "Naturaleza y ser en la escolastica y en Nicolas de Cusa", in La Filosofia della Natura nel Medioevo (Milan: Societa Editrice Vita e Pensero, 1966), pp. 714-15.

[76]Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 26 (VI): "participabilis Dei similitudo"; cf. De possest, Schriften II, p. 276.

[77]Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 354: "Quid ergo est mundum nisi invisibilis Dei apparitio?... Mundus

In the complicative unity of the Possest and its imaging through the posse-fieri, the twofold theme of the 'essential' inherence of all things in God and theophanic manifestation throughout creation comes to be seen as a thoroughly dynamic relational structure — that is, as a structure of creative power, of dynamis. In the De apice theoriae Cusanus brings this relatedness into still sharper focus with another divine name: Posse ipsum. In a single bold stroke, he telescopes the dialectic of Possest and posse-fieri into a unified expression, so that

> Posse ipsum, which is God, and posse which supports the possibility and actuality of all inferior beings, would not be two posse's of different orders, but linked together as a Posse which is a plenitude and a posse which is the reflection and manifestation thereof.[78]

Like Eriugena's metaphor of divine self-creation, the posse ipsum signifies the divine nature within the very act of origination, where this absolute 'quiddity' appears diversely in the variety of beings, "with greater power in one than in another."[79]

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igitur revelat suum creatorem ut cognoscatur." At this point Cusanus is glossing I Corinthians 13:12. Cf. also De possest, Schriften II, p. 270; Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, pp. 540-42; De apice theoriae, Schriften II, p. 370; Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 678C - D.

[78] Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa", p. 99. Cf. Cusanus, De apice theoriae, Schriften II, pp. 378 & 384; and Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 155-57 (VIII, 2 - 5).

[79] Cusanus, De apice theoriae, Schriften II, p. 370: "in uno potentius quam in alio."

Now, in terms of Cusanus' dialectic of relatedness, Dionysius' 'erotic' conception of the Good and Eriugena's schema of the division of nature and divine self-creation take on greater clarity and life. What is at issue for all three philosophers is a theophanic dialectic whose paradigm is symbolic expression, and whose originating and enduring principle lies in an infinite creativity. The polarity of complicatio and explicatio articulates the internal structure of theophany, and explicitly links it to the analogy of the mind. Further, the posse-fieri, Possest and Posse ipsum elucidate the wholly dynamic character of divine self-manifestation, and thereby provide structural principles for comprehending the vigorous 'eros' of the Dionysian Good in its emanation, and the constitutive descent of Eriugena's uncreated nature through self-creation. The diverse principles and metaphors called into play within this section thus fuse into a unified whole not only around the common theme of theophany, but more precisely around the way in which this theme is elaborated. Causality, emanation, eros, self-creation, the division of nature, symbolic expression, Possest and Posse ipsum: every term indicates a relational structure which is fundamentally dynamic in character. In this convergence of systematic orientation, Dionysius, John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa — and perhaps the Neoplatonic tradition generally — provide an alternative to

essentialist or substantialist metaphysics. The central categories of their theophanic doctrine are those of principle, power and cause, and not those of substance or essence.

And here the exception within the terminology proves the rule. Dionysius, Eriugena and Cusanus all affirm that God alone is the 'essence' of all things — an affirmation that would seem to contradict the general tendency of their thought, and to postulate a fixed essence at the foundation of all their speculative constructs. We have previously noted the modifications in the doctrine of ousia or essence for Dionysius and John the Scot.[80] Set within the dialectic of procession and return, essence becomes a relational concept, indicating at once a primordial 'communication' of the divine nature, and a condition for subordinate entities' participation of that nature. But it is Cusanus who radically and explicitly transforms the entire question of essence and substance. In seeking the quiddity which is "the unchangeable subsistence of all substances", he turns to the question of possibility and power:

> I see it to be necessarily acknowledged that this hypostasis or subsistence can be. And since it can be, then without can-be itself (posse ipsum) it cannot be. For how could it be without posse? Therefore, the posse ipsum without which nothing whatever can be, is that without which nothing can be subsistent. Hence it is the 'what' that is sought for, or quiddity itself

[80] Cf. supra, pp. 92 & 100.

without which nothing whatever could be.[81] Quiddity, hypostasis and substance are themselves transposed into the order of power and causality, as the Posse ipsum provides a name for God which simultaneously expresses the dynamic presupposition of all being.

Moreover, Dionysius, John the Scot and Cusanus assert that in itself the divine nature is beyond all being, essence and substance. Hence, not only is the conception of quiddity or essence modified within the relational dynamics of theophany, but it is also denied the precision of metaphysical ultimacy. Inadequate to transcendence and caught up in the relational dynamics of theophany, being and essence share in the fundamentally symbolic character of every divine 'communication', and hence in the conjectural status of every divine name.

3. Transcendence

As we turn now from theophany to transcendence, the focus of our discussion must shift from the symbolic manifestation of God in alterity to the precision of the divine nature subsisting in itself. Within this shift the limits of

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[81] Cusanus, De apice theoriae, Schriften II, p. 364: "Deinde vidi necessario fateri ipsam rerum hypostasim seu subsistentiam posse esse. Et quia potest esse, utique sine posse ipso non potest esse. Quomodo enim sine posse posset? Ideo posse ipsum sine quo nihil quicquam potest, est quo nihil subsistentius esse potest. Quare est ipsum quid quaesitum seu quidditas ipsa, sine qua non potest esse quicquam."

thought and language emerge, since it entails a series of contradictions which seem to call the entire hermeneutic of the divine names into question. For if the theophanic relatedness between God and creation forms the condition for the possibility of discourse about the divine, how can the precision of the divine nature "in its own original being" be a subject for reflection and naming? And since knowledge and language involve the ineradicable mediation of mind and symbol,[82] how can they approach transcendence apart from its self-disclosing communications or revelations? Dionysius states the dilemma in its full scope and force:

> If It [the Thearchy] is greater than all Reason and all knowledge, and hath Its firm abode altogether beyond Mind and Being, and circumscribes, compacts, embraces and anticipates all things while Itself is altogether beyond the grasp of them all, and cannot be reached by any perception, imagination, conjecture, name, discourse, apprehension or understanding, how then is our discourse concerning the Divine Names to be accomplished, since we see that the Super-Essential Godhead is unutterable and nameless?[83]

Although the appropriate attitude before divine transcendence may ultimately be "an absolute silence of word and thought,"[84] a premature collapse into such contemplative silence would scarcely elucidate the problem before us. For

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[82]Cf. Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 58 (I, xiii).

[83]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 59 (I,5).

[84]Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, III; PG 3, 1033C. Cf. Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 154 (XXXIII).

if we are to be faithful to the quest for meaning, our ignorance cannot simply be posited as final, and all speculative endeavor brought to a grinding halt. Rather, the conditions and structure of our ignorance must be explored, so that it may become a genuinely learned ignorance.[85] Dionysius accordingly seeks a provisional resolution for this dilemma in the via negativa, since "there can be no more fitting method to celebrate Its [the transcendent Thearchy's] praises than to deny It every manner of Attribute."[86] The transition from theophany to transcendence thus entails a corresponding shift in intentional mode from symbol and affirmation to negation. The via negativa becomes fundamental for the hermeneutic of the divine names because, within the very process of naming God, negation acts to establish the limits of this process. Grounded in the self-revealing divine 'energies', the cataphatic way affirms names of God metaphorically; while the apophatic way signifies the transcendence proper to the divine nature by negating those names affirmed in the cataphatic way. In this distance between what is affirmed metaphorically and its 'proper' negation, lies the pre-eminence of the via negativa: "There is more truth in saying that God is not any of the things that are predicated of Him than in saying

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[85] Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 196 (I,1): "Cum appetitus [for knowledge] in nobis frustra non sit, desideramus scire nos ignorare. Hoc si ad plenum assequi poterimus, doctam ignorantiam assequemur."

[86] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 60 (I,5).

that He is."[87] The full import of these methodological implications will be discussed in the following chapter. At present we need to examine the issue of transcendence itself, as formulated by Dionysius, John the Scot and Nicholas of Cusa. While stress will be placed upon the question of negativity as an ontological category, we shall also restore the counterpoint (so to speak) between the themes of theophany and transcendence. We shall therefore reiterate certain themes from the preceding section, focusing upon the transcendent and negative dimension within them.

As Ivánka has noted, Dionysius' discussion of the divine names moves from the 'Good' to the 'One'.[88] More precisely, this progression within the treatise reflects the theophanic dialectic of procession and return, and points towards the absolute transcendence of superessential unity. For the name 'Good' signifies the principle of unlimited fecundity from which the hierarchy of being — and hence the multiplicity of divine names — proceeds; while the name 'One' signifies the principle within which the

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[87] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 217 (522B). Cf. also Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 189 (XIII,3); Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 294-96 (I,xxvi), "quomodo negationes sunt verae et affirmationes insufficientes in theologicis"; and Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 26.

[88] Ivánka, Plato Christianus, p. 241; cf. also Théry, "Jean Scot introducteur de Denys", p. 96.

manifold beings and divine names are ultimately integrated, and which nonetheless remains radically transcendent, beyond the process of emanation and return. Since the One coincides with the Good,[89] the treatise thus comes full circle when it returns to the 'undifferenced' unity which remains ontologically prior to its 'differentiating' manifestations.[90] Therefore, in discussing the One, Dionysius turns first to its theophanic and integrative power, and thence to its unconditional transcendence.

Citing the example of mathematical unity which is participated by all number, Dionysius writes that

> everything and each part of everything participates in the One, and on the existence of the One all other existences are based, and the One Cause of all things is not one of the many things in the world, but is before all Unity and Multiplicity and gives to all Unity and Multiplicity their definite bounds.... And without the One there can be no Multiplicity; yet contrariwise the One can exist without the Multiplicity just as the Unit exists before all multiplied Number.[91]

Here the One is the causal and defining principle which grounds the hierarchic procession of being. In Cusanus' terms, it is the absolute complicatio, "wherein all things are knit together in one and possess a supernal Unity and

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[89] Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, p. 242: "Hinc unum et bonum ipsum Deum dicimus, nec illa sunt in ipso diversa, sed sunt ipsum unum." Cusanus is commenting on Proclus' term 'autounum'. Surely the detailed use of Proclus by both Cusanus and Dionysius helps to account for the historical and systematic unity of the learned ignorance.

[90] Cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 80 (II,11).

[91] Ibid. pp. 185-86 (XIII,2); cf. also pp. 137-38 (V,6), and supra, pp. 107-08.

superessentially pre-exist"[92]; in the One all things are unity itself, and in its explicatio only this unity is unfolded into multiplicity and alterity. In this respect, the discussion of the One appears simply to recapitulate that of the Good.

Yet there is a significant modification of accent, as Dionysius insinuates transcendence into the very dialectic of causality. For in accord with Proclus' maxim that "Every productive cause is superior to what it produces,"[93] Dionysius insists upon the absolute simplicity and transcendence of the One as originating principle. The one cause of all things is unconditionally prior to the entire dialectic of procession and return; it is

> before all distinctions of One and Many, Part and Whole, Definiteness and Indefiniteness, Finitude and Infinitude; giving definite shape to all things that have Being, and to Being itself; the Cause of everything and of all together — a Cause both co-existent and pre-existent and transcendent, and all these things at once; beyond existent Unity itself, and giving shape to existent Unity itself.[94]

Commenting on this passage, Cusanus writes that the superessential One is prior to that unity which is over against

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[92] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 187 (XIII,3).

[93] Proclus, The Elements of Theology, p. 9 (prop. 7). In his commentary, Dodds states that "This is the principle on which the whole structure of Neoplatonism is really founded" (p. 193).

[94] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 187-88 (XIII,3); cf. also p. 167 (IX,9).

multiplicity.[95] Yet this latter, 'existent' unity presupposes and manifests the superessential One. Therefore, precisely as cause and principle, the One both becomes theophanically manifest and remains unconditionally transcendent. For in its 'communication' the divine nature "becomes differentiated without loss of Undifference; and multiplied without loss of Unity; from its Oneness it becomes manifold, while yet remaining within Itself."[96] The entire polarity of theophany and transcendence is therefore disclosed within the very structure of the One's primordial causality, so that "the Universal and Transcendent Cause must both be nameless and also possess the names of all things."[97]

Taking his lead from the transcendence inherent in universal causality, Dionysius proceeds to an affirmation of the radical transcendence of the divine nature in its precision. As in Plotinus and Proclus,[98] this leap entails a

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[95]Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 514-16 (XV). Cf. supra, pp. 71-72.

[96]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 79 (II,1); cf. also pp. 60 (I,5), & 174 (XI,1); Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 643A-B; Plotinus, Enneads VI,ix,3; and Beierwaltes, Proklos, p. 335 (glossing Proclus, Theol. Plat. II,7,101).

[97]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 62 (I,7). Vanneste's distinction between 'universal causality' and 'absolute transcendence' in Dionysius therefore lacks precision, since transcendence is implicated within this causality; cf. Vanneste, Le mystère de Dieu, pp. 130ff.

[98]Cf. Plotinus, Enneads V,v,6 and VI,ix,5; Proclus, The Elements of Theology, p. 109 (prop. 123).

convergence of the themes of ineffability, negativity and transcendence. For, beyond the reach of any created power, the transcendent divinity possesses

> no name, nor can It be grasped by the reason; It dwells in a region beyond us, where our feet cannot tread. Even the title of 'Goodness' we do not ascribe to It because we think such a name suitable; but desiring to frame some conception and language about this Its ineffable nature, we consecrate as primarily belonging to It the name we most revere.... Nevertheless the actual truth must still be far beyond us.[99]

Since reason and language are bound to the alterity and multiplicity of being, that which transcends all being — the superessential (hyperousion) unity — can be neither known nor expressed with precision.[100] Hence, all the divine names, even the 'Good' and the 'One',[101] come to be seen as inadequate to divine transcendence. In Cusanus' terms, the names of God are conjectural approaches to the one ineffable and precise name and verbum.

To designate transcendence more adequately, Dionysius turns to the via negativa, since in negation the limits and imprecision of every conjectural name of God are recollected. Therefore, the Mystical Theology concludes with a sequence of mounting negations, almost doxological in character, which

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[99]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 188-89 (XIII,3).

[100]Cf. Ibid. p. 59 (I,4); also Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, p. 254; De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 524 (XVII).

[101]Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, p. 240: "... per se subsistenti [Proclus' 'autohypostaton'] nullum nomen convenire, quoniam innominabile indicible et ineffabile est. Etiam sibi ii unum proprie non convenit."

culminate in the affirmation of radical transcendence beyond the grasp of either the cataphatic or apophatic way. The divine nature

> transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature -- free from every limitation and beyond them all.[102]

As we shall see in the following chapter, the logic of the divine names thus leads not only to the via negativa, but to the negation of the negations themselves. At this point, however, it is sufficient to reiterate the epistemological correlation between transcendence and negativity, in order to explore their ontological correlation in its depth and power.

Dionysius insists that within the hermeneutic of the divine names negation signifies not privation, but transcendent plenitude and excess. Hence, the designation 'not-being' coincides with 'superessential' (hyperousion).[103] Although this insight is fundamental and implicit throughout Dionysius' methodology, it is John the Scot who elaborates

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[102]Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 201 (V; PG 3, 1048B). Cf. On the Divine Names, p. 189 (XIII,3); Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 206 (I,iv); Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, pp. 458-60 (Bk. II).

[103]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 89 (IV,3), and 97 (IV,7). Regarding the general correlation between negation and plenitude, cf. On the Divine Names, p. 68 (II,3); Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 459D-460B; and infra, pp. 166ff.

its full metaphyisical implications. Eriugena is in accord with Dionysius when he writes, concerning 'nothing' (nihil) as a divine name, that it signifies

> the ineffable, incomprehensible and inaccessible clarity of the divine good which is unknown to all intellects, whether human or angelic, since it is superessential and supernatural. When it is thought through itself, it neither is, nor was, nor will be. For in no existing thing is it understood, since it is beyond all things. ... When the incomprehensible is understood in this way, it is not improperly called 'nothing' on account of its excellence.[104]

In the designation 'nothing', negation provides a peculiarly appropriate mode for signifying the transcendence of the uncreated nature in its precision, just as symbolic affirmation articulates its manifestation as self-creating theophany.

Further, Eriugena proceeds to express the bond between transcendence and theophany by integrating the divine name 'nothing' into his cosmogony. For as the superessential Good "begins to appear in its theophanies, it is said to proceed as though from nothing into something."[105] John the Scot's distinctive metaphor of divine self-creation here converges

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[104]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 680D-681A: "Ineffabilem et incomprehensibilem divinae bonitatis inaccessibilemque claritatem omnibus intellectibus sive humanis, sive angelicis incognitam — superessentialis est enim et supernaturalis — eo nomine significatam crediderim, quae dum per se ipsam cogitatur, neque est, neque erat, neque erit. In nullo enim intelligitur existentium, quia superat omnia.... Dum ergo incomprehensibilis intelligitur, per excellentiam nihilum non immerito vocitatur."

[105]Ibid. 681A: "in suis theophaniis incipiens apparere veluti ex nihilo in aliquid dicitur procedere."

upon the traditional doctrine of creation ex nihilo: creation out of nothing, that is, out of the transcendent negativity proper to the uncreated nature. Commenting on the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, Eriugena argues that this primordial 'nothing' cannot be the privation of essence or condition (habitudo), because privation presupposes a prior essence or condition. Privation therefore posits the world whose genesis has yet to be accounted for, or — if this be denied — leads into sheer nonsense, since it is incomprehensible "how the world was made from the absence or privation of things that never were."[106] Hence, the 'nothing' that is prior to creation can only be the superessential negativity of the uncreated nature in its precision, beyond all essence and condition.

> If someone were to say that neither the privation of condition nor the absence of some essence is signified in the name 'nothing', but rather the universal negation of all condition and essence, whether of substance or of accident, and simply of all things that can be said and understood, he would then conclude as follows: in that term, God is therefore necessarily named, for He alone is properly signified in the negation of all things that are, because He is exalted above everything that can be said and understood. For He is nothing of those things that are and are not; and He is better known in not-knowing.[107]

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[106] Ibid. 686C: "quomodo de absentia vel privatione rerum, quae nunquam erant, mundus factus est, non intelligo."

[107] Ibid. 686C - 687A: "Si vero quis dixerit, neque privationem habitudinis, neque absentiam alicujus essentiae nihil nomine significari, sed universalem totius habitudinis, et essentiae, vel substantiae, vel accidentis, et simpliciter omnium, quae dici et intelligi possunt, negationem, concludetur sic: eo igitur vocabulo Deum vocari necesse est, qui solus negatione omnium, quae sunt, proprie innuitur, quia super omne, quod dicitur et intelligitur, exaltatur, qui

Creation ex nihilo is therefore nothing other than creation ex Dei: it is the manifestation, the procession of transcendent negativity into alterity and affirmation. The uncreated nature which creates does so out of the 'nihil' proper to its transcendence, so that once again creation comes to be interpreted as theophany and divine self-creation. Negativity thus signifies transcendence in a twofold fashion: in its absolute precision, and as the originating principle from which the division of nature springs.

The primary emphasis of John the Scot's discussions of negativity nevertheless remains upon the unconditional transcendence of the uncreated nature subsisting in itself. We have repeatedly noted the connection between the themes of transcendence, unknowability and negation. But Eriugena presses this connection to its utmost limits when he denies essential knowability of the divine nature not only to all created intellects, but also to the divine nature itself. Like Cusanus, Eriugena insists that knowledge is contingent upon number and the differentiation among beings into wholes

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nullum eorum, quae sunt et quae non sunt, est, qui melius nesciendo scitur." Cf. also De divisione naturae, 643C - 635A; and Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, ed. Dondaine, p. 262 (IV,3): "Credimus enim ipsum [Deus] de nichilo omnia fecisse; nisi forte illud nichil ipse est qui, quoniam super omnia superessentialis extollitur et super omne quod dicitur et intelligitur glorificatur, quoniam in numero omnium quae sunt nullo modo collocatur."

and parts, forms, genus and species. Yet transcendence is prior to all being, essence and division of nature generally — and hence to the conditions necessary for knowledge. Therefore,

> How can the divine nature understand itself, what it is, since it is nothing? For it is above everything that is, because it itself is not being, but all being is from that which, by virtue of its excellence, is above all essence and substance.... God thus does not know what He is, since He is not a what; He is consequently incomprehensible in anything — both to Himself and to every intellect.[108]

As in Cusanus' non-aliud, transcendence finds articulation in the negation of the limits imposed by particularity. And with this negation, the essential unknowability of the divine nature comes into sharper focus since, as Cusanus states,

> All things that are understood are something, and therefore are not God. However, something is another what. Thus, if God were to be understood, He would be understood to be not other.[109]

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[108]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 589A-B: "Quomodo igitur divina natura seipsam potest intelligere, quid sit, cum nihil sit? Superat enim omne, quod est, quando nec ipsa est esse, sed ab ipsa est omne esse, quae omnem essentiam et substantiam virtute suae excellentiae superemінet.... Deus itaque nescit se, quid est, quia non est quid; incomprehensibilis quippe in aliquo et ipsi et omni intellectui." Cf. Werner Beierwaltes, "Das Problem des absoluten Selbstbewusstseins bei Johannes Scotus Eriugena", in Platonismus in der Mittelalters, ed. Beierwaltes (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), p. 499.

[109]Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 524 (XVII): "cum omnia, quae intelliguntur, sint aliquid, ideo non sunt Deus. Aliquid autem quid aliud est. Deus igitur, si intelligeretur, utique non esse aliud intelligeretur." Cusanus is glossing Dionysius' First Letter to Gaius (PG 3, 1065), "If anyone seeing God knew what he saw, he did not see Him, but only something of Him among things being and being known" (tr. Ronald F. Hathaway, from "The Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius", part II of Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters

In the negation of alterity and quiddity, the foundations of unknowability and ineffability thus become explicit; and with the reflective apprehension of these foundations, our ignorance begins to become learned. But it is Eriugena who explicitly draws the radical conclusion of an ignorance proper to God — an ignorance whose image is reflected in man's unknowing when confronting the questions of totality and transcendence.[110] Yet ignorance too is a determination, and hence not adequate to the precision of transcendence. Following the Dionysian procedure linking negativity to plenitude, Eriugena accordingly characterizes this divine self-ignorance as "the highest and true wisdom."[111]

In elaborating on this divine unknowability, John the Scot coordinates the theme of negativity with that of infinity. Every created being is bound "within the limits (termini) of its own nature,... confined in something, in measure and number and weight"; but God "alone is infinite, truly within and above all things."[112] Created being is essentially finite, while the uncreated nature pervades and transcends

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of Pseudo-Dionysius [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969], p. 131).

[110] Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 771B - D; and infra, pp. 242-43.

[111] Ibid. 594A: "Ipsa itaque ignorantia summa ac vera est sapientia."

[112] Ibid. 590A - B: "Nulla creatura est... quae non intra terminos propriae naturae in aliquo coartetur in mensura et numero et pondere.... [Deus] solus vere in omnibus supra omnia existat."

all created being in virtue of its infinity. As the transcendent ground of finitude, the uncreated nature cannot be understood in its precision — that is, its infinity — within the confines of its finite manifestations. For if God

> were to understand Himself in something, He would not disclose Himself as utterly infinite, incomprehensible and unnamable. Why, He says, do you ask my name?... If He rebukes the seeking of His name because it is unnamable above every name, what [would be His rebuke] if one sought His substance which, if it were something finite, would not lack a finite name? But since it is placed in no [name], because the infinite lacks all naming, it is unnamable.[113]

The infinity proper to transcendence can be neither understood nor adequately expressed in the finitude of its theophanies. Here the dialectic of particular quiddity and its negation finds its structural principle in the relation between the finite and infinite. For the limits necessary for every determination of a 'what' (quid) — and hence for knowledge and language — render impossible the precise articulation of that which transcends every limitation, the infinite.

For Nicholas of Cusa the question of infinity is also inextricably bound up with the issues of transcendence and

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[113] Ibid. 589C - D: "Nam si in aliquo seipsum cognosceret, non omnino infinitum et incomprehensibilem innominabilemque seipsum indicaret. Ut quid interrogas, inquit, nomen meum?... Si ergo increpat nomen suum quaerere, quia super omne nomen est, innominabile, quid, si quis quaerat ejus substantiam, quae, si in aliquo finito esset, finito nomine non careret? Quoniam vero in nullo substituitur, quia infinitus omni nominatione caret, innominabilis est."

unknowability. Infinity's transcendence can only be approached in the ways of negation and conjecture. Indeed, 'infinity' is itself a negative term, 'not-finite', and constitutes the very nerve of the via negationis. "According to this negative theology,... one word alone may be used of Him [God]: Infinite."[114] The essential imprecision of thought and language, their immersion in the sphere of the more-and-less, requires that the hermeneutic of the divine names be a process of unending conjecture. Since there is no thought or expression which cannot be more precise and appropriate, the infinite actuality of truth "can always be approached more closely, while remaining itself always unattainable as it is."[115] In other words, the posse-fieri of the mind and language consists in an unlimited capacity for assimilation to the absolute infinity of the Possest and Posse ipsum. As the maximum "than which there can be no greater," the Posse ipsum is "the infinite which is greater than everything measurable and comprehensible."[116] Here the

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[114] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 60; Schriften I, p. 294 (I,xxvi).

[115] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 60 (I,xiii): "... ut accedi possit semper quidem propinquius, ipsa semper, uti est, inattingibili remanente." Cf. also De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 190(II,xiii); Idiota de sapientiae, Schriften III, pp. 430-32 (Bk. I).

[116] Cusanus, De apice theoriae, Schriften II, p. 372: the Posse ipsum is "illud, quo non potest esse maius. Et hoc quidem est infinitum maius omni mensurabili seu comprehensibili." Cf. also De possest, Schriften II, pp. 314-16.

transcendent dimension of the Possest and Posse ipsum as divine names emerges precisely in terms of their infinity. Yet in their constitutive relatedness to the posse-fieri of the mind, these conjectural names also signify the foundation and telos of reflection: they indicate the limit — the terminus, or in Eriugena's terminology the ambitus — from and towards which reflection is oriented. The posse-fieri of the mind seeks an ever deeper participation in the infinite actuality and truth of the Possest. For Cusanus, therefore, the question of infinity turns towards the articulation of transcendence within the framework of a logic of unceasing conjecture — a logic which recollects its origin in the dynamics of the analogia entis.

These brief, suggestive remarks concerning Nicholas of Cusa are not intended to do justice to the full scope of his philosophy of infinity and conjecture. Rather, because of its crucial importance for the learned ignorance and for the entire hermeneutic of the divine names, Cusanus' understanding of infinity will be discussed in detail in chapter V, where the distinctive features of his conception of transcendence will also take on greater clarity. Before proceeding to these questions, however, we shall explore the logic of the divine names. Grounded in the fundamental paradox of theophany and transcendence, this conjectural logic culminates in Cusanus' twofold conception of the coincidentia oppositorum and infinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Logic of the Divine Names

In the Idiota de sapientia, Cusanus' Layman states that "Wisdom cries out in the very streets and her cry is how she dwells in the highest."[1] On the one hand divine wisdom is vividly present in the streets of the marketplace, while on the other it proclaims that it dwells in the highest. To comprehend this presence and proclamation, the hermeneutic of the divine names must not only insist upon the paradox of theophany and transcendence, but also establish procedures for thinking this paradox through. For inherent in the ontological polarity of theophany and transcendence is the properly logical problem of the relations among the divine names within which this polarity is expressed. What, then, are the modes of thought and speech which enable us to articulate the ontology of transcendence and theophany? How are these modes — and dialectic generally — related to the analogies of the mind and of being? Here we must turn to the logic of the divine names, so that the cry of wisdom may be heard with greater clarity, and traced from the streets to the highest.

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[1]Cusanus, Concerning Wisdom, tr. John P. Dolan, in Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas de Cusa (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 102; Schriften III, p. 422 (Bk. I). Cf. Proverbs 1:10.

In speaking of a logic of the divine names, our use of the term 'logic' will be twofold: first, in the general sense of the structural relations among the divine names; and secondly, in the more rigorous sense of Cusanus' coincidentia oppositorum and its concomitant critique of the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. In this twofold sense, logic lends formal precision to the hermeneutic of the divine names. Our exposition of this logic will begin with some general remarks on the relation between dialectic and the hermeneutic of the divine names. We shall then discuss the basic Dionysian distinction between the cataphatic and apophatic ways in some detail. Here, too, our emblem may be found in the Hermetic dictum that God is nameless and yet possesses the names of all things. For the cataphatic way embraces all the names which are affirmed of God "per metaforam a creatura ad creatorem",[2] whether these names be derived from the intelligible or the sensible world; and the apophatic way negates the affirmative names of God as inadequate to the precision and ineffable unity of the divine nature itself. In order to suggest the interrelation between these two principal viae, we shall comment on Dionysius' conception of dissimilar likenesses (anomoioi omoiotetes). Then, following the ascending dialectic of negation, we shall emphasize the primacy of the via negativa, and specify its

[2]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 461C.

internal structure in terms of Dionysius' paradoxical use of the prefix 'hyper'. After a brief consideration of the 'negation of the negations' and of the non-aliud's relation to the apophatic way, we shall conclude the chapter with a discussion of Cusanus' logic of coincidence.

1. Logic and Hermeneutics

The central issue in the logic of the divine names remains the appropriateness and limitations of the manifold names and modes of discourse concerning God. Hence, although this logic articulates the formal structure for the hermeneutic of the divine names, it cannot be seen merely as a formal structure, cut off from noetic and ontological considerations. Rather, within the hermeneutical context, the logical relations among the divine names are grounded in the analogies both of the mind and word, and of being. More precisely, the logic of the divine names articulates the creative synthesis of these analogies, since it expresses the concrete form of thinking itself, as the mind seeks its on-going assimilation to the world and transcendence.[3] For the fundamental logical modes of metaphysical reflection and discourse, the cataphatic and apophatic ways, simultaneously presuppose and

[3]Cf. Wilhelm Dupré, "Die Idee einer Neuen Logik bei Nikolaus von Kues", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, IV (1964), p. 362.

articulate both the ontological polarity of theophany and transcendence, and the double intentionality of the mind as a power of affirmation and negation. We have previously noted that theophany establishes the conditions for the cataphatic way's symbolic truth, while absolute transcendence necessitates the apophatic way.[4] Moreover, the analogy of the mind and word culminates in the non-aliud: as the absolute presupposition and determinate negation of all definition and language, the non-aliud signifies the noetic ground for the ways of both affirmation and negation. Conceived as the synthesis of the analogies of being and of the mind and word, the logic of the divine names thus seeks to explicate the structure and limitations of the act of thinking, as the mind confronts the fundamental paradox of theophany and transcendence. In virtue of this integrative power, the logic of the divine names becomes indispensable for the learned ignorance, since it establishes structural principles which elucidate the conditions, nature and limits of our knowledge within the framework of the analogia entis.

Although this properly metaphysical interpretation of dialectic may appear unusual in contrast to contemporary formal logic, it is surely not alien to the philosophers under consideration. For Cusanus, as we shall see, the question of logic is intrinsically linked to the unities of the

[4]Cf. supra, pp. 84-85.

mind, so that the principle of non-contradiction and the coincidentia oppositorum articulate the rational and intellectual unities respectively.[5] As Roques remarks concerning Dionysius, his purpose in distinguishing between speculative methodologies is "to describe the living tension of an intelligence in pursuit of the divinizing union."[6] Within this tension, the hermeneutical logic of the divine names expresses the integral movement of the contemplative mind, in its quest to understand transcendental unity and totality.

Perhaps John the Scot emphasizes the concreteness of logic most radically, when he insists upon dialectica as a power which is both connatural to the human soul, and constitutive for the division of nature. Here the method of defining (diffiniendi disciplina) is bound up with dialectic,

> whose property is to divide and combine and distinguish the natures of all things which can be understood, and to allot each to its proper place, and [which] therefore is usually called... the true contemplation of things.[7]

This description already indicates the properly speculative character of dialectic. Indeed, as "the true contemplation of things", dialectic would seem to coincide with philosophy

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[5] Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, pp. 546-50; cf. infra, pp. 190ff.

[6] René Roques, "De l'implication des méthodes théologiques chez le Pseudo-Denys", Revue d'ascétique et de mystique, XXX (1954), p. 274.

[7] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 137 (486B).

itself. Utilizing the Dionysian triad of essence, power and operation, Eriugena argues for the essential inherence of the liberal arts (dialectica among them) in the human soul. The liberal arts belong within

> the energeia, that is, the operation of the soul. For ... the arts are eternal and immutably attached to the soul forever, in such a way that they seem not to be some kind of accidents of it, but natural powers (virtutes) and actions which do not and could not withdraw from it, and which do not come from anywhere but are innate in it as part of its nature (naturaliter ei insitas).[8]

This internal, constitutive relation between the liberal arts and the soul makes it difficult to determine whether the soul confers eternity upon the arts or vice versa, or whether "they coinhere with each other, all being eternal, in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another."[9] Yet even this exaltation of the liberal arts within the soul does not exhaust Eriugena's treatment of dialectic. For in commenting on Genesis, he remarks that the account of creation proceeds from genera to species, and draws the startling conclusion that

> The art of dialectic, which divides genera into species and resolves species into genera, was not fashioned by human devices, but created (condita) in the nature of things by the Author of all arts that are true arts; and discovered (inventa) by wise men and, by skillful research, adapted to use.[10]

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[8]Ibid. p. 137 (486C).

[9]Ibid. p. 137 (486D).

[10]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 748D-749A.

Not only is dialectic an essential power and operation of the soul, but it is also implicated within the very division of nature.

We may specify the ontological dimension of dialectic with greater precision. For Cappuyns has noted the correlation between procession and return and two of the principal divisions of dialectic, diaretike or divisoria and analytike or reditiva.[11] Just as the division of nature proceeds from the unity of the uncreated nature through the manifold species of powers and beings, diaretike "divides the unity of the greatest genera from the highest all the way downwards, until it reaches individual species"; and as the manifold beings and powers revert towards unity in the fourth division of nature, analytike gathers together individual species, and in its ascent "leads them back (reducit) to the unity of the greatest genera."[12] The division of nature thus constitutes a dialectic in the precise sense that its twofold movement can be conceived as the interrelation between the logical modes of diaretike and analytike.

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[11]Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, pp. 305-06.

[12]Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, PL 122, 184C - 185A: "Et diaretike quidem divisionis vim possidet; dividit namque maximorum generum unitatem a summo usque deorsum, donec ad individuas species perveniat...; /analytike/ easdemque in unitatem maximorum generum reducit; Idcoque reductive dicitur sive reditiva." Cf. also De divisione naturae 868D - 869A, and 681C (regarding the procession from the uncreated nature as the passage from negation to affirmation). The immediate context in the Expositiones for

Dialectic therefore manifests a properly metaphysical dimension, articulating the dynamics of both theophany and the mind. Logic not only lends formal clarity to the hermeneutic of the divine names, but also provides the locus for the reflective integration of the analogies of the mind and of being.

2. Symbolism, Affirmation and Negation

In the opening chapters of The Mystical Theology, Dionysius elaborates his speculative methodology. The way of affirmation, he writes, is the principal concern of On the Divine Names and of two other treatises which are either lost or fictitious, the Outlines of Divinity and the Symbolic Theology (Symbolike Theologia). On the Divine Names explicates the "titles which the understanding frames",[13] that is, the intelligible names of 'Good', 'Life', 'Being', 'Wisdom', etc. The Symbolic Theology, on the other hand, dealt with "the metaphorical titles derived from the world of sense and applied to God."[14] Although this latter treatise is nowhere

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Eriugena's discussion of this logical distinction is soteriological: man's fall as diaretike, and his restoration in divinization as analytike. Yet another dimension is thus added to the function of dialectic.

[13] Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 197 (III); PG 3, 1033A.

[14] Ibid.

to be found, symbolic theology nevertheless forms a recurring motif in the Dionysian corpus, particularly in the Letters and in the treatises on the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies.[15] Moreover, the foundations for a symbolic theology are clearly established in the theophanic dialectic of On the Divine Names, since in virtue of his self-manifestation God "possesses the names of all things",[16] intelligible and sensible alike. In contrast with the other works, The Mystical Theology is primarily concerned with the transcendence of all symbolic expression by means of the way of negation, although the themes of transcendence and negation are also explicitly developed in On the Divine Names.

Now, the relations among these treatises and modes of thought indicate the logical form for the hermeneutic of the divine names. For in the works concerned with the cataphatic way,

> the course of the argument, as it came down from the highest to the lowest categories, embraced an ever-widening number of conceptions which increased at each stage of the descent, but in the present treatise [The Mystical Theology] it mounts upwards from below towards the category of transcendence, and in proportion to its ascent it contracts its terminology.[17]

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[15] Cf. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius, Part I", Downside Review, LXXXII (1964), p. 295.

[16] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 62 (I,7).

[17] Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 198 (III); PG 3, 1033B-C.

As in Eriugena's correlation of dialectic with the division of nature, the Dionysian logic of the divine names reflects the movement of the creative *eros* in its procession and return. For *diaretike* and affirmation re-present — that is, make present to consciousness — the theophanic turn from superessential unity towards the alterity and multiplicity of creation, while *analytike* and negation re-present the teleological reversion upon transcendence. As Lossky has commented,

> The affirmative method corresponds to the descent of God, to the manifestation of the Cause in the effect: the theophanic character of creatures is affirmed in the measure of their analogy to the inaccessible Cause .... The negative method takes an opposite direction: it corresponds to the ascension of the creature towards God, starting from known and conceivable effects towards the unknown and inconceivable Cause.[18]

The procedure of naming God thus follows the metaphysical schema of emanation and return, and in so doing establishes a dialectical interrelation between the cataphatic and apophatic ways. Therefore, as Dionysius remarks,

> When affirming the existence of that which transcends all affirmation, we were obliged to start from that which is most akin to It, and then to make the affirmation on which the rest depended; but when pursuing the negative method, to reach that which is beyond all negation, we must start by applying our negations to those qualities which differ most from our ultimate goal.[19]

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[18]Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite", pp. 217-18; cf. also Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu*, pp. 26, & 69-70.

[19]Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, tr. Rolt, p. 198 (III); PG 3, 1033C.

In this passage two points ought to be noted. First, Dionysius insists upon God's transcendence of all affirmation and negation, and hence upon the conjectural character of every divine name; in terms of Cusanus, no imposed name can express the one ineffable name of God in its precision. Secondly, within this conjectural framework, the comparative adequacy of the names of God is contingent upon their relation to the hierarchic structure of theophany. Accordingly,

> It is truer to affirm that God is life and goodness than that He is air or stone, and truer to deny that drunkenness or fury can be attributed to Him than to deny that we may apply to Him the categories of human thought.[20]

In On the Divine Names the affirmation of the Good thus lies at the root of the cataphatic way, signifying the cause for the entire theophanic procession of being, and hence the ground for both the intelligible and the 'symbolic' names of God. But in the concluding chapters of The Mystical Theology (IV - V), Dionysius presents a series of negations which ascends from the sensible sphere, through the intelligible, towards the transcendence which exists beyond both affirmation and negation. The coincidence of transcendence and the Good provides the ultimate unity for this circular dialectic of affirmation and negation.

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[20] Ibid. pp. 198-99 (III); PG 3, 1033C - D. Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 296 (I, xxvi), where Cusanus cites this passage from Dionysius.

If we turn now to the properly noetic conditions for the logic of the divine names, the circularity of affirmation and negation recalls the "progressing regressions" of Cusanus' unities of the mind.[21] We may say that the cataphatic way descends from the idea of God, through intelligence and reason, and into corporeal alterity, while the apophatic way ascends from sensibility to the complicative unity of the idea of God. The two viae thus reflect the movement of consciousness, as well as that of procession and return; or more precisely, they articulate this movement of consciousness within the polarity of theophanic manifestation and the reversion towards unconditional unity and transcendence. Here the essentially symbolic and conjectural character of the divine names achieves greater clarity, since all the names of God are not only inadequate to transcendence, but are also imposed within the mind's dynamic circularity. Since the intellect does not coincide with the intelligible, but is rather its image in alterity, the approach to the precision of truth remains necessarily conjectural: "A conjecture is... a positive assertion which in alterity participates in truth as it is."[22] Therefore, the divine names are imposed through the conjectural power of the mind, and hence

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[21] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 38 (I,x); cf. supra, pp. 55-56.

[22] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 56-60 (I, xiii): "Coniectura igitur est positiva assertio in alteritate veritatem, uti est, participans."

manifest the one precise name of God symbolically, that is, in the alterity of thought and speech.

In his habitual usage, Dionysius reserves the term 'symbolic theology' (symbolike theologia) for the names and images for God which are derived from the sensible sphere. Its primary concern is with questions such as "what are the places where He [God] dwells and the robes He is adorned with; what is meant by God's anger, grief,... or the divine inebriation and wrath."[23] In short, symbolic theology seems bound to the exegesis of the Scriptural "imagery of allegorical symbolism."[24] In a more comprehensive sense, however, Dionysius' understanding of symbolism may justly be extended to the intelligible names of God, so that symbolic theology may coincide with the cataphatic way. The rationale for this extension has already been indicated in the conjectural — and hence symbolic — character of every divine name.

Following Dionysius, both John the Scot and Cusanus insist that all the divine names are relational terms, transposed metaphorically (translative) from the created order to the uncreated nature. As Cusanus remarks, "the names which are attributed to God are taken from creatures, since in

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[23]Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 197 (III); PG 3, 1033A-B. Cf. also Dionysius, Letter IX, PG 3, 1105C-1113B.

[24]Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 197 (III); PG 3, 1033B.

Himself He is ineffable and above everything that can be named"[25]; or in more specific terms, "affirmative names... can only apply to Him in relation to creatures."[26] In this respect an identity of intentional structure governs the formation of both the sensible and the intelligible names of God. For the mind's idea of infinite unity and totality provides an analogue for superessential unity,[27] just as sensible beauty manifests the transcendental power and form of beauty. Hence, as Roques has commented, sensible symbolism is "only a particular case of a general metaphysic of image (eikon)" and participation.[28] Indeed, the entire hierarchic procession of being emerges within the divine nature's ecstatic communications or emanations, whose paradigm lies in symbolic expression. Conceived as theophany, creation is the symbolization or expressive manifestation of superessential unity in essence and alterity. With these considerations

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[25]Cusanus, De pace fidei, tr. Dolan, Unity and Reform, p. 207; Schriften III, p. 730 (VII): "Nam nomina, quae Deo attribuuntur, sumuntur a creaturis, cum ipse sit in se ineffabilis et super omne, quod nominari aut dici posset."

[26]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 55; Schriften I, p. 282 (I,xxiv). Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 460C-461C, & 758A.

[27]Cf. Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 190 (II,xvi); and Beierwaltes, Proklos, pp. 367-82.

[28]René Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le Pseudo-Denys", Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé, Series 4, 1957, no. 1, p. 106.

in mind, we must agree with Roques's distinction between

> two great functions of inverse direction (sens) which rigorously correspond to all the moments of the unifying ascent of the soul, without regard for the artificial boundary which separates the sensible from the intelligible: on the one hand, the cataphatic and descending function of symbolization; on the other hand, the apophatic and ascending function of negativity.[29]

By thus re-defining the relation between affirmation and negation, the cataphatic way comes to be seen as wholly and essentially symbolic, as the expression of the mind's symbolizing power.

This shift from a restricted to a more comprehensive sense of 'symbol' is evident in John the Scot's philosophical development. In his early De praedestinatione, Eriugena had distinguished between divine names as "quasi propria" and as "aliena, hoc est translata".[30] Interpretation of the latter names corresponds to Dionysius' restricted sense of 'symbolic theology', with the addition of a hermeneutic of contrary predications concerning God. Those names which are "quasi propria" include 'essence', 'truth', 'power' and 'wisdom' — names which

> since they signify what is first and best in us (that is, the same substance and its best accidents without which it cannot be immortal), are not absurdly referred

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[29] Ibid. p. 110.

[30] Eriugena, De praedestinatione, PL 122, 390C - D.

to the one and best principle of all good things, which is God.[31]

But by the time he wrote the De divisione naturae, Eriugena had encountered the Dionysian distinction between the cataphatic and apophatic ways. In light of this distinction, he came to insist firmly on the symbolic character of all the positive divine names, even those he had previously designated as "quasi propria": "It is not properly but metaphorically that it [the ineffable nature] is called Essence, Truth, Wisdom and other names of this sort."[32] Within this context, the differentiation of relative adequacy among the affirmative divine names becomes that between more or less appropriate symbols and metaphors, rather than that between "quasi propria" and "translata". For in terms of the hierarchic structure of participation, the names 'One', 'Good' and 'Being' are simply more appropriate symbols than those derived from the sensible sphere, where the divine communications are explicated in greater multiplicity and alterity. "In affirmative propositions... it is truer to assert that

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[31] Ibid. 390C: "quoniam in natura nostra quidquid primum optimumque sit, significant, id est ipsam substantiam, et ejus optima, sine quibus immortalis esse non potest, accidentia, non absurde referuntur ad unum optimumque principium omnium bonorum quod est Deus."

[32] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 79 (460C): "Non enim proprie sed translatiue...." Cf. Eriugena's Praefatio to his Versio operum S. Dionysii, PL 122, 1035A-1036A; also Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, pp. 317-23.

God is intelligence and life than to assert that He is earth, stone or anything material."[33] Yet all affirmations remain essentially symbolic and inadequate to the precision of divine transcendence.

The importance of a thoroughgoing correlation between symbolism and the affirmative way comes to light in the Dionysian distinction between modes of likeness. In The Celestial Hierarchy Dionysius writes that

> the most holy Mysteries are set forth in two modes: one, by means of similar and sacred representations (eikonon) akin to their sacred nature, and the other through unlike forms (anomoion morphopoiion) designed with every possible difference.[34]

Here we seem to have a simple recapitulation of the descending dialectic of appropriateness, affirming the eminence of the designations 'word', 'wisdom' and 'essence' for the superessential One. Yet Dionysius immediately introduces a shift in perspective towards negativity and dissimilar likenesses (anomoioi omoiotetes), and thus brings into focus the crucial problem of relating symbolic expression to divine transcendence. At this point we must cite Dionysius' argument in some detail:

> Although such sacred forms are more venerable, and seem in one sense to surpass the material representation (proshylon morphoseon), even so they fail to express truly the Divine Likeness which transcends all essence and life...; for all other word and wisdom is incomparably below it. But at other times It is extolled in a

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[33]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 61; Schriften I, p. 196 (I,xxvi).

[34]Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, p. 24 (II,2-3); PG 3, 140B-C.

> supermundane manner... where It is named Invisible, Infinite and Unbounded, in such terms as indicate not what It is, but what It is not: for this... is more in accord with Its nature, since... It is not in the likeness of any created thing.... If, therefore, the negations (apophaseis) in the descriptions of the Divine are true, and the affirmations (kataphaseis) are inconsistent with It, the exposition of the hidden Mysteries by the use of unlike symbols accords more closely with that which is ineffable.[35]

The virtue of dissimilar likenesses lies in their manifestation of the structure and limits of religious symbolization and naming. In concentrating upon the "similar and sacred representations" which appear "quasi propria", there is a tendency towards forgetfulness of negativity, and a consequent reification of these symbols. The name or image may become absolutized and taken as fully adequate, so that the essential differentiation between image and archetype collapses into a simple identity. In contrast, incongruous sensible images and names — such as those of a corner-stone, an ointment, a lion or worm — stimulate the contemplative mind to recognize their inherent negativity, and prevent it from dwelling "upon the forms themselves as the final truth."[36]

Principal among Dionysius' unlike symbols is that of the cloud or darkness (gnophos or skotos) which he develops in conjunction with the theme of unknowing (agnosia). The negativity of the darkness and cloud imagery expresses by

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[35] Ibid. p. 25 (II,3); PG 3, 140C - 141A. Cf. Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, PL 122, 155B - 156C.

[36] Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, p. 27 (II,5); PG 3, 145A. Cf. Augustine, De doctrina christiana, II,vii,7.

contrast the brilliance of the "light inaccessible" where God dwells: "Intangible and Invisible Darkness we attribute to that Light which is Unapproachable because It so far exceeds the visible light."[37] The symbolism of cloud and darkness therefore cannot be taken in a pedestrian, literal sense; rather, in its very unlikeness and negativity this symbolism requires an exegetical understanding (theoria). Darkness and cloud signify the transcendence and essential unknowability of God, and consequently characterize the contemplative soul's participation of this unknowability in its own agnosia and darkness.[38] Far from entailing obfuscation and primordial stupidity, Dionysius' darkness imagery indicates a lucid acknowledgment of the root of the learned ignorance — namely, that "God cannot be known as He is."[39] Cloud and darkness express a reflective awareness of the limits of knowledge before transcendence, and thus give symbolic form to the

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[37] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 150 (VII,2). Cf. also The Mystical Theology, p. 194 (I,3 - II,1; PG3, 1025A); Dionysius, Letter V (PG 3, 1073A - B); Eriugena, Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, p. 268 (291A - B); Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, pp. 558-60. The Scriptural text in question is I Timothy 6:16, which is often seen in conjunction with Exodus 20:21.

[38] Cf. Puech, "Le ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys et dans la tradition patristique", p. 36; Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?", p. 302; Gregory of Nyssa, La vie de Moïse, critical ed. & French tr. by Jean Daniélou ("Sources chrétiennes"; Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1968), pp. 210-16 (PG 44, 376C - 380A).

[39] Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 562: "Deum scire non posse, uti est — in quo radix doctae ignorantiae."

learned ignorance and its apophatic logic.

The coordination between unlike symbols and the via negativa is particularly suggestive for the entire logic of the divine names. For the negativity of dissimilar likenesses elucidates the internal structure of symbolization and naming, and thereby specifies the relation between the cataphatic and apophatic ways with greater precision. Symbol and image require both likeness and unlikeness, both similarity and difference; for if an image were to coincide with its exemplar in every respect, it would not be an image, but the exemplar itself. Specifically, negativity and difference are insinuated within the structure of religious symbolism and naming in the irreducible distance between the finite image and the infinite archetype, between the imposed names (vocabula) and the one precise name (verbum) of God. Since "no single existing thing is entirely deprived of participation in the Beautiful,"[40] every symbol and name expresses a likeness of the divine nature in its theophanic manifestation; yet none can articulate the precision of the divine nature's transcendence. The ontological polarity of theophany and transcendence thus finds its reflection in the conjectural polarity of adequacy and negativity. The task of logic is to explicate this twofold polarity in the hermeneutic of the divine names,

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[40]Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, pp. 25-26 (II,3); PG 3, 141C. Cf. Letter IX, PG 3, 1105C; Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 689C.

neglecting neither theophany and comparative adequacy nor transcendence and negativity.

Within this hermeneutical context, the via negativa is not simply set over against the way of affirmation, but rather becomes fundamental for its truth as a properly symbolic structure. For by focusing upon the dissimilarity inherent in religious symbolism and the divine names, the via negativa recollects their ultimate inadequacy to transcendence. While this dissimilarity is most vividly evident in the 'unlike symbols' whose inadequacy cannot be mistaken, it nonetheless permeates the entire symbolism of the cataphatic way. Hence, Cusanus insists upon the negativity and coincidence of light and darkness in the symbolism of the "light inaccessible", and concludes that

> Negative Theology... is so indispensable to affirmative theology that without it God would be adored, not as the Infinite but rather as a creature, which is idolatry, or giving to an image what is due to truth alone.[41]

Negation therefore provides the regulative or corrective power which simultaneously delimits the conjectural truth of symbolic affirmation, and discloses its transcendental orientation. By recollecting the distance and negativity essential to figurative expression, the via negativa becomes "the center and key of all symbolism."[42]

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[41] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, pp. 59-60; Schriften I, p. 292 (I, xxvi). Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 511C - 512B.

[42] Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le Pseudo-Denys", p. 105.

Within the very hermeneutic of symbolic affirmation, therefore, we have the turn towards the ascending dialectic of the via negativa, which ultimately leads beyond both affirmation and negation. This turn begins in the acknowledgment of the manifest inadequacy of "dissimilar likenesses", and their consequent negation; it then mounts (so to speak) the entire scale of divine names, denying the ultimate adequacy of the intelligible names 'being', 'life', 'wisdom', 'good', etc. For, as Dionysius states, "when pursuing the negative method... we must start by applying our negations to those qualities which differ most from our ultimate goal."[43] The regulative function of the via negativa thus suggests a dialectical interrelation between the cataphatic and apophatic ways, since, in John the Scot's vivid metaphor, "all the significations with which kataphatike clothes the Divinity are without fail stripped off it by apophatike."[44] Here Eriugena recaptures the sense of Dionysius' technical term for the ascending dialectic of the via negativa, 'aphairesis'. As in Plotinus and Proclus, 'aphairesis' retains its original meaning of the sculptor's act of removing or stripping away stone, as well as its Aristotelian sense of abstraction.[45]

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[43]Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 198 (III); PG 3, 1033C. Cf. also On the Divine Names, pp. 149-50 (VII,2); and Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 296 (I,xxvi).

[44]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 83 (461D); cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 252 (I,xvii).

[45]Vanneste, Le mystère de Dieu, p. 64ff.

The term thus expresses the abstractive function of negation, its stripping away the affirmations of the cataphatic way. 'Aphairesis' further articulates the order in which the apophatic way proceeds, since this "abstractive negation"[46] retraces symbolic affirmation's descent from superessential unity to names derived from sensible alterity. In ascending from unlike symbols to the negation of the more "sacred and venerable forms", aphairesis thus completes the circular dynamic of the divine names.

Yet within this circular dialectic of affirmation and negation, the cataphatic and apophatic ways are not simply coordinate methodologies of equal weight. For the via negativa not only provides a regulative counterpoint to the affirmative way, but in its own right possesses primacy over the way of affirmation. Dionysius explicitly announces his preference for the via negativa in terms of its greater adequacy to divine transcendence.[47] And Eriugena, commenting on Dionysius, states that

> Affirmation is less able to signify the ineffable Divine Essence than negation, since the former is transferred from creatures to the Creator, but the latter is predicated of the Creator in Himself beyond all creation.[48]

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[46] Ibid. p. 70.

[47] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 60 (I,5), & 189 (XIII,3). Cf. Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 14 (XI): "Dionysius noster negativam praefert theologiam affirmativae."

[48] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 758A; cf. also 510C.

Here the fundamental paradox of theophany and transcendence becomes manifest with its full force in the logical polarity of affirmation and negation. While affirmation proceeds metaphorically and reflects the divine nature's self-manifestation in alterity, the via negativa properly (proprie) denies every positive predication and approaches the truth of divine transcendence. Negation asserts its greater efficacy precisely in its contrasting and corrective function for affirmation. As Eriugena formulates the relation between the two viae,

> first by the Cataphatic, that is, by affirmation, we predicate all things of Him [God], whether by nouns or by verbs, but in a metaphorical sense; then we deny by the Apophatic, that is, by negation, that He is any of the things which by the Cataphatic are predicated of Him, only this time not metaphorically but properly — for there is more truth in saying that God is not any of the things that are predicated of Him than in saying that He is.[49]

Positive designations such as 'essence' or 'power', which Eriugena had previously considered "quasi propria", are thus explicitly recognized as metaphorical — that is, as "a creatura ad creatorem translata"[50]; while the negative way assumes the function of 'proper' designation. The contrast

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[49]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 217 (522A-B): "prius de eo iuxta catafaticam, id est affirmationem, omnia... praedicamus, non tamen proprie sed translative; deinde... omnia quae de eo praedicantur per catafaticam eum esse negemus per apofaticam, id est negationem, non tamen translative sed proprie...." Cf. also 461D; Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, PL 122, 155C: "si vera est negatio in divinis rebus, non autem vera sed metaphorica affirmatio"; Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, pp. 326-27.

[50]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 458A; cf. 460C.

between metaphorical expression and proper meaning thus assures the primacy of the apophatic way, so that "negative propositions are true and affirmative ones are inadequate."[51]

Concerning the relational structure of the cataphatic way, Cusanus remarks that "every affirmation puts, so to speak, in God something of the thing it signifies," and is therefore inappropriate to the divine essence; positive names are thus "infinitely weak diminutives" for the one precise name of God.[52] Knit within the fabric of alterity and opposition, every affirmation is essentially contingent and limited. For instance, the affirmation of good or being is set over against that of evil or non-being. But by negating the limitations inherent in the theophanic explicatio and symbolic expression, the act of negation opens reflection towards the infinity and transcendence of the uncreated nature "in its own original being". Hence, Eriugena may reformulate the primacy of the apophatic way as follows:

> Whatever negation you make about Him [God] will be a true negation, but not every affirmation you make will be a true affirmation: for if you show that He is this

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[51]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 61; Schriften I, p. 196 (I,xxvi). Cf. also De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 150-52 (XXXIII); Dionysius, The Celestial Hierarchy, p. 25 (II,3; PG 3, 141A); and Plotinus, Enneads V,v,13: "The only way is to make every denial and no assertion"(tr. MacKenna, p. 414).

[52]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 55; Schriften I, p. 282 (I,xxiv).

> or that you will be proved wrong, for He is none of the existing things that can be spoken of or understood. But if you declare: 'He is not this nor that nor anything', you will be seen to speak the truth, for He is none of the things that are or of those that are not.[53]

We have previously noted Eriugena's correlation between transcendence and negativity in discussing 'nihil' as a divine name.[54] Here the methodological implications of this correlation become explicit, as the truth of the via negativa is seen to lie in its power to focus upon divine transcendence beyond the entire sphere of 'nature', whose fundamental division is into "those things that are and those that are not."[55] The primacy and propriety of the via negativa thus rest upon its articulation of the mind's relatedness to transcendence.

However, the truth which the apophatic way manifests is clearly not a positive knowledge of transcendence, but rather an awareness of the limits of our knowledge and symbolizing power. For the learned ignorance entails a fundamental ambiguity in the tension between the positive act of the mind and the negativity of this act's content. In

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[53]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, pp. 191-93 (510C): "...quia omnium quae sunt quae dici uel intelligi possunt nihil est;... quia nihil horum quae sunt et quae non sunt est." Cf. Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, pp. 252ff.

[54]Cf. supra, pp. 130ff.

[55]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 37 (441A).

phenomenological terms, the intentionality (noesis) of the learned ignorance is positive, since reflection actively seeks its ultimate horizon. Yet the content (noema) of this intentionality is negative throughout, since the learned ignorance yields re-cognition of the unknowable precisely as unknowable, of the ineffable as ineffable.[56] This recognition leads into the central paradox of the learned ignorance as a noetic structure: that divine transcendence is known by not-knowing, or that ignorance of God's essence constitutes true knowledge (gnosis). "Complete ignorance (agnosia) in a higher sense is knowledge (gnosis) of what is beyond all known things."[57] Like its correlative symbolism of cloud and darkness, the recurring theme of agnosia articulates the reflective turn towards transcendence. It expresses the rootedness of the learned ignorance in the unknowability of the divine nature in its precision and truth. Accordingly, if in the via negativa "we are not led to a knowledge (cognitio) of what God is, but of what He is not,"[58] then this knowledge

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[56] Cf. Beierwaltes, Proklos, p. 358. Gandillac states accurately that for Cusanus the denial of the divine names is "un acte positif, de forme négative", but misleadingly allies Cusanus with Aquinas — and against Dionysius — in seeing negation as "un effort mental tendu vers une affirmation" (La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, pp. 272-75).

[57] Dionysius, Letter I, tr. Hathaway, p. 131 (PG 3, 1065B). Cf Cusanus' gloss on this passage in the De non aliud, Schriften II, p. 524 (XVII).

[58] Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, tr. Dolan, Unity and Reform, p. 119; Schriften III, p. 460 (Bk. II).

reflects the negativity and transcendence proper to God. For, as John the Scot argues, God himself

> does not know what He is; that is, He does not know himself to be a what, since He knows himself to be absolutely no one of those things which are understood in anything, or concerning which it can be understood and said what they are.[59]

In stripping away all positive determinations, aphairesis thus articulates the analogy of the mind precisely in terms of negation and unknowing, since at the very center of agnosia is the dynamic conformation between the unknowing subject and the essential unknowability of the divine nature.[60] Since aphairesis provides the logical structure which makes this analogy conceivable, the greater adequacy and truth of the via negativa are thus assured. The apophatic way is the logic proper to the learned ignorance.

3. Towards a Transcendental Logic: Negatio Negationum and Coincidentia Oppositorum

While the regulative function and methodological primacy of the via negationis are thus clear, we need to specify further its internal structure. For crucial questions remain regarding the nature of negation, and the manner in

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[59] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 589C: "Nescit igitur, quid ipse est, hoc est, nescit se quid esse, quoniam cognoscit, se nullum eorum, quaelin aliquo cognoscuntur, et de quibus potest dici vel intelligi, quid sunt, omnino esse." Cf. also 510C; and supra, pp. 132ff.

[60] Cf. Cf. Vanneste, "Is the Mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius Genuine?", p. 302; Le mystère de Dieu, pp. 159-61, & 210-11; also infra, pp. 242-43.

which the apophatic way expresses ineffable transcendence. In response to these questions, we shall conclude this chapter with a discussion of three themes which are fundamental for the learned ignorance and its logic: the interpretation of transcendental negativity as plenitude and excess, the negation of the negations, and Cusanus' principle of the coincidentia oppositorum. In the logic of coincidence, the via negativa will finally turn towards the question of infinity and the limit-situation, where the conjectural logic of the divine names finds its ultimate resolution.

Our initial consideration must concern the nature of negativity within the divine names, since our response to this issue will determine the orientation for the entire section. Now, Dionysius unequivocally states that in naming God negation indicates not privation, but plenitude and transcendence. For example,

> the lack of Mind and Sensation must be predicated of God by excess and not by defect. And in the same way we attribute lack of Reason to Him that is above Reason, and Imperfectability to Him that is above and before Perfection.[61]

In more general terms, Dionysius remarks that "It is customary for writers on Divinity to apply negative terms to God in a sense contrary to the usual one."[62] In reference to

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[61] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 150 (VII,2); cf. also p. 68 (II,3): "all those titles wherein the negative expresses excess."

[62] Ibid. p. 147 (VII,1); cf. also pp. 89-90 (IV,3): "All the attributes of the Good we express in a transcendent manner by negative images."

absolute transcendence, terms and symbols which generally imply absence or privation are taken up into a paradoxical disclosure of plenitude and excess. The 'formlessness' of God indicates not the privation of form as in amorphous matter, but rather the originating power of the transcendent Good as the ground for the entire realm of forms. Similarly, 'not-being' signifies not the void, but rather the precision of the divine nature subsisting in itself, prior to its theophanic communication in being.[63]

This interpretation of negativity as excess discloses the internal relation between the via negationis and the typical Dionysian use of the prefix 'hyper' in On the Divine Names. One commentator has remarked that in applying the prefix 'hyper' to every category, Dionysius formulates "a new technical language" for the logic of the divine names.[64] Here a problem arises concerning the relation of this new technical language and the ways of affirmation and negation. For, particularly in the Thomistic traditions, Dionysius' persistent use of the prefix 'hyper' is often taken to constitute a third way, a via eminentiae which overcomes the contrast

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[63]Regarding these exempla, cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 89 (IV,3), & 97 (IV,7); also Eriugena's commentary on 'nihil' as a divine name, discussed supra, pp. 130ff.

[64]Louis Grondijs, "La terminologie métalogique dans la théologie dionysienne", in L'homme et son destin d'après les penseurs du moyen âge (Louvain & Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1960), p. 345.

between the apophatic and cataphatic ways.[65] Divine names such as 'superessential' or 'supervital' are taken to be positive in content, only understood 'eminenter': God is not essential or living as we know essences and living beings, but is essence and life in an analogical and pre-eminent way. Whatever value this interpretation may have as a description of Dionysius' usage, it fails to come to grips with the curious fact that Dionysius nowhere explicitly formulates a third way; there are only the ways of symbolic affirmation and of negation, the latter of which culminates in the radical aphairesis of mystical theology. How, then, can the Dionysian use of 'hyper'be integrated within the schema of affirmation and negation? John the Scot provides a clear alternative to a proposed via eminentiae by situating designations prefixed by 'hyper' and 'plus quam' squarely within the via negativa. For these prefixes specify the mode of negation proper to the apophatic way, since they articulate the transcendental function of negation in signifying excess rather than privation.

Having established the contrast between the cataphatic and apophatic ways, the Master in the De divisione naturae raises the question of whether designations such as 'superessentialis' and 'plus quam veritas' should be allocated to

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[65]For example, cf. Semmelroth, "Gottes überwesentliche Einheit", pp. 222-23; and Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 82-83.

the affirmative or to the negative way. The Student is initially doubtful, but responds lucidly:

> When I see that the aforesaid significations lack the negative particle which means 'not', I fear to include them in the negative branch of theology; yet if I include them in the affirmative branch I realize that I am not doing justice to their sense (intellectus). For when it is said: 'It is superessential', this can be understood by me to be nothing but a negation of essence. For he who says: 'It is superessential' openly denies that it is essential, and therefore although the negative is not expressed in the words announced, yet the hidden meaning is not hidden from those who consider them well.... These aforesaid significations which in appearance do not imply a negation belong... rather to the negative than to the affirmative branch of theology.[66]

What is at issue in the designations prefixed by 'super' and 'plus quam' is the nature and transcendental orientation of negation in the hermeneutic of the divine names. For in their affirmative form, 'super' and 'plus quam' articulate negation's directedness towards exaltation and plenitude; in their negative meaning (intellectus), they designate the unconditional transcendence of the divine nature in its undifferenced unity and precision. Hence, elaborating upon the Student's response, the Master comments that

> these names which are predicated of God by the addition of the particles super- or more-than- ... comprehend within themselves the fullest sense of the two previously mentioned branches of theology, so that in outward expression they possess the form of the affirmative, but in meaning the force of the negative.[67]

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[66] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 83 (462A-B).

[67] Ibid. p. 85 (462C): "... ut in pronuntiatione formam affirmatiuae, intellectu uero uirtutem abdicatiue obtineant."

In this play between positive form and negative meaning, the prefixes 'hyper', 'super' and 'plus quam' thus provide the logical form proper to transcendental negation. To elucidate the structure of these divine names, the Master concludes with an example. The divine nature

> is Essence, affirmation: it is Non-essence, negation: it is superessential, affirmation and negation together — for superficially it lacks negation, but it is fully negative in meaning. For that which says: 'It is superessential', says not what it is but what it is not; for it says that it is not essence but more than essence, but what that is which is more than essence it does not reveal. For it says that God is not one of the things that are but that He is more than the things that are, but what this 'is' is, it in no way defines.[68]

If from the perspective of theophany God can be named affirmatively as 'the essence of all things', the designation 'superessential' signifies his transcendence of all essence. Rather than insinuating positive meanings to be understood eminenter, divine names such as 'superessential' make no assertion, but simply lend precision to the way of negation; they are indeed to be understood eminenter, but as eminently

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Cf. Beierwaltes, "Das Problem des Selbstbewusstseins bei Johannes Scotus Eriugena", pp. 494-97.

[68] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 85 (462C - D): "Essentia est, affirmatio; essentia non est, abdicatio; superessentialis est, affirmatio simul et abdicatio, in superficie etenim negatione caret, intellectu negatione pollet. Nam quae dicit: Superessentialis est, non quod est dicit sed quid non est; dicit enim essentiam non esse sed plus quam essentiam, quid autem illud est quod plus quam essentia est non exprimit. Dicit enim deum non esse aliquod eorum quae sunt sed plus quam ea quae sunt esse, illud autem esse quid sit nullo modo deffinit." Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 265 (I,xviii): "supersubstantiale, hoc est scilicet non substantiale, quia hoc inferius est eo [maximum], sed supra omnem substantia."

negative in meaning. Therefore, far from introducing a third way, designations prefixed by 'hyper', 'super' and 'plus quam' constitute a modification within the via negativa.

Yet the synthesis of positive form and negative meaning suggests a crucial difficulty with the via negationis. For if the task of the apophatic way is to articulate the mind's orientation towards absolute transcendence, then the very opposition between affirmation and negation must be overcome. But this requirement seems to call into question the very truth of the via negativa. For in its regulative function, negation constantly plays off against symbolic affirmation: the designations light, being, good, etc., are negated as inadequate to divine transcendence. A process of mutual limitation thus binds the apophatic and cataphatic ways together, so that negation recollects the limits of affirmation, and therefore is itself limited by its bond to affirmation. In this reciprocal limitation, "the negation to which an affirmation is opposed does not attain precision."[69] Yet the precision of unconditional transcendence is at issue. Hence, in glossing Proclus' commentary on the Parmenides. Cusanus underlines the transcendence of the One by stating that it is "exaltatum super omnem oppositionem et negationem".[70] In

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[69] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 22 (I,vii): "non tamen praecisionem attingit negatio, cui obviat affirmatio."

[70] Cusanus, marginal gloss to Proclus' Commentarium in Parmenidem (Cod. Cus. 186, fol. 149^{v}); published, along with the concluding section of Book VII of Proclus' commentary, in

its regulative coordination with affirmation, negation itself appears implicated within the structure of alterity and opposition. Cusanus therefore insists that transcendental unity is "prior to every affirmation and negation."[71] Similarly, Dionysius concludes the ascending negations of The Mystical Theology by denying the ultimate adequacy of both the cataphatic and the apophatic ways:

> Nor can any affirmation or negation apply to It [the transcendent universal Cause]; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation nor negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature — free from every limitation and thus beyond them all.[72]

Here Dionysius not only recollects the contingency of the cataphatic way, but also renders problematical the primacy and propriety of the apophatic way. For even if negative propositions are more adequate than affirmations, they nevertheless fall short of the absolute simplicity and truth of divine unity.[73] In terms of John the Scot, it would thus seem that not even negations are predicated 'properly' (proprie)

Plato Latinus, vol. III, ed. R. Klibansky & C. Labowsky (London: Warburg Institute, 1953), p. 106; for the relevant text of the Commentarium, cf. p. 70.

[71] Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, p. 238: "ante omnem affirmationem et negationem"; cf. De possest, Schriften II, pp. 334-36; De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 456 (IV); and De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 206 (I,iv).

[72] Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 201 (V; PG 3, 1048B); cf. also pp. 192-93 (I,3; PG 3, 1000B); and On the Divine Names, p. 70 (II,4).

[73] Cf. Proclus, Commentarium in Parmenidem, ed. Klibansky, p. 70.

of God. In this way, the question of the limits of the entire project of the divine names comes to the fore. An adequate response to this question requires a transcendental logic, in the twofold sense of a logic which can overcome the opposition between affirmation and negation, and which therefore approaches divine transcendence with greater precision. The learned ignorance formulates such a logic with two interrelated principles: the negation of the negations, and the coincidence of opposites. Moreover, both of these principles articulate reflection's turn towards transcendence within the via negativa.

The negation of the negations is manifest in Dionysius' very formulation of the limits of the apophatic way. Not content to limit negation to its regulative function in relation to symbolic affirmation, in The Mystical Theology Dionysius establishes an ascending dialectic of aphairesis or abstractive negation, where

> the negations...do not counterbalance affirmations in an analogical knowledge of God.... The negations exist by themselves, rung upon rung in a ladder rising farther and farther above the realm of affirmative theology.[74]

From the denial of corporeality and spatiality, Dionysius ascends to denials of intelligence, eternity, unity, Godhead (Theotes) and truth as inappropriate to the divine nature's

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[74]Douglass, "The Negative Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite", p. 119. Cf. The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, pp. 199-201 (IV - V; PG 3, 1040D - 1048B).

transcendence. At the term of these negations, he then denies the ultimate adequacy of even the apophatic way, since the divine nature "transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of its simple and absolute nature — free from every limitation and beyond them all."[75] Yet this final denial is itself a negation, the negatio negationum. The power of the negative, which constitutes the driving force of the learned ignorance as a logical structure, thus asserts itself in its full vigor and purity. In moving beyond its regulative function, the apophatic way becomes genuinely reflexive and denies its own ultimate adequacy. As negation recollects and overcomes the limits of symbolic affirmation, the negation of the negations continues the dialectic of aphairesis on a yet higher level and removes the limitations imposed by negation as a regulative principle. Alternately phrased, in the negatio negationum the apophatic way becomes self-critical and regulates its own directedness towards transcendence. The limitations and conjectural nature of negation are thereby recognized precisely within the via negativa as a reflexive structure. By thus recollecting its own limits in the negatio negationum, the apophatic way re-asserts its primacy and approaches a more precise articulation of the mind's relatedness to that transcendence which remains beyond both affirmation and

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75Dionysius, The Mystical Theology, tr. Rolt, p. 201 (V; PG 3, 1048B).

negation.[76]

Cusanus specifies the negatio negationum further in his doctrine of the non-aliud and the coincidence of opposites. In the Idiota de sapientia the Layman speaks of "a consideration of God that is neither affirmation nor negation... which is agreeable to Him since He is above affirmation and negation."[77] One commentator has remarked that this proposed consideratio constitutes "an ineffable way" over against the ways of affirmation and negation.[78] Yet as the Layman develops this novel consideratio, it becomes evident that the crucial issue remains that of negation: "This then is an answer that denies (negans) both the affirmation and the negation as well as the combination of the two."[79] Once again the opposition between affirmation and negation is overcome within the apophatic way itself, in the negation of both affirmation and negation.

What is at issue for Cusanus is the ascent to the

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[76]Cf. Proclus, Commentarium in Parmenidem, ed. Klibansky, pp. 72-76; also Beierwaltes, Proklos, pp. 361-66.

[77]Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, tr. Dolan, Unity and Reform, p. 119; Schriften III, p. 460 (Bk. II): "Est deinde consideratio de Deo, uti sibi nec positio nec ablatio convenit, sed prout est supra omnem positionem et ablationem."

[78]Walter Bado, "What is God? An Essay on Learned Ignorance", Modern Schoolman, XLII (1964), p. 32. Here again the issue of a 'third way' comes to the fore.

[79]Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, tr. Dolan, Unity and Reform, p. 119; Schriften III, p. 460 (Bk. II): "Et tunc responsio est negans affirmationem et negationem et copulationem."

transcendental negativity of the non-aliud, which provides the only speculative field

> where negation is not opposed to affirmation. For the non-aliud is not opposed to the aliud, since it defines and precedes this. Outside this field, negation is opposed to affirmation — as immortal to mortal, incorruptible to corruptible, etc. Only the non-aliud is excepted.[80]

As in Eriugena's discussion of 'nihil' as a divine name, Cusanus' treatment of the non-aliud employs radical negation to signify absolute simplicity and the transcendence of all multiplicity and opposition. The polarity of affirmation and negation presupposes the sphere of alterity and its concomitant oppositions (mortal and immortal, etc.) Following the lead given in the negatio negationum, the non-aliud negates not only the logical contrast between affirmation and negation, but also the very condition for this contrast: alterity or the aliud. "Non-aliud est non aliud quam non aliud."[81] In this self-defining circularity of the non-aliud, the reflexive power of negation articulates both the principle of definition and the transcendence of the affirmation-negation

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[80] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 66 (XIV): "... in quo solo negatio non opponitur affirmationi. Nam li non aliud non opponitur li aliud, cum ipsum definiat et praecedat. Extra hunc campum negatio affirmationi opponitur, ut immortale mortali, incorruptibile corruptibili, et ita de omnibus. Solum li non aliud excepto." Cf. De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 456 (IV), & 560 (prop. XIV).

[81] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 446 (I), & 556 (prop. III). Cf. De principio, Schriften II, p. 254: "Principium igitur ineffabile nec principium nominatur nec multa nec non multa nec unum nec alio nomine quocumque, sed ante omnia illa est innominabiliter. Omne enim nominabile

polarity. In its unconditional negativity, the precision of the non-aliud cannot be expressed in alterity — neither in the mode of affirmation nor in its correlative negation. Yet as the principle of all definition, the non-aliud signifies the constitutive ground for alterity, since "aliud... [est] non aliud quam aliud."[82] Hence, the non-aliud becomes manifest symbolically in the alterity of reason and language, and in affirmation and negation as modes of definition. For Cusanus the non-aliud thus overcomes the contrast between affirmation and negation in a twofold manner: in its transcendental negativity the non-aliud signifies a totality and simplicity "ante omnem positionem et ablationem"[83]; and as the principle of definition, the non-aliud itself defines both affirmation and negation.

Yet for all this, the non-aliud is clearly a negation: it names God as not-other, and thus remains within the apophatic way. The peculiarity of the non-aliud consists in its being a negation which simultaneously transcends and grounds the contrast between affirmation and its correlative negation. Further, precisely in its self-defining and negative circularity, the non-aliud is what Cusanus claims to "have sought

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aut figurabile seu designabile praesupponit alteritatem et multitudinem et non est principium."

[82]Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 448 (I); cf. supra, pp. 65ff.

[83]Ibid. p. 456 (IV).

for many years by means of the coincidence of opposites."[84] For, like Dionysius' divine name 'Sameness', the non-aliud "contains all opposites under the form of identity."[85] It is the absolute complicatio of all opposition and multiplicity, so that in the non-aliud all things are the non-aliud; while in its manifold explications, only the non-aliud becomes manifest in alterity, and consequently is all things in all things.[86] In its priority to all opposition and alterity, the non-aliud constitutes the ineffable goal towards which the coincidence of opposites is directed. For coincidence provides a methodological principle for integrating the manifold, conflicting predications concerning God into a unified conjectural structure. Therefore, recollecting the unconditional transcendence signified by the non-aliud, we shall now turn to the coincidentia oppositorum.

Cusanus emphasizes the methodological function of coincidence in his image of the beryl or magnifying glass:

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[84] Ibid. p. 456 (IV): "et istud [i.e., the non-aliud] est, quod per oppositorum coincidentiam annis multis quaesivi." Cf. also Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 534-38.

[85] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 164 (IX,4); cf. also p. 138 (V,7). The ultimate source for these passages is Plato's Parmendides 139B - E, & 146B - 147A. Cf. Cusanus discussion of 'Idem' as a divine name, Dialogus de Genesi, Schriften II, pp. 390ff.

[86] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 516 (XV); cf. supra, pp. 105-06.

> The beryl is a clear, white and transparent stone which has been given a form that is equally concave and convex; and looking through it, one approaches (attingit) what had previously been invisible. If an intellectual beryl, having equally maximum and minimum form, is fitted to the eyes of the intellect, then the indivisible principle of all things is approached with its help.[87]

The coincidence of the concave and the convex lends magnifying power to the beryl, so that the invisible becomes visible. Similarly, the coincidence of the maximum and the minimum leads the intellect to a clearer vision of God as the indivisible principle and origin of all things. By means of coincidence, the oppositions of the created sphere — motion and rest, similarity and difference, possibility and actuality — are led back to their original, undifferenced unity in the complicatio complicationum. The optical character of the beryl image underlines the conjectural function of the coincidence of opposites; it is precisely a mode of seeing, of leading the contemplative intellect from the alterity and opposition of the more-and-less to the vision of the indivisible maximum. For coincidence is the logic proper to the intellectual unity of the mind, and articulates the synthetic, integrative power of the intellect as it moves from the

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[87] Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 4 (III): "Beryllus lapis est lucidus, albus et transparens, cui datur forma concava pariter et convexa; et per ipsum videns attingit prius invisibile. Intellectualibus oculis si intellectualis beryllus, qui formam habeat maximam pariter et minimum, adaptatur, per eius medium attingitur indivisibile omnium principium."

alterity of reason to the unity of the idea of God. In the image of the beryl, Cusanus thus discloses the twofold context within which the coincidentia oppositorum is set: the doctrine of the Absolute Maximum as a divine name, and the unities of the mind. In explicating the logic of coincidence, we shall therefore have to develop Cusanus' coordinate themes of maximality and the dynamics of the mind.

From the De docta ignorantia onwards, Cusanus repeatedly links the principles of coincidence and maximality. For the logic of coincidence articulates the fundamental "regula doctae ignorantiae" — namely, "in that which receives the more-and-less, one never arrives at the simple maximum or minimum."[88] Cusanus frequently expresses this rule in terms of the polarity of the infinite and the finite, so that between the infinity of the Absolute Maximum and the finitude of the more-and-less there can be no possible proportion.[89] The beryl discloses the primary coincidence between the maximum "quo nihil maius esse potest" and the minimum "quo

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[88] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 124 (XXVI): "in recipientibus magis et minus numquam devenitur ad maximum simpliciter vel minimum simpliciter." Regarding the "principle of maximality", cf. Rudolf Haubst, Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), pp. 150-52; and Dupré, "Die Idee einer neuen Logik bei Nikolaus von Kues", pp. 368-69.

[89] Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 200 (I,111), & 326 (II,11); De pace fidei, Schriften III, p. 710 (I); De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 200 (XXIII). The relation between the finite and infinite will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

nihil minus esse potest", a coincidence which indicates a totality unconditionally beyond the sphere of the more-and-less.[90]

To formulate the contrast between the Absolute Maximum and the more-and-less, Cusanus frequently employs mathematical symbols. Among the simpler of his geometric analogies is the one given in the De beryllo, where a straight line is conceived as the coincidence of maximum and minimum angularity, and consequently as the originating principle for all possible angles. If we take a reed and bend it at the center, we shall have an analogy (aenigma) for this doctrine and for the general principle of coincidence:

> Let the reed be a line ⌜AB⌝ which is bent into an angle at point C, and let CB be mobile and moved against CA; in that motion, CB with CA causes all formable angles.[91]

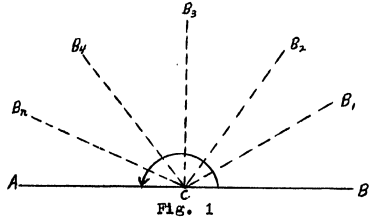

Fig. 1

[90] Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 8 (VII); De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 204(I,iv).

[91] Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 10 (VIII): "Esto igitur, quod calamus sit ut linea et plicetur super C puncto CB mobilis et moveatur versus CA; in eo motu CB cum CA causat omnes formabiles angulos." If a reed is not readily available, a paper straw will suffice.

The line thus provides the principle for the generation of all possible angles, since it is the complicatio out of which all angles are unfolded. Now, within this generation, the contrast between principium and principiatum elucidates that between the maximum and the more-and-less. For

> never will any one ⌜angle⌟ be so acute that it could not be more acute, until CB is joined to CA; nor will any be so obtuse that it could not be more obtuse, until CB will be one continuous line with CA. Therefore, if through the beryl you see the angle which is equally the maximum and the minimum of formable angles, then your gaze will not come to an end in any angle, but in the simple line which is the principle of all angles... and ⌜which is⌟ indivisible by every mode of division in which angles are divisible.[92]

The progression of greater-and-less in angularity thus finds its term only in reduction to unity with its principle, the straight line. The line thus constitutes the precision of angularity, and yet itself is not an angle. As the coincidence of obtuse and acute, of maximum and minimum angularity, the straight line cannot be conceived as the simple sum total of all angles; it must rather be seen as a complicative unity and totality outside the progressing series of angles. Through the 'spectacles' of coincidence, we are thus led to the principle of all angularity. In the De docta ignorantia, Cusanus uses similar arguments to demonstrate the coincidence

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[92] Ibid.: "Numquam autem erit aliquis ita acutus, quin possit esse acutior quousque CB iungetur CA, neque aliquis ita obtusus, quin possit esse obtusior, quousque CB erit cum CA una continua linea. Quando igitur tu vides per beryllum maximum pariter et minimum formabilem angulum, visus non terminabitur in angulo aliquo, sed in simplici linea, quae est principium angulorum, quae est indivisibile principium superficialium angulorum omni modo divisionis, quo anguli sunt divisibiles."

of the infinite line, triangle, circle and sphere.[93] Yet the same dialectic operates throughout these different exempla, since the central issue remains the coincidence of opposites in the infinite maximum.

If we turn now to the transcendental interpretation of these mathematical symbols, the contrast between the maximum and the more-and-less becomes that between God and creation. For Cusanus describes the Absolute Maximum as that "than which nothing can be greater"[94]:

> The absolute maximum is in act most perfect, since it is in act all that it can be. Being all that it can be, it is, for one and the same reason, as great and as small as it can be. By definition the minimum is that which cannot be less than it is; and since that is also true of the maximum, it is evident that the minimum is identified with the maximum.[95]

Here Cusanus not only recapitulates the coincidence between the maximum and the minimum, but also indicates a further coincidence between possibility and actuality. For posse and esse coincide in the Absolute Maximum, which is "omne id,

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[93]Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 234-40 (I,xiii - xv).

[94]Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 8 (VII): "quo nihil maius esse potest." The identical formulation occurs at De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 198 (I,11).

[95]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 12; Schriften I, p. 204 (I,iv): "maximum absolute cum sit omne id, quod esse potest, est penitus in actu; et sicut non potest esse maius, eadem ratione nec minus, cum sit omne id, quod esse potest. Minimum autem est, quo minus esse non potest. Et quoniam maximum est huiusmodi, manifestum est minimum maximo coincidere." Cf. Paul Wilpert, "Das Problem der Coincidentia Oppositorum in der Philosophie des Nikolaus von Kues", in Humanismus, Mystik und Kunst in der Welt des

quod esse potest." The logic of coincidence thus provides the formal structure for the divine name 'Possest', as well as for the Absolute Maximum. In contrast, Cusanus correlates the sphere of alterity and opposition with the posse-fieri of the more-and-less:

> Where there are opposites, like simple and composite, abstract and concrete, formal and material... there we find degrees (excedens et excessum); hence a point is never reached where all opposition completely ceases or where two are absolutely identical.[96]

While the Possest is all that it can be, the posse-fieri cannot achieve a total realization, since it constitutes the dynamic principle for the field of alterity, where the play among opposites delimits the actualization of power. For example, set within a fabric of opposition and definition, no particular spoken word (vocabulum) can exhaust the power of language, because "words are not so precise that a thing could not have been named with a more precise word."[97] Only in the divine Verbum, which is the precision and maximum of language, do power and actuality coincide.

Mittelalters, ed. Josef Koch (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, vol. III; Leiden-Köln: E. J. Brill, 1953), pp. 40-50.

[96] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 69; Schriften I, p. 318 (II,1). Cf. also De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 562 (prop. XVII & XVIII).

[97] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 150 (XXXIII): "non sunt vocabula praecisa, quin res possit praecisiori vocabulo nominari." Cf. supra, pp. 50ff.

In this fundamental contrast between the Absolute Maximum and the more-and-less, the Maximum at once transcends and grounds the sphere of the more-and-less. The principle of maximality signifies precision and totality, so that — as Cassirer remarks —

> The term Maximum must not be misleading: it is not a question of creating a superlative to a previous comparative. On the contrary, it must be understood as the complete antithesis to every possible comparison, to every merely quantitative-gradual procedure. The Maximum is not a quanititative, but a purely qualitative concept.[98]

Just as the straight line is neither an angle nor the simple sum total of all angles, the Maximum is unconditionally beyond the gradations and oppositions of the more-and-less. Yet as the line is the principle and complicatio of all angularity, so also the maximum is the complicative unity within which the more-and-less finds the principle of its genesis and truth.[99] For the principle of maximality indicates the precise "rule and measure" of the more-and-less,[100] where all opposites and gradations are nothing other than

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[98]Cassirer, Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy, tr. Mario Domandi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 20; cf. Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa", pp. 85-86.

[99]Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 210 (I,iv).

[100]Ibid. p. 250 (I,xvii): "Non est ergo aliud esse maximum metrum et mensuram omnium quam maximum simpliciter esse in eipso sive maximum esse maximum."

the Maximum itself. Indeed, even Cassirer's distinction between the quantitative more-and-less and the qualitative Maximum is finally inadequate, since the Maximum brings into coincidence the very contrasts of the categoreal scheme — action and passion, quantity and quality, etc. In the absolute complicatio of the Maximum, alterity and its concomitant oppositions and categories are thus reduced to transcendental unity.

Coincidence not only defines the Maximum in its correlation to the minimum, but also provides the logical principle for articulating the paradoxical relation between the Maximum and the alterity of the more-and-less. Since the divine nature "contains beforehand in itself all opposites under the form of identity,"[101] the speculative approach to transcendental unity proceeds by the reintegration of opposites into the higher unity of coincidence. For coincidence provides a rule whereby opposites are predicated of God as their complicative principle and origin. Hence, in chapter IX of On the Divine Names, Dionysius attributes the following opposites of God: greatness and smallness, sameness and difference, similarity and dissimilarity, motion and rest.[102]

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[101]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 164 (IX,4); cf. also p. 138 (V,7), and Cusanus' citation of the latter passage in the De beryllo, Schriften III, pp. 12-14 (X).

[102]Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 162-68 (IX). The oppositions are derived from Plato's Parmenides, via Proclus' commentary; cf. Ivánka, Plato Christianus, pp. 234-35.

For, conceived as the originating complicatio from which all contrasts and oppositions are unfolded, God is the cause of contraries (contrariorum causa) and consequently becomes theophanically present — and hence namable — in the alterity and oppositions of the created order. In terms of John the Scot,

> Not unreasonably... all things that are, from the highest to the lowest, can be spoken of Him by a kind of similitude or dissimilitude or by contrariety or by opposition, since He is the Source of all things which can be predicated of Him. For He created not only things similar to Himself but also things dissimilar, since He is Himself the Like and the Unlike, and the Cause of contraries.[103]

While the juxtaposition and play of conflicting predications are thus grounded in the dialectic of theophanic causality, they also direct reflection towards the transcendental complicatio of the Maximum, where these contradictory predications are reduced to unity. For if Eriugena names God as the "oppositorum oppositio, contrariorum contrarietas", it is because opposites and contradictories coincide within the infinite simplicity of the Maximum.[104] Hence, in the Absolute

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[103]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 193 (510D - 511A); "Non autem irrationabiliter... omnia quae a summo usque deorsum sunt de eo dici possunt quadam similitudine aut dissimilitudine aut contrarietate aut oppositione quoniam ab ipso omnia sunt quae de eo praedicari possunt. Non enim similia sibi solummodo condidit sed etiam dissimilia quoniam ipse similis est et dissimilis, contrariorum quoque casa est." Cf. also 757B - 758A.

[104]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 517C. Cusanus' marginal gloss to this passage emphasizes, "deus contrariorum contrarietas" (British Museum Cod. Additt. 11035, 80r; Institut für Cusanusforschung, "Kritisches Verzeichnis", p. 98).

Maximum possibility coincides with actuality, non-being with being,[105] unity with trinity and multiplicity,[106] singularity with universality,[107] the beginning with the end, and Alpha with Omega.[108]

Therefore, while the non-aliud simply negates alterity and opposition, the logic of coincidence approaches this negation by elaborating a juxtaposition of opposites within the focus provided by the idea of totality and simple unity. For through the beryl of coincidence, the oppositions explicated in alterity are seen in their reversion towards their principle and complicative unity in God. Coincidence is a properly synthetic logic, which employs the distinctions and oppositions inherent in alterity to overcome the limits of alterity itself. Recollecting the twofold polarity of theophany and transcendence and of the complicatio and explicatio, the principle of coincidence thus leads us to re-assert the Hermetic paradox: God is and is named in all things (compli-

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Cf. Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, pp. 148-50 (XIII); and Werner Beierwaltes, "Deus Oppositio Oppositorum", Salzburger Jahrbuch für Philosophie, pp. 179-85.

[105]Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 270 (I,xxi).

[106]Ibid. pp. 258 (I,xix), & 280 (I,xxi). Coincidence is crucial for Cusanus' Trinitarian theology, where there must be three persons in one God, i.e., where trinity must coincide with unity.

[107]Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 538.

[108]Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 136 (X).

cative), and yet is nothing of all things and nameless.[109] In the logic of coincidence neither the affirmation nor its negation can be denied; rather, the truth of both must be acknowledged within the idea of the maximum or totality, where affirmation and negation coincide.

Now, if the coincidentia oppositorum is among the most distinctive features of Cusanus' philosophy, it is also among its most provocative. For it flatly denies the ultimacy often accorded the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. Indeed, Cusanus frequently speaks of a "coincidentia contradictorum."[110] Confronted with this scandal, representatives of the Scholastic tradition could scarcely remain silent. Hence, in his De ignota litteratura, Johannes Wenck attacked Cusanus for destroying the seed and foundation of all knowledge, and claimed that in formulating the principle of coincidence Cusanus displays "the paucity of his instruction in logic."[111]

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[109] Cf. Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 580. Here Cusanus refers to Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 139-43 (V,8 - 10).

[110] Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 132 (X - XI); Apologiae doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 550; De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 50 (XXV).

[111] Johannes Wenck, De ignota litteratura; ed. E. Vansteenberghe, Le "De ignota litteratura" de Jean Wenck de Herrenberg contra Nicolas de Cuse: Texte inédit et étude, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, vol. III, 6 (1910), pp. 21-22, 29, & 24: "paucitas instructionis logice". Regarding Wenck and the De ignota litteratura, cf. Vansteenberghe's introduction; and Rudolf Haubst, Studien zu Nikolaus von Kues und Johannes Wenck, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, vol. XXXVIII, 1 (1955), especially pp. 83-136.

Although Cusanus' reaction to Wenck's attack leads him to proclaim, "A dialecticis libera nos, Domine,"[112] his reply to Wenck — the Apologia doctae ignorantiae — nevertheless contains a careful differentiation among modes of thought and logic.

First of all, Cusanus acknowledges the naturalness and utility of discursive logic. Man uses logic to attain his ends, just as animals use their sensible intuition to catch their game. Citing Al-Gazzali, Cusanus states that "logic is given to us by nature, since it is the power of reason."[113] Here Cusanus' pragmatic bias comes to the fore, as does the distinction among the unities of the mind. For discursive logic is "the art in which the power of reason is explicated."[114] And in this explication, it provides the instrument by which man orients himself within the sphere of alterity and the more-and-less. For the rational unity of the mind finds its ontological correlate in the realm of alterity, where one property is continually set over against another.[115] By distinguishing between opposites and con-

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[112]Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 562. Cusanus attributes the epigram to Ambrose, but the exact source is uncertain.

[113]Ibid. p. 548: "logica nobis naturaliter indita est; nam est vis rationis"; Al-Gazzali, Logica, Cod. Cus. 205. Cf. De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 8 (I); Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 514-16 (V).

[114]Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 92 (II, 11): "nec est aliud logica quam ars in qua rationis vis explicatur."

tradies, discursive logic manifests reason as an analytic power, whose primary function consists in distinction. Indeed, the very limits within which reason and its logic move are conceived as distinct and opposed:

> [Rational] discourse is necessarily bounded between the terminus a quo and the terminus ad quem, and we call these opposites 'contradictories'. Hence, the boundaries for rational, discursive thought are opposed and separate. Therefore, in the region of reason, extremes are separate, so that in the rational definition of a circle — namely, that the lines from the center to the circumference are equal — the center cannot coincide with the circumference.[116]

Cusanus thus links the principle of non-contradiction to the polarity internal to reason, the polarity between the terminus a quo and the terminus ad quem. "In the region of reason" the principle of coincidence is inconceivable, since beginning must be thought apart from end, part from whole, maximum from minimum.

Cusanus therefore acknowledges the value and truth of rational logic within its own sphere. Yet the unity of reason is set within the dynamic circularity of the mind as a whole, and in the realm of alterity neither ultimacy nor

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[115] Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 494-96 (II).

[116] Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 548: "Discursus est necessario terminatus inter terminos a quo et ad quem, et illa adversa sibi dicimus contradictoria. Unde: rationi discurrenti termini oppositi et disiuncti sunt. Quare in regione rationis extrema sunt disiuncta, ut in ratione circuli, quae est, lineae a centro ad circumferentiam sint aequales, centrum non potest coincidere cum circumferentia." Cf. Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 82 (II,1): "haec est radix omnium rationabilium scilicet non esse oppositorum coincidentiam attingibilem."

self-sufficiency can be attained. Accordingly, the truth of rational logic remains provisional, since it is adequate neither to the higher unities of the mind[117] nor to divine transcendence. However, Wenck's critique of Cusanus refuses to recognize any limitation whatsoever to the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction, which is conceived as the "seed" and principle of all meaning.[118] By thus absolutizing rational logic, Wenck intends to demolish the learned ignorance. Yet in fact he imposes severe limitations on the very conception of logic, which — in a more general sense — expresses the structural principles for the totality of the mind's assimilative and creative power.[119] For the logic of non-contradiction does not exhaust the power of the mind and its unities, nor can it express the comprehensive interrelation between dialectic and ontology, as conceived by John the Scot.

The limits of rational logic emerge within the context of the hermeneutic of the divine names. Since God cannot be reduced to a determinate point within the field of alterity

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[117]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 604-06 (XV).

[118]Wenck, De ignota litteratura, ed. Vansteenberghe, pp. 21-22, & 29: "O quantum spargitur hic venenum erroris et perfidie, corollario isto destruente omnem processum scientificum ac omnem consequentiam, pariter et tollente omnem oppositionem, pariter legem contradictionis, et per consequens totam doctrinam Aristotelis, destructo semine omnis doctrine."

[119]Cf. Dupré, "Die Idee einer neuen Logik bei Nikolaus von Kues", pp. 362-64.

and reason, the transcendental relevance of the logic appropriate to this field becomes problematic. As Cusanus remarks,

> The reconciliation of contraries is beyond reason, so every name reason imposes naturally opposes another; e.g., reason naturally opposes plurality and multitude to unity. God is not called 'Unity' in this sense, but 'Unity' in which distinction, plurality or multitude are all identified.[120]

The hermeneutic of the divine names thus requires a transcendental logic — that is, a logic capable of overcoming the oppositions and alterity of reason. The elements of this transcendental logic have already been discussed: the negatio negationum and the coincidentia oppositorum. We now have only to specify the function of the coincidentia oppositorum within the unities of the mind, and to emphasize the conjectural character of even this transcendental logic.

Within the "progressing regressions" of the mind, the rational and intellectual unities are related as image and exemplar. Reason is the image or word (locutio, verbum) within which the intellect is explicated in alterity.[121] Conversely, reason turns towards its genesis, principle and measure in the intellectual unity, as a living image turns towards it exemplar and truth. This dynamic reciprocity is

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[120] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 54; Schriften I, p. 280 (I,xxiv). Cf. De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 36-38; De principio, Schriften II, p. 240; Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 185-88 (XIII,2-3).

[121] Cf. Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 26 (I,viii), 82 (II,i), & 112 (II,vi).

reflected in the logics appropriate to the respective unities. As the logic of non-contradiction explicates the rational unity, the coincidence of opposites articulates the intellectual unity. For in turning from the alterity of reason to the higher unity of the intellect, the contrasts and oppositions of the rational sphere achieve integration within the intellect: "This intellectual unity is the complicative root of opposites which, in their explication, are incompatible."[122] In the analytic power of reason, these opposites are explicated and find their structural principle in the logic of non-contradiction. In contrast, the synthetic power of the intellect expresses the integration of these opposites through the logic of coincidence. Hence, reverting to mathematical symbolism, Cusanus writes that

> In the region of the intellect, he who sees number contained in unity, the line in the point, and the circle in the center attains to the coincidence of unity and plurality, of the point and the line, of the center and the circle; [and he achieves this] in the vision of the mind apart from discursive procedure.[123]

The intellect is thus the locus for coincidence, or more

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[122] Ibid. p. 24 (I,viii): "Unde intellectualis illa unitas radix quaedam complicativa oppositorum in eius explicatione incompatibilium existit."

[123] Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 550: "Sed in regione intellectus, qui vidit in unitate numerum complicari et in puncto lineam et in centro circulum, coincidentia unitatis et pluralitatis, puncti et lineae, centri et circuli videre attingitur visu mentis sine discursu."

precisely, this complicative intellectual unity is coincidence itself: "Unum et multitudo non in intellectu sunt, sed est intellectus; hic omnium unum et multitudo."[124] Therefore, the intellectual unity and its logic of coincidence constitute the noetic condition and formal structure for approaching the idea of God as totality and unity, where the maximum coincides with the minimum, and power with actuality. The ascent from the rational to the intellectual unity thus entails the transition from the logic of non-contradiction to the coincidentia oppositorum. This twofold transition also marks the shift from rational knowledge to the learned ignorance. To the extent that knowledge consists in a process of comparison, it establishes analogies and proportions between what is already known and the knowable.[125] Yet comparison, proportion and analogy require distinction and distance between one property and another, between the whole and its parts, etc. Hence, knowledge presupposes the alterity and oppositions of the rational unity and of the more-and-less, and the principle for this knowledge is that of non-contradiction. In contrast, the intellect is the "complicative root" within which opposites and distinctions coincide. Yet where unity coincides with multiplicity, and totality

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[124]Cusanus, marginal gloss to Proclus' Commentarium in Parmenidem 775-76; Codex Cus. 186, fol. 33[r]; cited by Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 216. Cf. Gandillac's commentary on this passage, loc. cit.

[125]Cf. Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 194 (I,1).

is prior to the distinction between parts and their sum total, comparison and proportionality become impossible. The coincidentia oppositorum therefore negates the presupposition for rational knowledge, and in this negation signals the transition to the learned ignorance. As one commentator has remarked,

> The two principles of the docta ignorantia and the coincidentia oppositorum are internally connected: where coincidence begins, 'knowing' ceases — therein lies an indirect acknowledgment of the principle of non-contradiction's value as the principle of 'knowing'. Coincidence is the principle of the higher sphere, which is one of 'unknowing'.[126]

The principle of coincidence thus converges upon the via negativa in elaborating the logic of the learned ignorance.

Although the coincidence of opposites provides a structural principle for the learned ignorance, it nevertheless remains conjectural and must not be accorded ultimacy. For within the "progressing regressions" of the mind, the intellectual unity and its logic mediate between the rational and

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[126] Josef Stallmach, "Zusammenfall der Gegensätze: Das Prinzip der Dialektik bei Nikolaus von Kues", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge de Cusanus-Gesellschaft, I (1961), p. 54. Coincidence thus constitutes a logical principle for the Dionysian agnosia, so that Cusanus says of Dionysius that "in hoc libello ubi theologiam misticam... vult manifestare possibili modo, saltat supra disiunctionem usque in copulacionem et coincidenciam, seu unionem simplicissimam que est non laterals sed directe supra omnem ablacionem et posicionem, ubi ablacio coincidit cum posicione, et negacio cum affirmacione; et illa est secretissima theologia, ad quam nullus phylosophorum accessit, neque accedere potest stante principio communi tocius phylosophie, scilicet, quod duo contradictoria non coincidant." Cusanus, "Letter to the Abbot and Monks of Tegernsee (September 14, 1453)"; published among the appendices to E. Vansteenberghe's Autour de la docte ignorance: une controverse sur la théologie mystique au XV^e siècle, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, XIV

divine unities. Hence, as the intellect limits reason, it in turn is limited by the idea of a simple totality beyond both opposites and their coincidence. For in light of the first unity of the mind, Cusanus is led to assert the transcendence of the divine nature to every mode of thought, whether of the rational or of the intellectual unity.[127] Since "God is not the root of contradiction, but is rather that simplicity prior to every root,"[128] Cusanus asserts that God is beyond the coincidence of opposites.[129] Hence, just as the negatio negationum renders the via negativa reflexive, so the idea of God recollects the limits of the principle of coincidence. In the modes of both negation and coincidence, transcendental logic remains conjectural throughout. Since the learned ignorance consists precisely in recollecting the limits of the mind's symbolizing and reflective power, the conjectural

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(1915), pp. 114-15. Cf. also Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 530. It may even be that coincidence provides a key to religious discourse and symbolism generally; cf. Eliade, The Two and the One, pp. 78-124.

[127] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 22 (I,vii).

[128] Cusanus, De Deo abscondito, Schriften I, p. 304: "Nam non est radix contradictionis Deus, sed est ipsa simplicitas ante omnem radicem."

[129] Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 140 (XI). Cf. also Cusanus' marginal gloss to Albert the Great's commentary on The Mystical Theology of Dionysius: "est solum Deus ultra coincidentiam contradictorum", Codex Cus. 96, fol. 226[rb]; published by Baur, Nicolaus Cusanus und Ps. Dionysius im Lichte der Zitate und Handbemerkungen des Cusanus, p. 112, citation no. 589.

recognition of its limitations marks transcendental logic as the dialectic proper to the learned ignorance.

Cusanus specifies the ultimate inadequacy of the coincidentia oppositorum in various ways, but primarily in terms of the non-aliud and the concept of infinity. The non-aliud is what Cusanus claims to "have sought for many years by means of the coincidence of opposites,"[130] because in its self-defining power the non-aliud is prior to both alterity and the coincidence of opposites. Since the negativity and transcendental orientation of the non-aliud have already been discussed in detail, we shall now turn to the question of infinity. In the De visione Dei Cusanus presents the coincidentia oppositorum in the image of the wall of Paradise:

> The place wherein Thou art found unveiled is girt round with the coincidence of contradictories, and this is the wall of Paradise wherein Thou dost abide. The door whereof is guarded by the most proud spirit of Reason, and, unless he be vanquished, the way will not lie open. Thus 'tis beyond the coincidence of contradictories that Thou mayest be seen, and nowhere this side thereof.[131]

Within this highly charged Scriptural image, Cusanus recapitulates the ascending dialectic among the mind's unities. The mediation between reason and the divine unity occurs in the intellectual principle of coincidence, which is simultaneously

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[130] Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 456 (IV): "istud est, quod per oppositorum coincidentiam annis multis quaesivi."

[131] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 44; Schriften III, p. 132: "... Ultra igitur coincidentia contradictorium videri poteris et nequaquam citra." The image of the wall of Paradise is derived from Genesis 3:24.

the boundary (murus) and entrance (porta, ostio) between the rational unity and God. The coincidence of opposites constitutes a boundary insofar as it is inaccessible to reason; it is an entrance insofar as it integrates the oppositions of reason into their originating principle, and orients reflection towards totality and transcendence. Cusanus specifies the mediational function of coincidence in an exemplum which recalls Eriugena's metaphor of divine self-creation:

> While I imagine [conceive, concipere] a Creator creating, I am still on this side of the wall of Paradise! While I imagine a Creator as creatable, I have not yet entered, but I am still in the wall. But when I behold Thee as Absolute Infinity, to whom is befitting neither the name of creating Creator nor of creatable Creator — then indeed I begin to behold Thee unveiled, and to enter the garden of delights.[132]

Precisely in his infinity God transcends the coincidence of complicatio and explicatio,[133] of creator and creatable.

Here the theme of the analogia mentis emerges once again, since in the idea of infinity man recollects his origination in absolute infinity. Therefore, as the first unity of the mind, infinity provides the transcendental principle which grounds coincidence and leads beyond it. For the logic of coincidence culminates in absolute infinity, which is the finis infinitus or end without end.[134] The coincidence of opposites thus articulates the limit-situation

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[132] Ibid. p. 57; Schriften III, p. 144 (XII). Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 455B, 646A, 678C; and supra. pp. 96ff.

[133] Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 140 (XI).

[134] Ibid. p. 148 (XIII); cf. also Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 538.

of thinking itself; that is, within the "progressing regressions" of the mind, coincidence expresses the dynamic interrelation between the finitude of reason and the infinity of the divine unity. For its completion, the logic of the divine names thus requires a reflective turn towards the limit-situation in a twofold sense: a formal analysis of the polarity between the finite and the infinite; and an anthropology of the limit-situation, which takes this polarity as its structural principle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Infinity and Anthropology

The question of infinity has been suggested several times in the course of our discussion, particularly in conjunction with the issue of transcendence. In thematizing the relation between the finite and the infinite, we shall come to the conclusion of our argument, since here the learned ignorance finds its ultimate structural principle. Therefore, the various themes which have previously been discussed will have to be recapitulated within the context of infinity and the limit-situation. The analogies of the mind and of being, theophany and transcendence, the logic of negation and coincidence, the symbolizing power of language: all achieve an integral expression in light of the relation between infinity and the finite.

Moreover, the limit-situation provides the context for an analysis of human existence, since man dwells within the boundary of the finite and infinite. For although actually finite, man nonetheless possesses both the idea of infinity and an unlimited power for symbolic creation. Through the idea of infinity, man comprehends the finite and moves towards an unlimited assimilation of the world and God. In terms of John the Scot, humanity is the "ratio medietatis" or living

juncture of the uncreated and incorporeal, and the created and corporeal natures.[1] The structural analysis of infinity and the limit-situation thus leads into an exploration of the anthropological conditions for the formation and interpretation of the divine names. Hence, the hermeneutic of the symbols which man creates passes over into the hermeneutic of the symbol that man is, that is, into the anthropology of the imago Dei and limit-situation.[2] Within this anthropological hermeneutic, the question of culture takes on paramount importance, since it is within the cultural sphere that man actualizes his symbolizing power, and thereby seeks both to know himself and to name God.

Our discussion of infinity and the limit-situation will proceed in two interrelated stages. The first will be a structural analysis of the relation between the infinite and the finite, and will take its lead from Cusanus' mathematical symbolism. The second will deal with the anthropology of the limit-situation, and will conclude with a discussion of culture as the concrete locus for the analogia mentis and hermeneutic of the divine names. In the course of our presentation, what may be described as an "eclipse of Dionysius" will occur, since there is little explicit treatment of

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[1] Eriugena, Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, pp. 292-94 (294A - B).

[2] Cf. Dupré, "Die Idee einer neuen Logik bei Nikolaus von Kues", pp. 366-67.

either infinity or anthropology in the corpus Dionysiacum. On the other hand, because of Cusanus' extensive development of these themes, he will assume a central position, while John the Scot's crucial discussions of infinity and the idea of humanity will supplement our argument. Yet, in spite of this imbalance in the use of sources, the fundamental congruence between the major Dionysian themes and these speculative structures of Eriugena and Cusanus is not to be denied. Rather, as Cusanus might say, the analysis of infinity and the limit-situation can be seen as an explication of Dionysius' seminal insight.[3] With these general considerations in mind, we may now turn to this analysis and explication in greater detail.

1. Finite and Infinite

The polarity between the finite and infinite continually recurs in Cusanus' philosophy, and provides a structural principle for his various names of God. For as infinite power, the non-aliud both transcends and grounds the finitude of

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[3]For instance, witness the conflation of themes in this comment of Cusanus on Dionysius' Mystical Theology: "Et michi visum fuit quod tota ista mistica theologia sit intrare ipsam infinitatem absolutam, [Dionysius] dicit enim infinitas contradictorium coincidenciam, scilicet finem sine fine; et nemo potest Deum mistice videre nisi in caligine coincicie, que est infinitas", Cusanus, "Letter to the Abbot and Monks of Tegernsee (September 14, 1453)", ed. Vansteenberghe, Autour de la docte ignorance, pp. 115-16. Cf. Ivánka, Plato Christianus, p. 257.

alterity.[4] Cusanus similarly formulates the distinction between the Maximum and the more-and-less so that "the absolute maximum alone is infinite and... all else, in reference to it, is finite and limited."[5] The coincidence of the maximum and the minimum further leads to the conception of the Possest or Posse ipsum which is all that it can be, and thus constitutes an unlimited actuality in contrast to the contracted finitude of the posse-fieri.[6] Therefore, the relation between God and creation comes to be interpreted as that between infinity and the finite. In specifying this relation, Cusanus states the general principle that "Between the infinite and the finite there is no possible proportion."[7] Although this theme itself is not Cusanus' novel creation,[8] his thoroughgoing systematic development of it does indeed constitute a novelty. For it is a principle which he never

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[4]Cf. Cusanus, De non-aliud, Schriften II, pp. 470 (VII), & 484 (X).

[5]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 16; Schriften I, p. 210 (I,vi). Cf. also Cusanus, Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, p. 658 (III): "Solum enim infinitas non potest esse maior nec minor."

[6]Cusanus, De apice theoriae, Schriften II, p. 372; De possest, Schriften II, pp. 314-16; De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 54-60 (XII - XIII).

[7]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 73; Schriften I, p. 326 (II,ii). Cf. also De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 200 (I,iii); De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 200 (XXIII); De pace fidei, Schriften III, p. 710 (I); Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, p. 696 (XII).

[8]Cf. Bonaventure, Breviloquium IV,vi,4-5; Aquinas, In phys. VIII,31; Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas of Cues, pp. 248-49; Cassirer, Individual and Cosmos, pp. 10-11.

tires of reiterating, and whose foundations and implications he never ceases to explore. Cusanus does not simply posit the absolute disproportion between the finite and infinite as an unreflected assumption; rather, he is continually examining the principle itself from every vantage point and within every dimension of human existence and thought.

The structure of this absolute disproportion can perhaps be indicated most clearly in terms of the mathematical infinite. For, as Cusanus remarks, "Since there is no other approach to the knowledge of things divine than symbols, we cannot do better than to use mathematical signs on account of their indestructible certitude."[9] As we shall see in discussing the quadratura circuli, Cusanus' mathematical speculations generally focus upon functional relations, whose elements converge towards unity as their limit. To indicate the structure of these relations, we shall first turn to Cartesian coordinate geometry and the example of a hyperbola. While Cusanus surely did not know this example, its functional correlation between numerical and geometric progression expresses clearly and succinctly the mathematical limit-situation which Cusanus sought to explicate.

The graph of the quadratic function $XY=C$, where $C \neq 0$, yields a hyperbola (Fig. 2). The curves of the hyperbola

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[9] Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 27; Schriften I, p. 230 (I,xi). Concerning Cusanus' use of mathematical analogies, cf. Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, pp. 206-09.

Let XY = C, where C≠0
Let XY = 20

X	Y
1	20
2	10
4	5
5	4
10	2
20	1
∞	0
0	∞
-20	-1
-10	-2
-5	-4
-4	-5
-2	-10
-1	-20

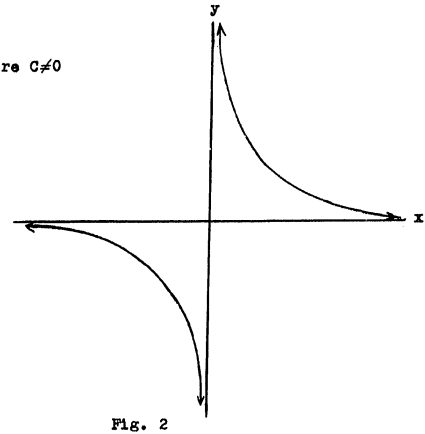

Fig. 2

continually tend towards the axes as limits, yet never actually touch them; that is, the relation is asymptotic. The axes lie outside the sequence of numbers and points that constitute the curves, for — regardless of the continually shrinking distance between curve and limit — the curve can never coincide with the axes through the finite process of numerical multiplication. Within the structuralization of the hyperbola, therefore, the infinite or unlimited is outside the series of finite numbers, and no piling up of numbers and fractions of numbers can yield the infinite.

Like the Neoplatonic and Dionysian One which it signifies, the mathematical infinite constitutes a simple totality which is "neither a unit in the multiplicity of things nor yet the sum total of such units."[10] Between the infinite as primal totum and the finite series of numbers, therefore, "there is no possible proportion." Yet the curves of the graph are strictly limited, having their very being only in relation to the limit as that towards which they tend. Hence, as we turn towards the theoretical interpretation of this mathematical symbol, we must note the following: infinity is wholly other than the finite, and yet is itself given in constitutive relation to the limited and finite. The infinite or unlimited thus cannot be thought apart from the limit and limited; nor can the limited be thought apart from the unlimited and the limit; nor, finally, can the limit be thought apart from the limited and the unlimited. The threefold structuralization is therefore essentially one of interrelation, since each element taken singly necessarily involves the whole structure. Therefore, the infinite is both constitutive principle within the finite, and its determinate negation.

As another mathematical symbol, let us examine Cusanus' recurring example of the quadratura circuli or circulatio

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[10] Dionysius, On the Divine Names, p. 79 (II,11). Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 652C - 653C; and Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 150 (XIII).

quadrati.[11] A square is inscribed within a circle, and as the number of sides and angles is multiplied, the resulting polygons approach the circumference of the circle:

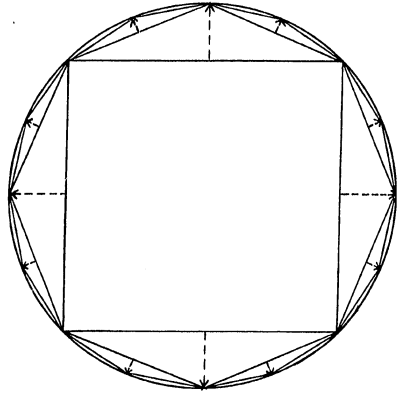

Fig. 3

[11] Cusanus, Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, p. 686 (XI). The bulk of Cusanus' mathematical treatises is devoted to this aenigma, including the De mathematicis complementis, the Quadratura circuli, and a Dialogus de circuli quadratura. Cf. Cusanus, Die mathematischen Schriften, German tr. by Josepha Hofmann, with intro. & notes by Joseph E. Hofmann (Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues, vol. 11; Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952). Although our discussion of this problem sketches only its barest outlines, it sufficiently indicates its structure and function.

Yet no multiplication of the polygon's sides, were they even as prolific as rabbits, could yield the circumference of the circle. As in the relation of a hyperbola to its limits, the relation between the multiplying sides of the polygon and the circle is asymptotic. The multiplying sides and angles approach the circumference ever more closely, yet the finite process of multiplication can never bring the polygon to coincide with the circle; such coincidence is conceivable only at infinity, that is, only outside the finite gradations of the multiplying sides and angles.[12] The circle thereby acts as the infinitely approachable limit towards which the multiplying sides inexorably tend, but which can never be reached through the finite process of multiplication. Therefore, in its symbolic significance,

> the circumference represents transcendence. It is not the last polygon, the one with the greatest number of sides possible, which is never attained. It is something that is beyond the possibility of every polygon. It is another order, not the maximum in the same line. With transcendence thus safeguarded, it is clear that the circumference is suggested as the goal of every polygon inscribed therein.[13]

In the relational structure of infinity, limit and the finite, Cusanus thus discerns a peculiarly fitting analogy for the paradox of theophany and transcendence. As Gandillac has commented concerning the variety of Cusanus' formulations

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[12]Cf. Cusanus, Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, p. 666 (V).

[13]Martínez Gómez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa", pp. 88-89.

and examples,

> What one will discover, at the center of all these speculations, will always be the paradox of an Infinite posed — simultaneously and indissolubly — as 'purely' transcendent and as 'totally' immanent.[14]

In light of this integrative power, the idea of infinity assumes a fundamental importance for the learned ignorance. Rather than recapitulate each of Cusanus' conjectures in terms of infinity, we shall confine our discussion to the central paradox of theophany and transcendence. As we explicate this paradox in relation to the limit-situation, we shall also recollect the logic of the divine names in its principal modes of negation, affirmation and coincidence. The metaphysical interpretation of infinity will thus follow the main lines of our argument. Further, to appreciate the full import of the limit-situation for the learned ignorance, we must examine its anthropological significance. For it is within the concrete act of man's thinking and its "progressing regressions" that this structure is elaborated and finds its ontological setting. The mathematical and metaphysical analysis of infinity therefore leads into the anthropology of the limit-situation, which will be discussed

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[14]Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 292. Similarly, Francis N. Caminiti speaks of "an infinity which is utterly and ineffably beyond, yet none the less most intimately present to even the lowest and most humble reality. We might call it the paradox of an embodied infinity, the mystery of an ineffable presence", Nicholas of Cusa: Docta Ignorantia, a Philosophy of Infinity (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1968), p. 78.

in the following section.

Now, to elaborate the structural correlation between the limit-situation and the paradox of theophany and transcendence, we shall first turn to the analogy between the idea of infinity and divine transcendence. Just as the circle is of another order than the polygon's multiplying sides, the precision of divine infinity cannot be attained within the finite sphere of creation. As a primordial totality prior to all gradation and alterity, absolute infinity remains ineffable and unknowable, because it cannot itself be circumscribed by any finite being or term. Knowledge and language require the definition or determination of limits and alterity, so that one property may be distinguished from another. For this very reason infinity signifies the transcendence of knowledge and imposed terms (vocabula). As Cusanus remarks,

> No name can thoroughly coincide with this absolute infinity.... For every imposition of a word is performed in such a way that the word signifies something. But that which is something, namely this and not that, is finite and limited. And therefore it can never coincide with the infinite.[15]

The relation between the finite and infinite thus provides a

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[15]Cusanus, Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, p. 696 (XII): "ipsum absolute infinitum penitus nullum nomen competere potest.... Nam omnis impositio vocabuli facta est ut vocabulum significat aliquid. Id autem, quod est aliquid, scilicet hoc et non illud, est finitum et terminatum. Et ita nequaquam infinito competere potest."

rule for thinking about divine transcendence: "Finiti ad infinitum nulla est proportio."[16] Within this radical disproportion, infinity negates alterity and finitude, and thereby turns from the determinate sphere of the 'aliquid' towards the transcendental negativity of the 'nihil'. For, as John the Scot insists, if God "is not-something on account of excellence and not privation, it follows that He is nothing on account of infinity."[17]

Since this transcendental negativity finds its most adequate articulation in the apophatic way, infinity becomes the principle for transcendence and its coordinate logic of negation. Hence, Cusanus states that the Absolute Maximum alone is "negative infinitum",[18] and that according to the via negativa "one word alone may be used of Him [God]: Infinite.... Yet infinity is a negative,"[19] not-finite. The thoroughgoing correlation between infinity, negation and transcendence becomes evident in the logical function of the

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[16]Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 200 (XXIII).

[17]Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, ed. Dondaine, p. 262 (IV,3): "si aliquid non est per excellentiam, non priuationem, conficitur nichil esse per infinitatem." Cf. also De divisione naturae 589C - 590B, 592C - 593C, 634B; and supra, pp. 134-35.

[18]Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 320. In contrast to the absolute, negative infinity of God, the universe is "privative infinitum", a 'contracted' infinity which "non... potest esse maius quam est; hoc quidem ex defectu evenit; possibilitas sive materia ultra se non extendit." Cf. Tyrone Lai, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Finite Universe", Journal of the History of Philosophy, XI (1973), pp. 161-67.

[19]Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, tr. Heron, p. 60;

term 'infinite' in Cusanus' usage. Like Dionysius' and Eriugena's use of 'hyper' and 'plus quam', the placing of 'infinite' before a predicate specifies the mode of negation proper to transcendental logic. For "all the names that attribute infinity to God seek to manifest His incomprehensibility through supereminence."[20] Rather than placing limits upon divine transcendence, predications such as 'infinite being' and 'infinite wisdom' signify the integration of finite perfections into infinite unity and totality.

> Just as naught can be added to the infinite, even so the infinite cannot be limited unto anything so as to become aught other than infinite. Infinite goodness is not goodness, but infinity; infinite quantity is not quantity, but infinity, and so with the rest.[21]

For Cusanus, therefore, infinity constitutes the nerve of the via negativa and signifies absolute transcendence.

Yet infinity's unconditional transcendence does not constitute an isolated stasis apart from the finite. For although there may be no proportion between the finite and

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Schriften I, pp. 292-94 (I,xxvi). Cf. also Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 584.

[20]Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 336: "omnia nomina, quae infinitatem Deo attribuunt, eius incomprehensibilitatem nituntur ostendere per supereminentiam"; cf. also pp. 314-16, & 346-48.

[21]Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, pp. 64-65; Schriften III, p. 152 (XIII). Cf. Cusanus, Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, pp. 696 (XII), & 664 (IV): "quando infinitas additur termino, ut, cum dicitur infinita scientia non aliud eius additio agit ad terminum quam removere terminum, ut id, quod significatur terminatam per dictionem seu terminum intueatur mentaliter infinitum seu interminatum."

infinite, there is nevertheless a constitutive relation between them. While infinity is certainly the negation of the finite, it does not overwhelm and obliterate the finite, nor does the finite render impossible the being of the infinite. Rather, as the mathematical symbols reveal, the finite can only be thought in relation to the infinite as its limit. Without the axes as limits, the progressing curves of the hyperbola are inconceivable, since their very curvature is directed towards the limits; and the limits are infinity. In this way the triadic structure of mathematical infinity, limit and the finite represents the dynamic interrelation between transcendence and theophany, between absolute infinity and the finitude of creation. Hence, as Cusanus states,

> Since we admit the existence of an end of the finite (finis finiti), we needs must admit the infinite, or the ultimate end, or the end without an end (finis sine fine). Now we cannot but admit the existence of finite beings, wherefore we cannot but admit the infinite.[22]

From the apparent tautology that the finite requires an end — i.e., that the limited is limited — Cusanus proceeds to question the nature of this end or limitation, and finds a resolution only in infinity, the finis sine fine. For while God remains transcendent in absolute infinity, he also comes to be conceived as the infinitely approachable limit and

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[22]Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 61; Schriften III, p. 148 (XIII). Cf. also Cusanus, "Letter to the Abbot and Monks of Tegernsee (September 14, 1453)", ed. Vansteenberghe, Autour de la docte ignorance, p. 116.

constitutive principle for all finite being. Both Eriugena and Cusanus therefore speak of divine infinity as "the Limit (terminus) of all things beyond which nothing proceeds."[23] In commenting on the limit (terminus) as a field for the hunt of wisdom, Cusanus recollects both infinity and the principle of maximality: this limit

> is very great and unlimited, since there is no end to its magnitude. For it has neither beginning nor end, but rather possesses within itself the beginnings, middles and ends of all limitable things.... The unlimited limit (interminus terminus) is the end of all things capable of ending, the precision and limit of all precisions. The limit, which is all that it can be, is prior to those limits which can become. It determines the whole, therefore, and defines singular things. For it is the perfect unlimited limit of the posse-fieri itself, possessing within itself all things which can become prior to [their] determination. It is therefore the limit of all things and of all knowledge.[24]

When infinity is thus seen as the limit of the finite, the entire relational structure of the limit-situation comes into play. The very being of the created, finite sphere is consti-

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[23] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Sheldon-Williams, p. 204 (516A). Cf. Eriugena's remarks about the 'ambitus' at De divisione naturae 517B, & 622A.

[24] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 126 (XXVII): "... maximus et interminus est, quia magnitudinis eius non est finis. Non enim habet principium nec finem, sed principia media et fines omnium terminabilium in se habet.... Interminus terminus omnium finibilium finis est et omnium praecisionum praecisio et terminus. Terminus, qui est omne quod esse potest, est ante omnem terminum eorum qui fieri possunt. Determinat igitur cuncta definitque singula. Est enim terminus ipsius posse fieri utique interminus, omnia in se determinate quae fieri possunt ante habens; terminus igitur omnium rerum et omnium scientiarum."

tuted only in relation to absolute infinity as its beginning, middle and end — that is, its originating principle, sustaining power, and telos.[25]

In the De principio, Cusanus specifies further both the nature and the limiting function of infinity. Discussing Proclus' commentary on the Parmenides, Cusanus criticizes the Platonic and Aristotelian interpretation of infinity, and proceeds to distinguish between modes of infinity. He notes that Plato "takes infinity for the indeterminate and confused, which is capable of receiving limits and ends, but [takes] the finite for the form which gives ends and limits to the infinite."[26] For Plato the finite is explicitly associated with unity and perfection, while the region of infinity consists in the oppositions and progressive gradations of the more-and-less, as in the dialectical relation between qualities like warmth and cold; alternately phrased, the limit and finite belong to being, while infinity characterizes becoming. Plato therefore accords a pre-eminent value to the finite on account of its bond to unity and being. For similar reasons Aristotle denies the existence of an actual infinite, and

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[25]Cf. Eriygena, De divisione naturae 451D-452A, 514A (citing Maximus' Ambigua), 622A, 653B-C, 675A; Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 142-43 (V,10); and Beierwaltes, Proklos, pp. 82-88.

[26]Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, p. 248: "Capit autem infinitatem pro interminato et confuso apto tamen terminari et finiri, finitum vero pro forma finiente et terminante infinitatem."

posits the impossibility of infinite regress.[27] Hence, we cannot but acknowledge a fundamental shift in the understanding of infinity from Plato and Aristotle to Eriugena and Cusanus. Indeed, a complete ontological and axiological inversion would seem to have occurred, as infinity came to be linked with absolute unity, transcendence and the actual plenitude of being.[28] Cusanus recognizes this shift, and seeks to integrate both conceptions of infinity into a single coherent structure:

> The position of Melissus is not so absurd as Aristotle's refutation claims. For to every reflective consideration, nothing is seen other than infinity, namely limiting infinity (infinitas finiens) and limitable infinity (infinitas finibilis). Limiting infinity is the end which has no end. It is the principle which subsists by itself, and which contains every end. It is God prior to every being. And limitable infinity is the privation of all limit and definition, [and is] limitable by the infinite end. It is after every being.[29]

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[27] Aristotle, Physics III, 4 - 8 (202b - 208a); Metaphysics II, 2 (944a - b). Cf. Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, pp. 222-24; De non-aliud, Schriften II, p. 484 (X).

[28] Among the central figures in bringing about this inversion are Philo Judaeus, Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa. Cf. Henri Guyot, L'infinité divine depuis Philon le Juif jusqu'à Plotin (Paris: Librairies Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, 1906); A. H. Armstrong, "Plotinus' Doctrine of the Infinite and its Significance for Christian Thought", Downside Review, LXXIII (1954-'55), pp. 47-58; Ekkehard Mühlenberg, Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); D. F. Duclow, "Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa: Infinity, Anthropology and the Via Negativa", to be published in the Downside Review, April, 1974.

[29] Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, pp. 248-50: "Non est Melissi positio its absurda sicut Aristoteles eam redarguit. Nihil enim in omni consideratione videtur quam infinitas, scilicet infinitas finiens et infinitas finibilis. Infinitas finiens est finis cuius non est finis. Et est principium per se subsistens omnem finem complicans. Et est Deus

The dynamics of the limit-situation thus emerge from the creative power of the *infinitas finiens*, which determines the constitutive limits of finite, created being. Cusanus therefore establishes a dialectic of limitation between the two modes of infinity, and discerns the genesis of finite being within the transcendent actuality of the *infinitas finiens*. For,

> when the first infinite [*infinitas finiens*] limits the second [*infinitas finibilis*], finite being arises from the infinite principle — that is, from the first [infinity] that is more than being since it precedes it [i.e., being], and not from the second since it is after being. In the first infinity all definable things are in act; all definable things are in the second with respect to the omnipotence of the first.[30]

Cusanus thus insists upon both the transcendence and the creative power of the *infinitas finiens*. Indeed, in virtue of its ontological priority to the finite, absolute infinity constitutes the complicative unity and creative principle for finite being.

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ante omne ens. Et infinitas finibilis est carentia omnis termini et definitionis finibilis fine infinito. Et est post omne ens." Regarding Melissus' doctrine of infinity, cf. Diels-Kranz, fragments 2 - 6. For Aristotle's critique, cf. Metaphysics I, 5 (986b). Eriugena distinguishes between the infinity of God and the infinity of matter at *De divisione naturae* 499D - 500A; Cusanus' marginal gloss on this passage reads, "quomodo deus et materia habent infinitatem" (Institut für Cusanusforschung, "Kritisches Verzeichnis", p. 95).

[30] Cusanus, *De principio*, Schriften II, p. 250: "Quando igitur infinitum primum finit secundum oritur ens finitum ab infinito principio scilicet a primo quod est plusquam ens, cum ipsum praecedat, non a secundo, cum sit post ens. In primo infinito sunt omnia definibilia actu, in secundo sunt omnia definibilia in respectu omnipotentiae primi." Cf. Rudolf Haubst, "Die Thomas- und Proklos-Exzerpte des 'Nicolaus

Therefore, as infinitas finiens and terminus interminus, absolute infinity is both the originating principle and telos of finite, created being. Infinity is the ineradicable condition for the intelligibility and very being of the finite, as the circle is for the multiplying sides of the inscribed polygon. In its complicative power and maximality, infinity contains all being in unity.

> Did infinity not include in itself all being, it were not infinity. If it were not infinity, then neither would the finite exist, nor aught alien or different, since these cannot exist without the otherness (alteritas) of ends and limits. If the infinite be taken away, naught remaineth.[31]

As in the theophanic dialectic which governs the transcendent Good, the division of nature, the non-aliud and Possest, this radical inherence of all finite being provides the precondition for theophanic manifestation. Hence, recollecting the expressionist paradigm and the complicatio-explicatio polarity, we may say that finite being manifests or explicates absolute infinity. Cusanus therefore states that "since the infinite form is received only in a finite way, every creature is, as it were, finite infinity or a created God."[32]

Treverensis' in Codicillus Strassburg 84", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, I (1961), pp. 27-33.

[31] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 62; Schriften III, p. 150 (XIII). cf. Dionysius, On the Divine Names, pp. 142-43 (V,9 - 10), & 155-56 (VIII,2 - 3).

[32] Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, p. 328 (II,11): "Quoniam ipsa forma infinita non est nisi finite recepta, ut omnis creatura sit quasi infinitas finita aut Deus creatus."

For the immanence of the limit within limited being reflects the immanence of infinity as both limiting (finiens) power and terminus interminus. In its twofold limiting function, absolute infinity thus becomes constitutively present throughout the rich diversity of finite being.[33] The triadic relation of infinity, limit and the finite thus provides a structural principle for the interpretation of theophany.

The entire polarity of theophany and transcendence attains a new clarity in terms of the limit-situation. For "the infinite is the most adequate measure of finite things, even though the finite is completely without proportion to the infinite."[34] The radical incommensurability between the finite and infinite guarantees the ultimate inaccessibility of divine transcendence, since no created being or intellect can measure or circumscribe the unlimited. Yet the limit-situation is a properly relational structure, within which infinity constitutes the limit and measure for the finite. Conversely, the finite is given only as the manifestation of infinity under the conditions of limitation and alterity.

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[33]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, p. 446 (Bk. I): "immultiplicabilis infinitas in varia receptione melius explicatur. Magna enim diversitas immultiplicabilitatem melius exprimit."

[34]Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, p. 582: "infinitum est adaequatissima mensura finitorum, licet finitum sit ad ipsum infinitum penitus improportionale." Cf. also Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, pp. 686-88 (XI); De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 152 (XIII); Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, p. 476 (Bk. II).

The infinite measure or limit thus becomes manifest in the measured or limited, so that "every creature is, as it were, finite infinity or a created God." Hence, the conception of infinity signifies transcendence in such a way that it becomes the measure and ineradicable condition for theophany. While in its precision divine infinity remains unattainable to all finite being and thought, it nevertheless becomes infinitely approachable, open to unlimited depths of participation. Therefore, by interpreting the relation between God and creation through the limit-situation, theophany and transcendence cannot be seen as a mutually destructive opposition, as a merely insoluble contradiction before which speculative thought must itself dissolve; rather, they come to be grasped as a polarity, each positing and necessarily conditioning the other.

Yet the implications of the limit-situation extend beyond this integration of theophany and transcendence, and into the logic of the divine names. Since we have already noted the internal connection between infinity and the *via negativa*, here we may focus upon the cataphatic way and the logic of coincidence. Discussing the many gods honored in the pagan pantheon, Cusanus comments on the altar to the "*Terminus infinitus, cuius non est finis*", and goes on to say that all the diverse names of the gods

> explicate the *complicatio* of the one ineffable name; and since the proper name is infinite, it contains-in-

> unity the infinitely many names of particular perfections. For this reason, the explications can be many, and yet never so many and so great that there could not be more; for each one of them is to the proper and ineffable [name], as the finite is to the infinite.[35]

Here the fundamental contrast between the various imposed names (vocabula) and the one precise name (verbum) of God is interpreted within the context of the limit-situation. Given the absolute disproportion between the finite and infinity, no finite name can attain the precision of the one infinite name. Yet within the relational structure of the limit-situation, the way of affirmation is not reduced to silence, but rather becomes a process of unending conjecture. In terms of the asymptotic relation between the finite and infinite, "there is no end to speculative metaphors (aenigmae), because no one of them is so near [its truth] that it could not always be nearer."[36] For not only is absolute infinity the determinate negation of the finite, but it also constitutes the infinitely approachable limit for an ever deeper participation in truth. Hence, the idea of infinity transforms

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[35]Cusanus, De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 288-90 (I,xxv): "... unius ineffabilis nominis complicationem sunt explicantia; et secundum quod nomen proprium est infinitum, ita infinita nomina particularium perfectionum complicat. Quare et explicantia possent esse multa et numquam tot et tanta, quin possent esse plura; quorum quodlibet se habet ad proprium et ineffabile, ut finitum ad infinitum."

[36]Cusanus, De possest, Schriften II, p. 338: "Aenigmatum nullus est finis, cum nullum sit adeo propinquum, quin semper possit esse propinquius." Cf. also Compendium, Schriften II, p. 694 (V).

the way of symbolic affirmation into an unceasing creation of conjectures and divine names. Conceived within the limit-situation, the ineffability of transcendence becomes the condition for symbolic affirmation: "Because in all speech it [i.e., infinite wisdom] is ineffable there can be no limit to the means of expressing it."[37]

Therefore, the learned ignorance and its conjectural logic do not entail the abdication of man's reflective and symbolizing powers. Rather, in recollecting the limits of these powers before infinite transcendence, the learned ignorance impels them towards ever new ventures of conjecture and symbolic creation. Here, then, is the reason for Cusanus' irenic approach to the history of philosophy and religion,[38] as well as for his repeated attempts to formulate the name of God — the absolute Maximum, Possest, Posse ipsum, non-aliud, and infinity itself. Since there neither is nor can be a human conception which is definitive and fully adequate to absolute infinity, we must both practice tolerance as the

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[37] Cusanus, Idiota de sapientia, tr. Dolan, Unity and Reform, p. 106; Schriften III, p. 430 (Bk. I). In a related context, Henri Bergson writes: "Dieu est amour, et il est objet d'amour: tout l'apport du mysticisme est là. De ce double amour le mystique n'aura jamais fini de parler. Sa description est interminable parce que la chose à décrire est inexprimable." Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion, Oeuvres, ed. A. Robinet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 1188.

[38] Cf. Rudolf Haubst's discussion of the role of 'concordantia' in Cusanus' thought, "Die leitenden Gedanken und Motive der Cusanischen Theologie", Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, IV (1964), pp. 264ff.

condition for apprehending truth, and seek continually fresh approximations to the infinite precision of truth. Indeed, conjecture consists precisely in the recollection of limitation and the process of symbolic and speculative approximation. As Gandillac formulates this dialectic of limitation and approximation,

> Conjecture defines itself starting from a double certitude: first, that every finite approach remains without proportion to the infinite which it seeks; and next, that it measures its object only by means of the immanence within it of an infinite Rule. It is a question of considering an ensemble of progressive adequations, which are so many partial victories of Truth, and whose maximum is only a superlative which is inaccessible to man.[39]

Yet this interpretation of symbolic creation does not entail a cabalistic proliferation of symbols. Rather, the idea of infinity provides a unifying focus for symbolic affirmation, a focus which becomes manifest in the logic of coincidence. For the coincidentia oppositorum is the principle of integration for the cataphatic way, because it is the 'wall of paradise' within which finite contradictory predications are directed towards the unity and negativity of infinity. By thus articulating the reflective turn towards infinity, coincidence expresses the limits of the conjectural process. And these limits come to light only in terms of the complicative power of infinity itself, which is the root of

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[39] Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 169; cf. also p. 166.

coincidence:

> Just as otherness (alteritas) in unity is without otherness because it is unity, even so, in infinity, contradiction is without contradiction, because it is infinity. Infinity is simplicity itself, contradiction existeth not without becoming other. Yet in simplicity otherness existeth without becoming other because it is simplicity itself, seeing that all that is said of absolute simplicity coincideth therewith, because therein having is being. Therein the opposition of opposites is an opposition without opposition, just as the end of things finite is an end without an end. Thou, then, O God, art the Opposition of opposites (oppositio oppositorum), because Thou art infinite, and because Thou art infinite Thou art infinity itself. And in infinity the opposition of opposites existeth without opposition.[40]

The very notion of infinity as the limit of the finite, as the terminus interminus or finis infinitus, constitutes a coincidence of opposites.[41] Coincidence is therefore implicated within the very structure of the limit-situation. Hence, John the Scot maintains that God is the "ambitus" of of all things and the "similium similitudo et dissimilitudo dissimilium, oppositorum oppositio, contrariarum contrarietas."[42] For in the infinite 'ambitus', all likeness and opposition coincide, since here they are reduced to unity in

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[40] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, pp. 61-62; Schriften III, pp. 148050 (XIII).

[41] Claiming the authority of Dionysius, Cusanus speaks of infinity as the "contradictoriorum coincidentiam, scilicet finem sine fine". Cusanus, "Letter to the Abbot and Monks of Tegernsee (September 14, 1453)", ed. Vansteenberghe, Autour de la docte ignorance, p. 116.

[42] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 517B - C. Cusanus' marginal gloss emphasizes, "deus contrariorum contrarietas" (Institut für Cusanusforschung, "Kritisches Verzeichnis", p. 98). Cf. Beierwaltes, "Deus Oppositio Oppositorum", pp. 179-84.

their originating, complicative principle.

Therefore, both the integrative and the transcending power of the idea of infinity emerges with greater clarity in the logic of coincidence. For within the mathematical limit-situation, the infinite line, triangle, circle and sphere cease to be distinct geometric constructs, because they coincide with infinity itself. Similarly, since "all that existeth in infinite being is itself infinite being pure and simple,"[43] infinite power (posse) coincides with infinite actuality (esse); for within absolute infinity, neither power nor actuality is other than infinity. The idea of infinity thus provides the ultimate ground for the divine names Possest and Posse ipsum. In more general terms, designations such as infinite goodness or infinite wisdom signify not these particular qualities in an eminent degree, but rather the absolute infinity within which these qualities coincide.[44] In this way infinity transcends not only the quantitative gradations of the more-and-less, but also the qualitative distinctions among finite predications.

In virtue of its integrative power, the logic of coin-

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[43]Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 71; Schriften III, p. 158 (XV). Regarding coincidence in the mathematical limit-situation, cf. De docta ignorantia Schriften I, pp. 232-40 (I,xii - xv).

[44]Cf. Cusanus, De visione Dei, Schriften III, p. 152 (XIII); cited supra, p. 213, n. 21.

cidence thus directs reflection towards the transcendence and negativity of absolute infinity. Coincidence articulates the limit where the mind posits a "transsumptio" or speculative leap from the finite to the infinite;[45] that is, it articulates the intellectual unity's mediation between the finitude of reason and the infinity of the mind's divine unity. Nevertheless, between the finite as such and absolute infinity there remains no possible proportion, to say nothing of coincidence. For if infinity is the complicative principle within which conjectural names coincide, it is also the determinate negation of all finite designations. Infinity is therefore the origin and telos of the conjectural process and coincidence, and yet in its precision remains beyond the reach of every conjecture and coincidence. Hence, Gandillac writes that

> We have not found a single text of Cusanus which unites the finite to the infinite in a true 'union'. The synthetic operation /of coincidence/ always brings itself to bear upon terms which are posited in advance as infinite (the maximum and the minimum), or upon symmetrical finite terms which are considered hypothetically at the limit of their growth.[46]

Only when conceived as actualizing their limits — that is, as infinite — do finite terms and properties coincide. For the limit-situation cannot be thought without the following paradox: in its limiting function infinity is all things

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[45] Cf. Gandillac, La philosophie de Nicolas de Cues, p. 206.

[46] Ibid. pp. 221-22; cf. also p. 150.

complicative, in such a way that within infinity all things are nothing other than infinity itself; yet precisely within this reductio, infinity is nothing of all things because no finite manifestation or designation adequately explicates the precision of infinity. The fundamental paradox of theophany and transcendence must therefore be re-affirmed, since "infinity is alike all things and no one of them all."[47] Infinity is at once the constitutive principle and the determining negation of the finite: constitutive principle as the finite's complicative origin and infinitely approachable limit; and determining negation in the radical disproportion between finite and infinite, which precludes the possibility of their coincidence. In tracing the logic of coincidence within the limit-situation, we are therefore led back to the issue of transcendence and the via negativa.

In conclusion, the analysis of the limit-situation thus proves to be extraordinarily fruitful for the learned ignorance. For it both demonstrates the internal coherence of the polarity between theophany and transcendence, and provides a comprehensive framework for the entire logic of the divine names. The via negativa, symbolic affirmation and the coincidentia oppositorum find their integration within the relational structure of infinity, limit and the finite. To

[47] Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, p. 62; Schriften III, p. 150 (XIII).

complete our argument, we need only trace the implications of the limit-situation for anthropology.

2. The Anthropology of the Limit-Situation

The question of anthropology is scarcely new to the course of our inquiry. Indeed, in developing a doctrine of man we shall recollect some of the central themes of our discussion. The cultural setting of hermeneutics, the analogies of the mind and word, Cusanus' doctrine concerning the unities of the mind, the paradigm of symbolic expression — all are anthropological structures. So that these structures do not function as unreflected presuppositions, they must be brought into focus within a coherent anthropology. Moreover, a distinguishing feature of hermeneutics and the learned ignorance is their insistence upon the mediating and creative role of the human subject. After all, the learned ignorance characterizes the noetic and epistemological condition of man, and it is man who — in light of this condition — undertakes the project of the divine names. Since the locus for the articulation of meaning and truth can be nothing other than the symbolizing and reflective power of man, completion of the hermeneutical project requires an explicit anthropology. In light of the previous section, this anthropology takes the form of an interpretation of man as dwelling within the limit-situation, as the dynamic center of mediation

between the created and the uncreated, between the finite and the infinite. As fundamentally the creature of the limits, man himself constitutes the final ground for the project of the divine names.

The limit-situation of humanity involves a fundamental paradox. Man is created and hence bound within specific limits; his bodily life, limited technical capacity, and ignorance clearly mark him as a finite being. Yet within this very finitude man is constitutively related to infinity and totality. Indeed, since the finite can only be thought in relation to the limit and infinity, we may even say that in the reflective apprehension of his created, finite nature, man discovers his openness to totality and the infinite. In its classical Aristotelian formulation, this relatedness to totality has become a philosophical commonplace: "anima est quodamodo omnia,"[48] that is, the soul is in some way all that is. In terms of mathematical structures, this dimension of totality discloses itself in the idea of infinity as a totum which is not the sum of its parts, but rather a transfinite whole, a unity prior to the conception of a multiplicity of parts and their summing up into a total. Within the dynamic circularity of the mind, the mathematical infinite manifests the mind's first unity, the idea of God, which constitutes

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[48]Aristotle, De anima III, 8 (431b). Cf. Josef Pieper, Leisure the Basis of Culture, tr. A. Dru (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 88.

the beginning and end for the "progressing regressions" through the unities of intellect, reason and sensibility.[49] Hence, considering the entire structure of the mind, we may discern an on-going dialectic between the infinity of the mind's divine unity and the finitude of the particular lower unities. The paradox of the limit-situation therefore emerges within the dynamic circularity of the mind itself.

The full anthropological significance of the idea of infinity as a symbolic structure is disclosed only in its transcendental interpretation. For here the idea of infinity suggests man's relatedness to the whole of creation, and to the uncreated divine nature, conceived as infinite unity and perfection. Within this context man comes to be understood as a person — that is, as a reality the whole of whose being is constituted in relation to totality. More precisely, man's being consists in total relatedness, in both a radical openness to the infinity of God, and an unlimited power of assimilation to the world. Thus understood, man's personhood can be grasped within a twofold symbolism: that of the limit-situation, and that of the imago Dei.

Following the exegetical traditions which go back to Philo, John the Scot and Cusanus speak of the mind as the

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[49] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 16 (I,vi), 38 (I,x), & 118 (II,vii): "Principium enim ipsius fluxus et finis refluxus coincidunt in unitate absoluta, quae est infinitas." Cf. supra, pp. 55-56

proper locus for discourse concerning man as imago Dei.[50] Yet it is the imago Dei seen from the perspective of the limit-situation. Hence, Eriugena writes that "just as Divine Essence is infinite, so human substance made in Its image is bounded by no definite limit."[51] Likewise, in Cusanus' Idiota de mente the Layman states that "the mind subsisting in itself is infinite or the image of infinity."[52] The divine mind alone is "maximum and absolute" infinity, while created mind is made in its image and, in the case of man, functions as the animating power of a finite body. Cusanus further specifies this imaging of infinity by distinguishing between explicatio and imago, and by stating that the mind is not the explication of the divine unity, but its image.

> The mind is the first image of the divine complicatio, uniting ("complicating") all images of the complicatio within its simplicity and power. For just as God is the complicatio of enfoldings (complicationum), the mind — which is the image of God — is likewise the image of the complicatio of enfoldings.[53]

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[50]Cf. Philo Judaeus, On the Creation of the World, XXIII, 69; On Abraham, VIII,1; On the Migration of Abraham, XXIII; Origen, De principiis I,1,7; Eriugena, De divisione naturae 786D, 790B - D; Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 508 (IV).

[51]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 772A: "Itaque sicut divina essentia, ad cujus imaginem facta est, infinita est, ita illa humana substantia nullo certo fine terminatur" (reading substantia for Floss' substitutio).

[52]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 486 (I): "Mens in se subsistens aut infinita est aut infiniti imago"; cf. also p. 604 (XV).

[53]Ibid. p. 506 (IV): "Et ita mens est imago complicationis divinae prima omnes imagines complicationis sua sim-

As the living image of absolute infinity and totality, the mind participates in its complicative power. Therefore,

> If all things are in the divine mind as in their precise and proper truth, all things are in our mind as in the image or likeness of proper truth — that is, conceptually. For knowledge occurs through likeness. All things are in God, but are there as the exemplars of things; all things are in our mind, but are there as the likenesses of things. Just as God is absolute being, which is the complicatio of all beings, our mind is the image of that infinite being, and thus enfolds all images.[54]

The totality of the created, explicated universe thus subsists within the mind's complicative power, but in the way of concept and likeness. For instance, in the conception of the point, the mind "discovers in itself the capacity for assimilating itself to all magnitude"; and in the conception of unity, the mind "can assimilate itself to all multiplicity." Hence, in general terms, "through the image of the absolute complicatio which is the divine mind, [our mind]

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plicitate et virtute complicantis. Sicut Deus est complicationum complicatio, sic mens, quae est Dei imago, est imago complicationis complicationum." Cf. also pp. 540-42 (VII); and Dangelmayr, Gotteserkenntnis und Gottesbegriff, pp. 96-102.

[54]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 504 (III): "Si omnia sunt in mente divina ut in sua praecisa et propria veritate, omnia sunt in mente nostra ut in imagine seu similitudine propriae veritatis, hoc est notionaliter; similitudine enim fit cognitio. Omnia in Deo sunt, sed ibi rerum exemplaria; omnia in nostra mente, sed ibi rerum similitudines. Sicut Deus est entitas absoluta, quae est omnium entium complicatio, sic mens nostra est illius entitatis infinitae imago, quae est omnium imaginum complicatio." Cf. also p. 534 (VII); De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 76-78 (XVII); De ludo globi, Schriften III, p. 320 (Bk. II); Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 778D-779D; and Isaac of Stella, Epistola de anima, PL 194, 1886A.

has the power whereby it can assimilate itself to all explications."[55] As the image of absolute infinity, the mind at once recollects its archetype and genesis in God, and possesses the power for an unlimited assimilation to created, finite being.

However, the infinity of the mind must not be taken simply as an achieved fact, as a stasis within which humanity may congratulate itself for being and knowing all things. On the contrary, the dynamics of the imaging process and the limit-situation undercut any temptation to "the insolence of satiety"[56] concerning man's status, and indicate the indispensable function which distinction and progress play within the imago Dei theme. For the general principles which govern the relation between image and exemplar also structure the anthropology of the limit-situation, where hermeneutics encounters man as "the most symbolic symbol".[57] This conver-

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[55]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 506 (IV): "... in se reperit potentiam, qua se omni magnitudini assimilat"; "... se potest omni multitudini assimilare"; "Et per imaginem absolutae complicationis, quae est mens infinita, vim habet, qua se potest assimilare omni explicationi." Cf. De ludo globi, Schriften III, pp. 320-22 (Bk. II).

[56]Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection, in Select Writings and Letters of Gregory of Nyssa, ed. & tr. by W. Moore & H. A. Wilson ("The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers", Second Series, Vol. V; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, reprint of 1892 ed.), p. 450. Cited hereafter as "Select Writings".

[57]This apt description was coined by Wilhelm Dupré; cf. Religion in Primitive Cultures: A Study in Ethnophilosophy (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), chapter III. This phrase could fittingly serve as the emblem for the anthropology of the imago Dei and limit-situation.

gence between hermeneutics and anthropology is emphasized with peculiar clarity by Gregory of Nyssa, whose De opificio hominis is among Eriugena's principal sources on the imago Dei theme. Since the process of imaging requires both resemblance and differentiation, Gregory indicates the need for a distinction between image and archetype within the structure of the imago Dei theme:

> Now as the image bears in all points the semblance of the archetypal excellence, if it had not a difference in some respect, being absolutely without divergence it would no longer be a likeness, but will in that case be manifestly identical with its prototype.[38]

Gregory and John the Scot proceed to establish the distance between image and archetype as that between the created and the uncreated[59] — a distance which is itself infinite. Hence, in terms of the symbolism of the limit-situation, the relation between the mind as imago Dei and God as exemplar becomes asymptotic: the infinity of the mind consists in its unlimited capacity to progress in likeness towards the absolute infinity of God. Eriugena therefore cites Gregory's assertion that "every rational and intellectual creature will desire and seek to see its God eternally and without

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[58]Gregory of Nyssa, De opificio hominis, XVI,12; Select Writings, p. 405. Eriugena habitually cites the De opificio hominis as the "De imagine"; cf. De divisione naturae 502A-B, 788A-B, 917A. Concerning Eriugena's use of Gregory and his translation of the De opificio hominis, cf. Cappuyns, Jean Scot Erigène, pp. 172-78.

[59]Gregory of Nyssa, De opificio hominis, XVI,12; Select Writings, p. 405. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 778A-B. Cf. Cusanus, Apologia doctae ignorantiae, Schriften I, pp. 540-42.

end. Since what it seeks is infinite, it is necessary that its quest also be infinite."[60] In terms virtually identical to those of Gregory and John the Scot, Cusanus writes of the soul's mystical ascent that "it is always moved to attain more, and since the Good is infinite, the spirit never ceases to be moved."[61] The dynamics of the limit-situation thus transform the mind's approach to its divine exemplar into an unlimited process of assimilation. For as divine infinity is open to unlimited depths of participation, the soul is characterized by a progressive, ever deepening capacity for participation.[62]

In the Idiota de mente, Cusanus' Layman provides a vivid analogy to illustrate this convergence between the themes of the imago Dei and the limit-situation. Speaking of the mind as a power (vis) and as an image of divine creativity, the Layman comments that

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[60]Eriugena, Expositiones super Ierarchiam caelestem, ed. Dondaine, p. 280 (VI,2): "... omnem rationalem et intellectualem creaturam eternaliter ac sine fine Deum suum uidere desideraturam et quesituram. Quoniam infinitum est quod querit, necesse est ut infinite querat." Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, De opificio hominis, XXI,2; Select Writings, pp. 410-11.

[61]Cusanus, "Letter to Gaspard Aindorffer (September 22, 1452)", ed. Vansteenberghe, Autour de la docte ignorance, p. 112: "Movetur igitur semper ut plus attingat, et quia est bonum infinitum, nunquam deficit moveri spiritus." Cf. Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, pp. 430-40 (Bk. I).

[62]Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, On the Soul and the Resurrection, Select Writings, p. 453; also La vie de Moïse, ed. Daniélou, pp. 210-16 (PG 44, 376C - 380A). What is at issue here is Gregory's distinctive doctrine of the "epectasis", the infinite progress or "stretching forth" of the soul to the things that are before (Phil. 3:13).

> the mind is created by the creative art as if that art wanted to create itself; and since the infinite art cannot /itself/ be multiplied, there then arises an image of it. It is as though an artist wished to portray himself, and — since he himself cannot be multiplied — he paints his own image. No matter how perfect it may be, an image which cannot be more perfect and more like its exemplar is never as perfect as any imperfect image which possesses the power to conform itself, without limit, ever more closely to its inaccessible exemplar. For this latter image imitates infinity in the only way an image can. It is as though the artist painted two pictures (imagines) of himself: one actually appears to be a better likeness of him, but is dead; whereas the other, although a less precise likeness, is alive in such a way that — stimulated to motion by its object — it can make itself ever more like its exemplar. No one would doubt that the second picture is more perfect, since it imitates the painter's art more closely.[63]

It is only as a moving image of infinity that man can be infinity humanly contracted, or infinite in a human way.[64] Dwelling within the boundary of the infinite and the finite, man is the most symbolic symbol in the sense that he consti-

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[63]Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 592 (XIII): "Unde mens est creata ab arte creatrice, quasi ars illa se ipsam creare vellet, et quia immultiplicabilis est infinita ars, quod tunc eius surgat imago, sicut si pictor se ipsum depingere vellet et, quia ipse non est multiplicabilis, tunc se depingendo oriretur eius imago. Et quia imago numquam quantumcumque perfecta, si perfectior et conformior esse nequit exemplari, adeo perfecta est, sicut quaecumque imperfecta imago, quae potentiam habet se semper plus et plus sine limitatione inaccessibili exemplari conformandi; in hoc enim infinitatem imaginis modo, quo potest, imitatur, quasi si pictor duas imagines faceret, quarum una mortua videretur actu sibi similior, alia autem minus similis viva, scilicet talis, quae se ipsam ex obiecto eius ad motum incitata conformiorem semper facere posset, nemo haesitat secundum perfectiorem quasi artem pictoris magis imitantem." Cf. also p. 490 (II).

[64]Cf. Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 160 (II, xiv): "Nam humanitas unitas est, quae est infinitas humaniter contracta."

tutes a living plasticity,[65] a power for unlimited conformation to his infinite exemplar. Here the relation between image and exemplar constitutes a dynamic order, whose structural principle lies in the relation between the Possest and the posse-fieri of humanity. Cusanus therefore discerns the ground for man's perpetual desire for more profound knowledge in his character as an image of divine infinity:

> And notice that, since God is infinite energy in act, the likeness of God's infinity is found in the intellect inasmuch as the likeness of infinity is capable of this [divine] energy.... And learn from this how that is a living image which conforms itself to the creator without end.[66]

While the plenitude of actuality, or the coincidence of posse and esse, characterizes divine infinity, the posse-fieri of humanity turns towards its divine exemplar as its infinitely approachable limit, precision and truth.

In this way the analysis of the limit-situation articulates the internal, relational dynamics of the imago Dei theme. For, conceived within the limit-situation, the infinite distance between archetype and image entails the archetype's infinite approachability. In virtue of his absolute

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[65]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 540 (VII).

[66]Cusanus, sermon, Qui me inveniet, Basel ed., p. 679: "Et attente quod similitudo infinitatis Dei, scilicet quum Deus sit actu infinitus uigor, reperitur in intellectu, modo quo similitudo infinitatis est capax ipsius uigoris.... Et ex hoc elice quomodo est uiua imago, quae se conformat creatori sine fine." Cf. Caminiti, Nicholas of Cusa, p. 154.

infinity, God transcends the capacity of every created intellect; yet he also constitutes the precise measure and limit, the terminus interminus, towards which every finite intellect continually tends, as a living image turning towards its transcendent exemplar and truth. Given the created mind's unlimited power of assimilation, "only the uncreated mind measures it, limits it, and acts as its final end, just as truth does for its living image which is created by it, in it, and through it."[67] Conversely, as the most symbolic symbol, man imitates his exemplar in the only way a symbol can: by unceasing conformation to his archetype. The general hermeneutical principle that "every image... can be more perfect and more precise"[68] thus governs the approach of the human mind to its limit and truth.

Perhaps this convergence between the themes of the imago Dei and the limit-situation can be conceived with still greater clarity if we recall the noetic conditions for this convergence. Among the four unities of the mind, the idea of totality and infinity constitutes a recollection of man's genesis in absolute totality and infinity. Yet this genesis

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[67] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 606 (XV): "sola mens increata mensurat, terminat atque finit, sicut veritas suam et ex se, in se et per se creatam vitam imaginem." Cf. Complementum theologicum, Schriften III, pp. 686-88 (XI).

[68] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 172 (XXXVIII): "omnis... imago perfectior et praecisiorque esse possit." Cf. De possest, Schriften II, p. 338; Compendium, Schriften II, p. 694 (V).

cannot be recollected apart from the concrete, thinking subject, and consequently only becomes manifest under the conditions of human understanding and alterity. Hence, in the first unity of the mind, man contemplates the infinite, actual unity of God

> not as it is, but as it is humanly understood. Through this [infinite unity] which it thus understands in alterity, [the intellect] lifts itself so that it may proceed towards that unity as it is — [i.e., proceed] from the true towards truth, eternity and infinity. And this is the final perfection of the intellect, since through the theophany descending into it, [the intellect] continually ascends and approaches the assimilation of divine and infinite unity, which is the infinite life, truth and rest of the intellect.[69]

In this way the idea of God is not simply a fundamental datum of consciousness, but also the summons to its own transcendence in a process of unlimited assimilation. Moreover, as the principle and telos of the mind's "progressing regressions", the idea of totality is implicated within the dynamic circularity of the mind as a whole. Each unity —intellectual, rational and bodily —provides essential mediation for the reflection of the divine, infinite unity. Hence, while the

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[69] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 190 (II, xiii): "... non uti est, sed uti humaniter intelligitur; et per ipsam, quam sic intelligit in alteritate, se elevat, ut absolutius in eam, uti est, pergat de vero ad veritatem, aeternitatem et infinitatem. Et haec est ultima perfectio intellectus, quoniam per theophaniam in ipsum descendentem continue ascendit ad approximationem assimilationis divinae atque infinitae unitatis, quae est vita infinita atque veritas et quies intellectus." Cf. also p. 60 (I,xiii); and Idiota de sapientia, Schriften III, pp. 430-40 (Bk. I).

primary locus for the analogia mentis lies in the first unity of the mind, man's entire being participates in the on-going dialectic of theophany and continual ascent. It is therefore the whole of man that is made in the image and likeness of God.[70]

Conceived as imago Dei, man exists in a constitutive relation to his infinite exemplar. We have previously remarked on the relational structure of ontology for Dionysius, John the Scot and Cusanus; here the anthropology proper to the learned ignorance discloses its thoroughly relational character as well. Indeed, the indissoluble polarity between image and archetype is so fundamental that we may speak of an absolute relation between God and man within the twofold symbolism of the imago Dei and the limit-situation. For if the absolute infinity of the divine archetype transcends its human image, it nevertheless becomes manifest to man only through his own character as image and as the creature of the limits. Since the mind is the locus for the reflection and assimilation of truth, the meaning of God is given only in the way man turns and looks towards God as his infinite measure and exemplar. Hence, in the De visione Dei Cusanus writes,

> He, then who looketh on Thee with loving face will find Thy face looking on himself with love.... He who looketh

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[70] Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 759A - C, 786D - 789A, 790B - D.

> on Thee in wrath shall in like manner find Thy face wrathful. He who looketh on Thee with joy shall find Thy face joyful, after the same sort as is his own who looketh on Thee.[71]

To describe this thoroughgoing reciprocity of vision, John the Scot follows Maximus the Confessor in stating that "between themselves, God and man are paradigms of each other."[72]

Paradoxically, within this mutually paradigmatic relation, even man's self-ignorance possesses symbolic value, since it reflects the transcendent unknowability of God. Recollecting the expressionist paradigm, we may say that the infinity of man's nature transcends its symbolic expressions, just as the infinite divine nature subsists in itself beyond its theophanic manifestations.[73] This analogy of transcendence entails an essential apophaticism with regard to both God and man. For, as John the Scot states in a passage of remarkable speculative power,

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[71]Cusanus, The Vision of God, tr. Salter, pp. 24-25; Schriften III, pp. 112-14 (VI). A similar insight occurs in Spinoza (Tractatus theologico-politicus, ch. II) and Feuerbach (The Essence of Christianity), only without a transcendental orientation, and hence in a reductive fashion.

[72]Eriugena, Versio ambiguorum S. Maximi, PL 122, 1220A (VIII): "inter se invicem esse paradigmata Deum et hominem." Cf. De divisione naturae, 778A-B: "... omnia quae de Deo praedicantur, de imagine ejus praedicari posse, sed de Deo essentiale, de imago vero participatione." Cf. also Polycarp Sherwood, The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor ("Studia Anselmiana"; Rome: Herder, 1958), pp. 143-44; Thomas Tomasic, "Negative Theology and Subjectivity: An Approach to the Tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysius", International Philosophical Quarterly, IX (1969), pp. 409-12.

[73]Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 633B-C, 678C-D; Cusanus, De principio, Schriften II, pp. 256-58; supra, pp. 101ff.

> the human mind both knows itself and does not know itself. It knows that it is, but it does not know what it is.... The human mind is praised more for its ignorance than for its knowledge. It is more praiseworthy for the mind not to know what it is than to know that it is; just as negation is more closely and fittingly related than affirmation to the praise of Divine Nature, and it is wiser to be ignorant of It than to know It, for ignorance of It is true wisdom since it is better known by not knowing (nesciendo scitur). Very evidently, then, the divine likeness is discerned in the human mind by the mere knowledge that it is, but the ignorance about what it is. "Whatness" (quid esse), if I may use the term, is spoken of negatively in reference to it, and only being (esse) is attributed to it affirmatively. Nor is this without reason. If it were known to be a certain thing, it would surely be circumscribed in something, and hence would not altogether express in itself the image of its Creator, who is wholly uncircumscribed and understood in nothing, because He is infinite, superessential, above everything which is said and understood.[74]

The transcendental dialectic of infinity and apophaticism thus recurs within man as imago Dei. Within the limit-situation, John the Scot discerns the condition for the Dionysian convergence between the unknowing (agnosia) of the contemplative soul and the unknowability (agnosia) of God. For as a living image of divine infinity, man participates in its very transcendence and unknowability. By reflecting on the conditions for our ignorance, the learned ignorance itself becomes a symbol for the essential unknowability of God.

Thus far, we have been principally concerned with the relation between man and God. Yet there is a third dimension

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[74]Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 771B-D; cf. also 598A-B; Philo, De mutatione nominum II, 9-12; supra, pp. 134-35.

to the symbolism of the imago Dei and the limit-situation, since man in his personhood is related to the whole of creation. As image of the complicative simplicity of God, man becomes "the bond of the universe and microcosm."[75] A threefold relation is thereby established between God, man and the world, and the dynamics of the mind provide the locus for this entire relational structure. Hence, in the De venatione sapientiae Cusanus emphasizes the totality and assimilative power of humanity:

> The intellective soul, when it looks within itself, sees God and all things.... Everything is in everything according to its mode of being. Therefore, in our intellect all things exist according to its mode of being.... Hence, since knowledge is assimilation, it [the intellect] finds all things within itself by means of intellectual life, as in a living mirror. Looking within itself, it sees all things together assimilated in itself. And this assimilation is the living image of the creator and of all things.[76]

The principle that "omnia in omnibus scilicet suo esse modo"[77] elucidates the correlation between the themes of imago Dei and microcosm. For God and the universe of things are con-

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[75]Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 148 (XXXII): "copulam universi et microcosmum". Concerning Cusanus' role in the history of the microcosm theme, cf. Rudolf Allers, "Microcosmus from Anaximandros to Paracelsus", Traditio, II (1944), pp. 379-83.

[76]Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 76-78 (XVII): "... intellectivam animam, cum intra se conspicit, Deum et omnia speculari.... Omnia in omnibus scilicet suo esse modo. In intellectu igitur nostro secundum ipsius essendi modum sunt omnia.... Unde, cum cognitio sit assimilatione, reperit omnia in se ipsum respiciens cuncta in seipso assimilata videt. Et haec assimilatio est imago viva creatoris et omnium." At this point Cusanus is commenting on Proclus' Platonic Theology; cf. Haubst, "Die Thomas- und Proklos-Exzerpte", p. 35. Cf. also Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften

tained within the mind's complicative power according to its own mode of being — that is, in the way of concept, likeness, and assimilation.[78] Cusanus therefore states that

> Man is god, but not absolutely, since he is man; he is therefore a human god. Man is also the world, but not all things in contraction, since he is man. Man is therefore a microcosm or a certain human world. Hence, the region of humanity encircles God and the entire world in its power. Man can thus be a human god, or god in a human way; he can be a human angel, a human beast, a human lion or bear, or anything whatever. For within the power of humanity all things exist in its way.[79]

Through his manifold ways of knowing, man possesses the power to assimilate himself to all things — through the senses, to sensible things; through reason, to rational things; through the intellect, to the intelligible universe; through the divine unity, to God.[80] Moreover, in these varied assimila-

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III, p. 538 (VII).

[77]Cf. Cusanus' discussion of Anaxagoras' maxim "quodlibet in quolibet", De docta ignorantia, Schriften I, pp. 344ff (II,v).

[78]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 502-04 (III); De principio, Schriften II, pp. 232-34.

[79]Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 158 (II, xiv); "Homo enim deus est, sed non absolute, quoniam homo; humanus est igitur deus. Homo etiam mundus est, sed non contracte omnia, quoniam homo. Est igitur homo microcosmos aut humanus quidam mundus. Regio igitur ipsa humanitatis Deum atque universum mundum humanali sua potentia ambit. Potest igitur homo esse humanus deus atque deus humaniter; potest esse humanus angelus, humana bestia, humanus leo aut ursus aut aliud quodcumque. Intra enim humanitatis potentiam omnia suo existunt modo."

[80]Cf. Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 534-42 (VII); De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 86 (XXXVII); Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 733B - 734B, 755B - C.

tions man explicates his complicative unity, and actualizes his power as the totality of concepts and likenesses. Hence, that the power of humanity "goes forth searching through all things means nothing other than that it contains (complicare) the universe within itself in a human way."[81]

John the Scot vigorously insists upon the microcosmic dimension of the imago Dei theme. Like Cusanus, Eriugena emphasizes the fundamental importance of the idea of totality, since man "is understood to be man especially through the fact that he has been allowed to have an idea (notio) of everything, whether it was created equal with him or he was ordered to have dominion over it."[82] The universe of created nature thus subsists within the region and power of humanity, which is the "creaturarum omnium officina".[83] Yet Eriugena extends this conception to its utmost limit, transforming it into an apotheosis of the idea of humanity. For he speaks of human nature as the created wisdom which is the "second essence" of all creation, and subordinate only to the eternal, creative wisdom of the divine Verbum:

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[81] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 160 (II, xiv): "Nec est aliud ipsam admirabilem virtutem ad cuncta lustranda pergere quam universa in ipsa humaniter complicare." Cf. Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 562 (IX).

[82] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 768C-D.

[83] Ibid. 763D, 773D-774B. The image of the officina or workshop for man as microcosm can be traced back to Maximus the Confessor; cf. Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator, p. 148.

> Just as the Intellect of all things which the Father made in His only-begotten Word constitutes their Essence and the foundation of everything naturally understood about that Essence, so the knowledge of everything which the Father's Word created in the human soul is their essence and the foundation of everything naturally discerned about it. And just as Divine Intellect precedes everything and is everything, so the knowledge of the intellectual soul precedes everything which it knows and is everything of which it has foreknowledge. Thus everything subsists causally in Divine Intellect and in effect in human knowledge.[84]

If the divine Verbum is the essence of all things, its image constitutes their "second essence". The full scope of the limit-situation thus becomes evident: as image of God, the created wisdom of the mind looks towards the Verbum as its principle and truth; and as the "second essence" of creation, humanity contains the totality of the created order within its complicative unity and power.

Eriugena and Cusanus further specify the coordination between the themes of microcosm and the limit-situation when they speak of man as the mean or bond between the sensible and intelligible orders of creation. In the De divisione naturae, the Student asks "why God created in the genus of animals the man whom He intended to make in His own image." The Master's response turns again to the totalizing and microcosmic function of humanity:

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[84] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 779B-C: "... Et quemadmodum divinus intellectus praecedit omnia, et omnia est, ita cognitio intellectualis animae praecedit omnia, quae cognoscit, et omnia, quae praecognoscit, est, ut in divino intellectu omnia causaliter, in humana vero cogitatione effectualiter subsistant."

> He wished to create him [man] that way in order that there might be some animal in which He might show His image represented.... He made all visible and invisible creation in man, since the universe of created nature is understood as being in man.... There is nothing naturally present in celestial essences which does not subsist essentially in man. There is intellect and reason.... This whole sensible world has been established in man; for there is no part of it, whether corporeal or incorporeal, which has not been created in man and which fails to perceive, live, and be incorporated in him. Do not think of the corporeal mass of man, but rather consider the power (virtus) of his nature; especially since you see in the human body itself the pupil of the eye which, although the smallest of all the members in size, is the greatest in potency (potentia).... We can therefore reasonably say that God wished to station man in the genus of animals since in him He wished to create all creation.[85]

In contrast to the angelic natures which "perceive all bodily natures spiritually in their spiritual causes,"[86] man is constituted as a bodily, animal being — and is therefore immediately related to both the corporeal and the incorporeal spheres of creation.

In this way humanity comes to be conceived as the mediating juncture for the whole of created being. Hence, Cusanus remarks that

> Man, as the bond of the universe and microcosm, has been placed at the highest of the sensible nature and at the lowest of the intelligible [nature], connecting within himself — as in a mean — the lower temporal and the higher perpetual [orders]. He has been placed in the horizon of time and the perpetual, as the order of perfection demanded.[87]

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[85] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 763C-764B; cf. also 531A-C.

[86] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, 733C: "omnem corporalem creaturam in causis suis spiritualibus spiritualiter perspiciunt."

[87] Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, p. 148

To lend greater precision to man's mediation between temporal, sensible creation and perpetual, intelligible being, John the Scot speaks of three worlds: that of "the invisible and immaterial substance of pure spirits", that of "visible and bodily natures", and finally that of humanity.

> The third world is that which, as a middle term (ratio medietatis), unites in itself the superior world of spiritual realities and the inferior world of bodily realities, and which out of these two worlds makes one. This third world is realized only in man, in whom the whole of creation is restored to unity.[88]

As a third world which integrates the temporal and the perpetual, the corporeal and the spiritual, man comes to be seen as pre-eminently the creature of the limits.

In their deliberate, detailed discussions of the themes of microcosm and mediation, John the Scot and Cusanus show themselves to be firmly rooted in the speculative traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy. Not only can we trace Eriugena's use of the term "ratio medietatis" to his reading of Gregory of

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(XXXII): "Quam pulchre copulam universi et microcosmum hominem in supremo sensibilis naturae et infimo intelligibilis locavit connectens in ipso, ut in medio inferiora temporalia et superiora perpetua! Ipsum in horizonte temporis et perpetui collocavit uti ordo perfectionis deposcebat." This passage involves Cusanus' crucial distinction of three "regions" for the hunt of wisdom: the temporal, the perpetual, or aevum, and the eternal; cf. ibid. pp. 14-16 (III), & 48 (IX). Cf. also De aequalitate, Schriften III, p. 372, where Cusanus speaks of the soul as "intemporale tempus".

[88] Eriugena, Homélie sur le prologue de Jean, pp. 290-94 (294A-B): "Tercius mundus est qui, ratione medietatis, et superiorem spiritualium et inferiorem corporalium in seipso copulat et de duobus unum facit, et in homine solo intelligitur in quo omnis creatura adunatur." Cf. De divisione naturae 893C.

Nyssa,[89] but the entire anthropology here echoes clearly that of Maximus the Confessor. Commenting on Maximus' interpretation of man as imago Dei, Lossky states that

> It was the divinely appointed function of the first man... to unite in himself the whole of created being; and at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole of creation.[90]

Situated within the limit of the created and the uncreated, the human person is to act as the principle of their mediation. If all things exist within the power of humanity according to man's mode of being, it is in order that they may be turned towards their origin and end in God through the mediative function of humanity.[91] As imago Dei and the creature of the limits, man's task is to integrate the whole of his being —indeed, the whole of creation — into the perfect fruition of image and likeness. Through man and his assimilative power, the created divisions of nature are themselves taken up into deification.[92] The mediative function of

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[89]Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, De opificio hominis XVI,9, Select Writings, p. 405; The Great Catechism, ch. VI, Select Writings, p. 480; David L. Balás, Metousia Theou ("Studia Anselmiana"; Rome: Herder, 1966), pp. 37-39, & 47-49; also, Nemesius of Emesa, Of the Nature of Man, I,4.

[90]Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, p. 109; cf. Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator, pp. 140-52.

[91]Cf. Eriugena, De divisione naturae 774A - B, 893C; Cusanus, De venatione sapientiae, Schriften I, pp. 148050 (XXXII).

[92]With these considerations, anthropology turns towards Christology, since the incarnation of God entails the deification of man and, through man, that of the created world. However, a full and adequate discussion of this crucial issue

humanity is therefore of pivotal importance for the entire dialectic of procession and return. Once again we must emphasize that the imago Dei or limit-situation does not indicate the stasis of an achieved fact or mere theoretical doctrine, but is rather a field of possibility, carrying within itself the religious and moral imperative towards its own actualization.

At this point the cultural dimension emerges as central for the anthropology of the limit-situation,[93] since the mediation of humanity occurs neither magically nor in vacuo. Rather, in its imperative towards mediation, the limit-situation or imago Dei demands both practical and theoretical articulation: work as the practical integration of man and creation in directedness towards the divine, and reflection as the on-going interpretation of this integration and its impulsion towards adoration. Culture constitutes the concrete locus for this twofold articulation, since it is the human world where man both exercises dominion over sensible

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would carry us beyond the boundaries of our argument. For a thorough examination of Cusanus' Christology, cf. Haubst, Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues.

[93]In raising the issue of culture, we shall rely primarily on Cusanus, since there are only suggestions — albeit crucial ones — of this issue in John the Scot, and Dionysius' concern with cultural problems is limited to the sacramental mediation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Indeed, our argument here is perhaps farthest from the actual texts of the philosophers under consideration; this very distance may indicate a return to the properly speculative framework outlined in the opening chapter.

creation, and establishes the conditions for the achievement of spiritual value. In culture, John the Scot's metaphor of man as an integrative "third world" takes on concrete, historical form. For in his cultural creations, man simultaneously assimilates the created universe to himself and explicates his totalizing power as imago Dei. Commenting on the Hermetic designation of man as "secundus Deus", Cusanus turns to an analogy between divine creativity and culture.

> For just as God is the creator of real beings and natural forms, man is [the creator] of beings of reason and artificial forms. These are nothing else than likenesses of his intellect, as the creatures of God are likenesses of the divine intellect. Hence, man has an intellect which, in creating, is the likeness of the divine intellect.[94]

Therefore, while creation manifests the divine nature, culture is the concrete articulation and explication of humanity's complicative unity and power. Indeed, we may even say that culture is the incarnation of the idea of humanity, and thereby provides the indispensable condition for man's mediation between the sensible and intelligible worlds, and between the created and uncreated natures.

This incarnational and mediative role of culture

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[94]Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 8 (VI): "Nam sicut Deus est creator entium realium et naturalium formarum, ita homo rationalium entium et formarum artificialium; quae non sunt nisi sui intellectus similitudines, sicut creaturae Dei divini intellectus similitudines. Ideo homo habet intellectum, qui est similitudo divini intellectus in creando." Cf. De coniecturis, Schriften II, pp. 6-8 (I,iii). Regarding the designation "secundus Deus" cf. Asclepius, 8; Corpus Hermeticum, ed. Nock, vol. II, pp. 304-05.

becomes manifest in the practical dimension. For practical culture is related to the [illegible] theme of the imago Dei in a twofold manner, in that human creativity is an analogue for divine creativity, and in that work actualizes the relatedness of man to creation. In Cusanus' Idiota de mente, the Layman remarks that "all human arts are images of the infinite divine art."[95] After distinguishing between the finitude of human arts and the infinite creativity of God, the Layman proceeds to claim that his own particular art of spoon-carving provides a more precise analogue for divine creativity than do the imitative arts of sculpture and painting. In an explanation astonishing only in its lucid simplicity, the Layman discloses the unity among the spheres of work, aesthetics and metaphysics:

> The spoon has no exemplar outside the idea of our mind. Although the sculptor or painter takes models (exemplars) from existing things, which he then busies himself with shaping, I do not proceed in this way in making spoons out of wood, and bowls and pots out of clay. For in these activities I do not imitate the shape of any natural thing. Forms such as spoons, bowls and pots are brought to completion through human art alone. Hence, my art is more perfect than those that imitate created forms, and in this respect more like the infinite art.[96]

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[95] Cusanus, Idiota de mente, Schriften III, p. 490 (II): "omnes humanas artes imagines quasdam esse infinitae et divinae artis."

[96] Ibid. p. 492 (II): "Coclear extra mentis nostrae ideam aliud non habet exemplar. Nam etsi statuarius aut pictor trahat exemplaria a rebus, quas figurare satagit, non tamen ego, qui ex lignis cocleaaria et scuttelas et ollas ex luto educo. Non enim in hoc imitor figuram cuiusoumque rei naturalis. Tales enim formae cocleares, scutellares et ollares sola human arte perficiuntur. Unde ars mea est magis perfec-

While in his work the craftsman thus mirrors forth divine creativity, he is simultaneously integrating and assimilating the order of sensible creation into the sphere of human activity and culture. In this way practical culture mediates between man and his environment, and — through man — between the earth and the Lord of creation. Work is thus the practical articulation of man as imago Dei and creature of the limits.

Hence, practical culture ought to be conceived neither as the simple adaptation of man to the "external world", nor as the dispersion of the mind's power into alterity. Rather, through all his assimilations and constructs, man unfolds his complicative unity and thereby "measures his intellect through the power of his works."[97] Consequently,

> The creative activity of humanity has no other end than humanity itself. For when it creates it does not proceed outside of itself; rather, when it explicates its power reaches out towards itself. Nor does it create anything new; rather, in all that it creates by explicating, it learns what had been within itself. For we have said that the universe exists in man in a human way.... That this wonderful power [of humanity] goes forth searching through all things means nothing other than that it contains (complicare) the universe within itself in a human way.[98]

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toria quam imitatoria figurarum creaturarum, et in hoc infinitae arti simillior."

[97] Cusanus, De beryllo, Schriften III, p. 8 (VI): "mensurat suum intellectum per potentiam operum suorum." Cf. Idiota de mente, Schriften III, pp. 560-62 (IX).

[98] Cusanus, De coniecturis, Schriften II, p. 160 (II, xiv): "Non ergo activae creationis humanitatis alius extat finis quam humanitas. Non enim pergit extra se, dum creat, sed dum eius explicat virtutem, ad se pertingit; neque quic-

In its complicative and mediative power, humanity itself constitutes the beginning and end, the principium and telos of culture. We may therefore speak of a reflexive circularity in culture, since culture manifests the idea of humanity, and in this manifestation man comes to know and measure himself.

As we begin to turn towards the theoretical dimension of culture, the question of language once again comes into focus. For among the cultural arts within which the mind becomes manifest, language is the first and most natural to man.[99] Indeed, language is the cohesive power and form for culture as a whole. Not only does speech communicate knowledge and theory, but it is also the sign and instrument of man's practical dominion over the things of the earth. While discussing the idea of totality, John the Scot focuses upon language as the link between this idea and man's rule over sensible creation. For,

> How would man be given dominion over things of which he had no idea? His dominion would go astray if he did not know what he was ruling. Divine Scripture indicates this point to us very clearly in the words: "When all the animals had been formed from the earth and all the birds of heaven, the Lord God led them to Adam to see what he would call them. Now, whatever Adam called

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quam novi efficit, sed cuncta, quae explicando creat, in ipsa fuisse comperit. Universa enim in ipsa humaniter existere diximus.... Nec est aliud ipsam admirabilem virtutem ad cuncta lustranda pergere quam universa in ipsa humaniter complicare."

[99] Cusanus, Compendium, Schriften II, p. 688 (III); cf. supra, pp. 47ff.

> a living creature is its name" (Gen. 2:19). "To see," it says, i.e., to understand what he would call them. For if he did not understand, how could he call them correctly? "Now, whatever Adam called it is its name," i.e., it [the name] is the very idea of the living creature.[100]

Hence, it is in the power of language that the complicative unity of the mind becomes manifest as the precondition for man's dominion over sensible creation.

Yet in its transcendental function, language also provides a primary analogue for the absolute relation between man and God. Here language articulates the properly reflexive, theoretical dimension of culture, as we turn back towards the analogy of the word and our argument comes full circle. For speech is the ostensio of the mind, as creation is the theophanic manifestation of God; and the names (vocabula) imposed by man are images of the one precise and infinite name or word (verbum) of God. The power of language at once constitutes the foundation of culture, and marks humanity as made in the image of God. We have previously discussed the analogy of the word in detail, and underlined the centrality of the expressionist paradigm for the learned ignorance as a whole.[101] Therefore, to conclude our argument, we shall confine ourselves to some brief methodological remarks concerning language and anthropology.

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[100] Eriugena, De divisione naturae, tr. Uhlfelder, 768D-769A.

[101] Cf. supra, pp. 28-77, & 101-04.

The reflexive circularity of culture is nowhere more evident than in language. Man speaks, and thereby unfolds the complicative power of humanity; language thus becomes a datum for reflective apprehension, a datum through which man knows and measures himself. Hence, the act of speaking is given in constitutive relation to its theoretical apprehension. An on-going dialectic is thus established, as the symbols of language express the mind and simultaneously give rise to thought. The learned ignorance — as a hermeneutical project — seeks to explicate this circular dialectic. Since the transcendental orientation of language becomes most vividly manifest in myth, poetry, religious symbolism and the divine names, hermeneutics takes its lead from these modes of discourse and undertakes the coordinate quest for the genesis of language and the name of God. Specifically, beginning with the divine names as culturally given and determined, the learned ignorance traces them back to their origin in the symbolizing power of the mind and the <u>analogia mentis</u>. The circle thus begins to close, as reflection moves from the divine names as cultural data towards the mind's creativity and assimilative power as the locus for the analogy of the word. The circular dialectic becomes complete when the learned ignorance turns from the symbols that man creates to the symbol that man is: the <u>imago Dei</u> and creature of the limits. Man is the most symbolic symbol, that is, the creator

of culture and language whose unlimited symbolizing power mirrors the creativity of God, and mediates between the sensible and the intelligible, the created and the uncreated natures. Hermeneutics and the learned ignorance thus find their completion in the anthropology of the limit-situation, where man himself comes to be seen as the ultimate foundation for the project of the divine names.

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VITA

I was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 11, 1946, the son of Francis H. and Josephine T. Duclow.

After completing my primary and secondary education in Chicago, I entered De Paul University in September of 1964. I received both my B.A. and M.A. from De Paul: B.A. with Highest Honor in June, 1968, majoring in English and Philosophy; M.A. with Distinction in June, 1969, in Philosophy. From September of 1969 to May of 1974, I have continued my graduate studies at Bryn Mawr College. At Bryn Mawr I received an M.A. in Mediaeval Studies in May, 1972, and my Ph.D. in Philosophy in May, 1974.

I have held Teaching Assistantships in Philosophy at both De Paul University (1968-'69) and Bryn Mawr College (1970-'71). I have also been a Lecturer in Philosophy at Rosemont College (second semester, 1969-'70), and at Bryn Mawr College (first semester, 1971-'72).

While completing my M.A. in Philosophy at De Paul, I had the honor of studying with Professors Wilhelm Dupré, Bernard J. Boelen, Manfred S. Frings, Bruno Switalski, and William V. Hoffman (French). At Bryn Mawr I have been privileged to study with Professors Jean A. Potter, José Ferrater Mora, George L. Kline, Milton Nahm, Robert B. Burlin (English), and Myra L. Uhlfelder (Latin).

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"Marcuse and 'Happy Consciousness'", Liberation, vol. XIV, no. 7 (October, 1969), pp. 7-15.

"Towards an Alternative to One-Dimensional Society", in Man in Society: Facts and Visions, ed. H. H. Loiskandl. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1971. Pp. 58-81.

"Dionysius the Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa: The Hermeneutic of the Divine Names", International Philosophical Quarterly, vol. XII (1972), pp. 260-78.

"Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa: Infinity, Anthropology and the Via Negativa", to be published in the Downside Review, vol. XCII (April, 1974).

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My preliminary examinations for the Ph.D. were taken in March and April of 1972. The areas of examination were the following: Plato and the Mediaeval Platonic Tradition; Kant; Bergson and Whitehead; and Middle English Literature. My major subject area is the History of Philosophy, and Middle English Literature is my allied field.

Throughout my graduate studies, I have been fortunate to encounter professors of outstanding ability and accomplishment. At De Paul I wrote my M.A. thesis on Anselm and Cusanus under the direction of Wilhelm Dupré; his speculative orientation and presentation of Cusanus have decisively influenced my philosophical development. At Bryn Mawr, Jean Potter has

displayed a keen respect for both the historical and the speculative dimensions of the Hellenistic and mediaeval Platonic tradition. José Ferrater Mora, George Kline and Milton Nahm have not only proven themselves expert scholars in their respective areas of specialization, but have also conveyed a profound sense of philosophy as a profession.

The writing of this dissertation during the past year has been facilitated by a Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities, awarded by Bryn Mawr College. I would like to express my gratitude to the department of Philosophy, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the Whiting Foundation for this generous grant. I also wish to thank Professor Jean Potter for her direction of this dissertation. Without her friendship, patience, and expert guidance through the world of mediaeval Platonism, the dissertation could not have been brought to completion. I especially appreciate her work with me this spring, during her well deserved leave-of-absence. Furthermore, I am grateful to Jean Potter and Myra Uhlfelder for pre-publication use of their edition of John the Scot's Periphyseon, On Natures. My thanks are also due to Wilhelm Dupré for his careful reading of much of the dissertation, and for his helpful comments and criticism. Finally my wife, Geri, deserves my warmest praise and thanks for her continuing encouragement, understanding and tolerance, as well as for her professional assistance in the intricacies of library research.