NICHOLAS OF CUSA ON GOD AND THE CREATURE

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by
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PROPOSITIONES

1. Logica dividitur in materialem et formalem.

2. Tria sunt principia entis mobilis in quantum huiusmodi, scilicet, forma, materia, et privatio.

3. Potentiae animae specificantur ab actibus et obiectis, ad quae essentialiter ordinantur; ab actibus immediate, ab obiectis mediate.

4. Felicitas est operatio propria hominis secundum virtutem in vita perfecta.

5. Res physice continentur et mensurantur ab aeternitate etiam antequam sunt in re.
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INTRODUCTION

Since "the ideas of the One and the Many form the two poles about which all philosophic and religious thinking revolves", (1) it is not surprising that Ernst Cassirer sees the philosophy of Cusa as a special approach to the problem of the one and the many: "...Both principles (of 'docta ignorantia' and 'coincidentia oppositorum'), which had dominated theological thought for centuries, suddenly take a new turn in the fifteenth century. Their general significance is maintained; but they now receive a content of new problems and new interests. What had formerly been a negative principle of theology now becomes a positive principle of natural philosophy, cosmology, and epistemology. Nicholas Cusanus proceeds from his conception and interpretation of the idea of 'docta ignorantia' to an acute criticism of the Aristotelian logic and the Aristotelian physics. Aristotle's logic is unexcelled in the precise working out of contradictions, in setting up the categories by

which the classes of being are distinguished. But it is unable to overcome this opposition between the various classes of being; it does not press on to their real point of unification. Hence it remains caught in the empirical and the finite; it is unable to rise to a truly speculative interpretation of the universe. The physical universe of Aristotle is dominated by the opposition between 'the straight' and 'the curved'; motion in straight lines and motion in circles are for him essentially and radically distinct. But the transition to the infinitely large and the infinitely small shows that this is a matter not of an absolute but of a relative distinction. The circle with an infinite radius coincides with the straight line; the infinitely small arc is distinguishable from its cord." (1)

Another modern author, Abel Rey,(2) in his introduction to the French translation of Docta Ignorantia, gives credit to Cusa for having

(1) Ibid., part II, pp.322-323.

(2) Introduction to L. Moulinier's translation of Cusa's De la docte ignorance, Paris, Alcan, 1930.
done away with the universe of natures and for reducing everything to mere process, to creative transition. He too is impressed with Cusa's pivotal idea of limit which, in his opinion, dominates all modern philosophy. Like Cassirer he sees the whole thought converge around the simple example of the identity of opposites at infinity where the irreducibility of distinct natures is converted to identity.

La courbe et la droite n'ont, rappelons-le, pour le Cusan, aucune différence de nature et s'identifient à l'infini.(1)

This obviously introduces the problem of the one and the many belonging to the order of the natures themselves. To maintain that natures are reducible one to the other would be to destroy the object of science in the traditional sense. The universe of data would belong only to the first stage of knowledge. In the traditional view the acquisition of knowledge consisted primarily in an effort of the mind to dispel its own potentiality and confusion in the face of natures and of their connection. In the present conception however, the real purpose and

(1) Ibid., p. 30.
function of the mind is said to consist in this: having dissolved natures one into the other (curve into straight, say), the mind, becoming, as it were, the very root of all givenness, produces the natures anew by way of speculative creation in a Hegelian sense.

While the problem of the one and the many concerns the domain of natures and of their distinction and togetherness, yet it is not wholly confined to the manner in which things are one and many. There is also a one and many on the part of the knower. The fact of it is already clear from the distinction between the sensible singular and the sensible universal. The concept by means of which we know rational animal is one for all knowable men, yet the imagination forms new and distinct images for each man we can distinguish from the next. Indeed, while human knowledge requires as many distinct means of knowing as it knows objects distinctly, God knows all things in a single intelligible "species" which is His essence. True, we too somehow know all animals, including man, by the concept of animal, and we also know, in a fashion, all we can know by the concept of being, but such
knowledge embraces much confusion.

Pour connaître distinctement les natures, il nous faut un nombre de "moyens de connaître", c'est-à-dire de concepts, d'espèces intelligibles, proportionnel à la multiplicité elle-même des natures. Le moyen d'atteindre le cercle est distinct du moyen d'atteindre le polygone. Il est vrai, cependant, que nous pouvons comprendre dans un concept unique des objets qui diffèrent par définition—mais cette sorte de réduction à l'unité ne va pas sans indétermination, sans confusion. Ainsi dans le genre commun figure nous n'atteignons pas le cercle ni le polygone quant à ce qui les constitue proprement tels. (1)

To know man only as an instance of being, or even as an animal, is to know him quite imperfectly; yet, especially in mathematical thought we may attempt to overcome the manifold of our means of distinct knowledge, such as, when we define straight as a limit of curve, and thus try to generate, as it were, the very notion of straight from curve.

Un fait incontestable, c'est que notre intelligence tend naturellement à voir les natures comme limites les unes des autres. Elle y parvient le plus aisément en mathématiques. Nous ne nous bornons pas à voir les éléments point, ligne, surface, volume, dans leur nature absolue et irréductible. Nous croyons les mieux saisir lorsque, en outre, nous pouvons les définir comme limites; lorsque, sachant fort bien que nous n'y pourrions jamais atteindre sans contradiction, nous procédons quand même résolument comme si nous voulions en quelque

(1) Charles De Koninck, La dialectique des limites comme critique de la raison, in Laval théologique et philosophique, 1945, vol.1, no.1, p.177.
sorte engendrer ces éléments les uns des autres quant à leur nature propre et abstraite.

Ce modèle mathématique peut, dans une certaine mesure, s'étendre aux natures physiques partout où nous pouvons concevoir, ou artificieusement interpeler un ordre comparable, sous quelque rapport, à celui des séries infinies et convergentes. C'est ainsi que nous pouvons en quelque sorte faire surgir la raison d'une dégradation d'intellectus. En somme, tout le De divinis nominibus est à base de cette méthode. Cette œuvre en particulier présente des difficultés insurmontables dès lors qu'on veut l'interpréter en un sens directement réel. Pour légitimer pareille interprétation il faudrait, du reste, ignorer les multiples avertissements de l'auteur. (1)

However, this attempt should not be envisaged as an effort to fuse the natures concerned into one nature but rather as an endeavour to reach the second nature by means of the very concept through which we know the first. This application of the method of limits is peculiarly possible and fruitful in mathematics: possible, because of the kind of infinity proper to quantity; fruitful, because it reveals new properties and allows for greater rigor and distinction. As we shall see in the course of this work, the authors who foreshadowed and finally outlined and applied the method throughout philosophy make up the mathematizing tradition—

(1) Ibid., p.179.
from Anaxagoras, the Platonists, and the Neo-
Platonists on through Nicholas of Cusa.

All the fundamental errors of Cusa's
philosophy may be easily deduced from a simple
confusion of these two aspects of the problem—
of the real or natural, and of the noetic one
and many. It is enough to place upon the very
natures themselves the burden of our attempt
to acquire a more exalted way of viewing them
in their distinction and coordination, of iden-
tifying what is properly of the mind, with what
is proper to the natures themselves, to make
Cusa's philosophy and every philosophy in line
with its primitive assumption quite predictable.

Like the fundamental error of Plato,
that of Cusa is to be reduced to a confusion of
the "modus rei intellectae" and the "modus in-
telligendi rem ipsam".(1) The confusion is ul-
timately a subtly disguised form of anthropomor-
phism, since, by means of this confusion the hu-
man mind attributes to nature itself an indeter-
mination and morcellation arising from its own
limitedness. The results of such anthropomorphism,

(1) S. Thomas in I Metaphysicorum, lect.10,(ed.
Cathala) n,158.
though they have been called the highest achievement of mystical thought, are singularly disastrous for theology. To conceive of God as the ultimate limit towards which all things converge, understanding this term in the technical sense, and to hold that the divine essence is essentially the fulfilled limit of creation, even when held to be such from all eternity, is a recondite way of denying simple contradiction as well as the absolute transcendence of God. Yet Cusa has done just that. The manner in which he does it, however orthodox his intentions may have been, is a peculiarly insidious one, since at the same time that he stresses God's otherness and the impossi-

bility of reason to have positive knowledge of Him—so long as it proceeds in its own mode—, in the end he reduces God to a mere objectification of what is impossible to reason. Now, "what is impossible to human reason" is fraught with elu-
siveness. On the one hand, for example, we cannot think that which is contradictory: square circle; we cannot conceive of man as being at the same time and under the same respect, non-man; of a one sided figure with many sides, etc. Such im-
possibility, however, is no limitation upon the
human mind. On the other hand, there are beings which may be called beings impossible to human reason in the sense that adequate knowledge of them lies beyond its reach. Yet, as we shall see, Cusa reduces the two impossibilities to one. As is clear in his conception of Divinity as the "coincidentia oppositorum", God is the mere resolution of what is impossible in creation. This is something quite different from the impossibility of assimilating the Creator to His creation. Cusa's error is in some respects comparable to that which identifies God's own necessity with the creature's inherent necessity of being from God and with the necessity of our demonstration of God's existence. Yet, the creature's inherent necessity of being from God, and our rigorously scientific demonstration of His existence, can in no way be equated with the absolute, transcendent, necessity that is God. However much Cusa will insist on divine otherness it remains an otherness enclosed and measured by the creatures converging towards it.

The main purpose of the present study is to point out this debasement of Divinity in the philosophy which Cusa advances under the
guise of deep, mystical, understanding of His transcendence. (1) We believe this undertaking to be most timely. Apparently new, theological tendencies are again coming to the fore; most of them are reducible to this same covert negation of divine inaccessibility. While their professed ideas and language lack forwardness and are less amenable to sharp analysis, they belong to the same tradition. (2) We have confined ourselves in this study to an examination of Cusa's doctrine concerning God and the creature. We will devote a distinct essay to the problem of knowledge in his philosophy, for no study of his doctrine could possibly approach completion without it. However, what we have set down will in no way be modified by the precise perspective of Cusa's epistemology. In fact, we believe it was preferable to present first of all the natural aspect of his doctrine, that is, his philosophy concerning what we call ens naturae. An impartial examination of this point of view reveals at every step his con-

(1) For an example of Cusa's interpretation of Dionysius Mystical Theology, see his De Docta Ignorantia, I, 16.

(2) One particular school we have in mind is the one which now holds that the Godhead alone is not the formal subject of sacred theology, but Christ.
fusion of the logical and the real. It was more important to show this confusion when he speaks of things in themselves than to set in sharp relief this same confusion concerning the nature of knowledge itself. For one might hold a false conception concerning the nature of knowledge and yet remain fundamentally true to the nature of things in themselves. His theory of knowledge, then, we will present later, more as a confirmation of his so called "ontological view", than as the reason why he believes things to be in the manner in which he says they are. We have left aside a brief statement of what he means by Docta Ignorantia for summary presentations of this notion may be found in any author who has spoken of Nicholas of Cusa.

Each chapter of this study first gives a synopsis of Cusa's teaching on the subject involved; this is followed by a criticism based upon the doctrine of St. Thomas, together with an indication of the pertinent consequences to which Cusa's thought must lead. It must be noted that when we expose the doctrine of Cusa, the arguments, unless otherwise clearly indicated, are his.
List of abbreviations in the references
to the works of Cusa.

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(1) The latest, and most authoritative, edition of Cusa's complete works is that undertaken by the Academy of Letters of Heidelberg and published at Leipzig: NICOLAI DE CUSA Opera Omnia, iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicim fidem edita, Lipsiae in Aedibus Felicis Meiner. The first volume appeared in 1932. Because of the war this edition has not yet been completed. Previous to that of Leipzig, the latest edition was that published at Basel by Heinrich Petri in 1565: D. NICOLAI DE CUSA...Opera, Basiliae, ex Officina Henrici Petrina. We have used this edition for the works not yet published in the Leipzig edition.
CHAPTER ONE

1. Cusa's conception of God as Maximum, Minimum, and "coincidentia oppositorum".

Cusa's entire conception of God must be read in terms of the method of limits. Hence, when he uses such expressions as "maximum", "minimum", "magis et minus", they must be understood as limit and variable ordered to their limit.

The basic point treated in the first book of the De Docta Ignorantia is the notion and being of the "most". Cusa defines that which is "most" whatever it is, as that "than which there can be no greater."

Maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest. (DI., I, 2, p.7)

Now, that than which there can be no greater, exceeds everything that is such or such only to a finite degree. Hence the maximum (1) is necessarily infinite, and cannot be found where something is 'exceeded", however much it 'exceeds" something else.

...Ubi est reperire excessa et excessum, non devenitur ad maximum simpliciter, cum excessentia et excessa finita sunt. Maximum vero tale necessario est infinitum. (DI., I, 3, p.8)

That which is most whatever it is, is God.

(1) We will frequently use the term maximum for the substantivized absolute superlative most.
Hoc maximum, quod et Deus omnium nationum fide indubie creditur. (DI., I, 2, p.7)

Nulla unquam natio fuit, quae Deum non coleret et quem maximum absolute non crederet. (DI., I, 7, p.14)

Deus est absoluta maximitas. (DI., II, 4, p.73)

Perfection possessed to a finite degree is created perfection. Now, finite perfection differs from the infinite in that, no matter how much it exceeds something else, it can always be exceeded. Hence, Cusa infers, no matter how great a creature, there can always be a greater. And since any finite perfection can always be exceeded, there can always be a lesser creature.

...Dato quocumque finito semper est maius et minus sive in quantitate aut virtute vel perfectione et ceteris necessario dabili-cum maximum aut minimum simpliciter dabile in rebus non sit. (DI., II, 1, p.63)

Hence the entire created order always remains confined to the more or less which never attain the maximum or minimum.

Habuimus in radice dictorum in excessis et excedentibus ad maximum in esse et posse non deveniri. (DI., II, 1, p.61)

It always has the note of inexhaustible possibility, potential infinity.

Consistunt igitur inter maximum et minimum omnia contracta, ut quocumque dato possit dari maior et minor contractionis gradus... (DI., III, 1, p.119)
The potential infinity of the created order is inexhaustible: it can never be so actualized as to become an actual infinite. The reason is that, were it actually infinite, the creatures would make up an actual infinity of finite beings, of finite perfections. But this, Cusa says, is the maximum; this is God. Since this maximum would be among the creatures, it would mean that God is finite because of the finiteness of the constituents of this actual infinity. This, he agrees, is impossible.

Ostensum est in praecedentibus omnia praeter unum maximum simpliciter eius respectu finita et terminata esse. Finitum vero et terminatum habet, a quo incipit et ad quod terminatur. Et quia non potest dici, quod illud sit maius dato finito et finitum, ita semper in infinitum progresiendo, quoniam in excessibus et excessis progressio in infinitum actu fieri non potest-alias maximum esset de natura finitorum:- igitur necessario est maximum actu omnium finitorum principium et finis. (DI., I, 6, p.15)

Hence God, who is the actual infinite, being actually all that would be if the potential infinity of the creatures were actualized, is, according to Cusa, the maximum and minimum. All Cusa's examples are taken from predicamental quantity. We may compare the maximum to the
number 2, say, as the limit of the series 1, 1+\frac{1}{2}, 1+\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2} \ldots \text{. For 2 is as the unattainable maximum of the growing sums of the series. The series remain open to ever greater sums. Each new sum differs less from the maximum, but none will ever be equal to it. Note too, that, at the same time, the growth converges toward a minimum, since any sum of the series, differs by less from the preceding one, and by more from the next. Hence, both the maximum and the minimum of the series lie beyond, where they coincide. This, too, shows why Cusa calls God maximum and minimum.}

God, says Cusa, is not a limited maximum, viz., a maximum of only certain kinds of perfections; rather He is the absolute maximum, viz., the maximum of all orders and of each and every perfection. In God every kind of things attains its own "maximitas".

Maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest. Habundatia vero uni convenit. Coincidit itaque maximitati unitas, quae est et entitas; quod si ipse talis unitas ab omni respectu et contractione universaliter est absoluta, nihil sibi opponi manifestum est, cum sit maximitas absoluta. Maximum itaque absolutum unum est, quod est omnia; in quo omnia, quia maximum. (DI., I, 2, p.7)
Thus, God is not only the maximum of such notions as unity, being, and truth, but He is also the maximum of stone.

...Absoluta unitas lapidis istius sensibilis et rationalis, est Deus... (C. I, 10, p.83)

and the maximum of the sun and the moon.

...Quidditas solis absoluta non est alius a quidditate absoluta lunae—quoniam est ipse Deus... (DI., II, 4, p.74)

God, being the maximum, all things are in Him, and in this respect He is the maximum of actuality. Just as the infinite straight line, says Cusa, is actually a triangle, a circle, and a sphere, viz., all figures that a finite line can be, so also is God actually all things that can be.

Postquam num manifestum est, quomodo infinita lineae est omnia illa actu infinite, quae in potentia sunt finitae: habemus translative in maxime simplici pariflor-miter, quomodo ipsum maximum est actu maxim-me omnia illa, quae in potentia sunt simplicitatis absolutae. (DI., I, 16, p.30)

To signify this presence in God of all things Cusa often uses the term: "complicatio". Note, however, that the "complicatio" is predicated of God Himself:

...Manifestum est Deum esse omnium complicationem... (DI., I, 22, p.44)
Deus ergo est omnia complicans in hoc, quod omnia in eo...(DI., II, 3, p.70)

In the infinite unity of God all things are united; because they are united in God, He is their complication.

Unitas igitur infinita est omnium complicatio; hoc quidem dicit unitas, quae unit omnia. (DI., II, 3, p.69)

Because there is but one maximum, the complication or unity of substance is not different from that of quality, nor is the complication of quality other than that of quantity; rather all things have one complication, one unity, one absolute-God.

Una est ergo omnium complicatio; et non est alia substantiae, alia qualitatis aut quantitatis et ita de reliquis complicatio, quoniam non est nisi unum maximum cum quo coincidit minimum, ubi diversitas complicata identitati complicandi non opponitur. (DI., II, 3, p.70)

God complicates all things in that all things are present in God in absolute unity, absolute maximity, absolute perfection. Hence God is the complicating unity of all things, the complicating quiddity, the complicating truth, for God is the absolute maximum in whom are all things in their absolute perfection.

God is the maximum of actuality in that He is all that can be; but "all that can be",
declares Cusa, is the maximum of possibility, for "all that can be" is not a restricted possibility: a possibility to be merely this or that, but it is absolute possibility: the possibility to be all things without any limitation. That is, it is infinite possibility. Hence God is not only the maximum of actuality, but He is also the maximum of possibility. Since there can be only one maximum, in God actuality and possibility are identical. God's actuality is not a reduction from potency to act; rather from all eternity God is actually all that can be.

Quidquid enim possibile est, hoc est actu ipsum maximum maxime; non ut ex possibili est, sed ut maxime est; sicut ex linea triangulus educitur et infinita linea non est triangulus, ut ex finita educitur; sed actu est triangulus infinitus qui est idem cum linea. Praeterea, ipsa possibilitas absoluta non est aliud in maximo quam ipsum maximum actu, sicut linea infinita est actu sphaera. (DI., I, 16, p.30)

Hence, Cusa names God the Possess (posse-esse), i.e. all that can be, that, God is actually. (1)

Not only is God the maximum but He is also the minimum. Since God is all that can be, He cannot be less, for if He could be less,

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(1) P., p.252.
He would not be all that can be. And since He cannot be less, He is the minimum: the "most least," like the smallest possible quantity which is the "maxime parva". (1)

...Quare 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. (DI., I, 4, p.10)

Again, because God is all things, nothing can be opposed to Him; and if, on the one hand, nothing is opposed to Him, and since, on the other hand, He is the maximum, He must also be the minimum. In God the maximum and minimum coincide—He is "maxime" minimum.

Maximum itaque absolutum unum est, quod est omnia; in quo omnia, quia maximum. Et quoniam nihil sibi opponitur, secum coincidit minimum...(DI., I, 2, p.7)

Just as the infinite straight line is the maximum and minimum of angle, so is God the maximum and minimum of all things. (2)

The oppositions we encounter in the finite order are overcome in the maximum and minimum

(1) DI., I, 4, p.10.
(2) B., 9, p.10.
where they coincide. The "greatest line" is an example. It is both "most straight" and "least curved". Indeed, the specific distinctions between triangle, circle and sphere are surpassed in the straight line which is their limit, and in which they coincide. The greatest line is a "coincidentia oppositorum". (1) Upon closer examination, the coincidence of opposites is more than a coincidence, and more than a coincidence of opposites: it is the fulfillment of contradiction. For the coincidence at infinity is such that the opposites are predicated of the same subject: the straight line is a curve, it is a triangle, it is a circle. Hence "coincidentia oppositorum" is "coincidentia contradictionis". (2)

Now, the maximum and minimum of anything is God. Hence, it is God who is the coincidence of all opposites and the "coincidentia contradictionis" of all natures.

Deus est absoluta maximitas atque unitas, absolute differentia atque distantia praevienis atque uniens, uti sunt contradictoria, quorum non est medium... (DI., II, 4, p. 75)

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(2) C., II, 2, p. 94.
And hence any concept formed of God must embrace contradiction.

Oportet enim in divinis simplici con­ceptu, quantum hoc possibile est, com­plecti contradictoria, ipsa anteceden­ter praeveniendo; puta non oportet in divinis concepere distinctionem et in­distinctionem tamquam duo contradicen­tia, sed illa ut in principio suo sim­plicissimo antecedenter, ubi non est aliud distinctio quam indistinctio. (DI., I, 19, p.38)

In the finite order, curve and straight are distinct. Does it follow that in the maximum they are indistinct? No—for that would make them one, as they are one, in the confusion of the com­mon genus line. The answer is that, in God, dis­tinction is at the same time indistinction.

...Ubi non est aliud distinctio quam indistinctio. (DI., I, 19, p.38)

The following consideration would dis­pel whatever doubt might remain as to what Cusa means. It is true that the kind of opposites found in the finite order are absent from God. But the point is that Cusa carries into God the very natures here opposed. He predicates the di­versity of God, but, he adds, in God diversity is identity. It is the contradiction itself which, in God, is not contradiction.

Omnis enim diversitas in ipso est iden­titas...(DI., I, 21, p.42)
All this is quite in keeping with what would be, "at infinity", if, per impossibile, it could be reached: there, curve would have to be predicated of non-curve without contradiction. According to Cusa, in the absolute infinity of God all opposition is overcome. Thus, man, lion, the heavens and earth are most truly present in God; yet, this implies no composition in God, for, in Him, man is lion, the heavens are the earth; each is the other, each is God. In God they are the divine unity.

Quis enim intelligere possit unitatem infinitam per infinitum omnem oppositionem antecedentem, ubi omnia absque compositione sunt in simplicitate unitatis complicata, ubi non est aliud aut diversum, ubi homo non differt a leone et coelum non differt a terra, et tamen verissime ibi sunt ipsum, non secundum finitatem suam, sed complicite ipsamet unitas maxima. (DI., I, 24, p.49)

Cusa's contemporaries were well aware of the implications of such teaching, and his reply to their objections makes the unacceptable part of his doctrine stand out more clearly. Indeed, the main difficulty is met by his distinction between "ratio" and "intellectus". Reason is confined to the finite order in an absolute way; it is only about what is more or less. Our intellect, however,
although it does not positively intuit the maximum, yet it does attain the more or less as ordered to the maximum and it knows that the maximum is their coincidentia. Hence when Johannes Wenck, (l) professor of theology at Heidelberg, objected that the doctrine of "coincidentia" destroyed the root of all science, viz., the principle of contradiction, Cusa replied that the principle of contradiction may be the root of all science as known by discursive reason; it may be the first principle for man's reason. But in the higher order of human knowledge, namely in human intuition which is the act of the intellect, as well as in the divine order, the principle of contradiction has no validity.

Nec sequitur ex coincidentia etiam oppositorum in maximo hoc 'venenum erroris et perfidiae', scilicet destructio seminis scientiarum, primi principii, ut impugnator elicet. Nam illud principium est quoad rationem discurrentem primum, sed nequaquam quoad intellectum videntem.— ut supra de hoc. (A., p.28)

Thus, for reason the number five is composed of the numbers three and two; numbers are either large or small, odd or even; but human intelligence, which is a higher cognitive faculty than

is reason, sees all numbers as absolute unity, wherein one number is not greater than another; the odd numbers are not opposed to the even but identical with them; five is not greater than three or two, for in intelligence all numbers are absolute unity.

Another example is taken from geometry. The fact that every triangle must have three angles equal to two right angles is true for the domain of reason, since reason proceeds according to the principle of contradiction, but for the superior knowledge of human intelligence which proceeds according to the "coincidentia oppositorum" a triangle has but one infinite angle which is three angles.

Cum enim ratione appraehendis, omnem triangulum habere tres angulos, aequalis duobus rectis, et causam apprae-
hensionis non aliam, quam rationem ipsam conspicis: ad profunditatem rationis
viam habes, hoc est enim, a te ita capiendum. Ratio, quia ratio, ita iudicat, quia in rationali coelo ita esse necesse est, nam triangulum non habere tres angulos, duobus rectis praeceis aequales: si hoc verum est, vel est per coincidentiam unitatis et pluralitatis, sive trinitatis et unitatis, aut recti et non recti, sive aliorum valde oppositorum, et tunc est locutio intellectualis mundi. Aut quia non est dabilis rectus angulus praeceis, neque duo praeceis aequalia, neque tria duobus aequalia: sic est locutio sensibilis mundi, qui cadit ab aequalitate rationali, in alteritatem sensibilem. (C., II, 2, p.94)

2. Critique of this doctrine.

Let us now take a more critical glance at this doctrine.

If a limit were really attained, then the nature of the variable and the nature of the limit would be the same identical nature, e.g., circle would be the greatest possible polygon. Nor is this to be conceived as a union of the two natures in some third, differing from the first two, and yet containing them in the eminence of its superiority, in the manner in which vegetative nature and animal nature are contained in the eminence of man; rather the union of the two natures would be achieved in each other:
circle would be the fullness of polygon within the nature of polygon; while being properly circle, it would still be properly polygon, that is, non circle. It would be as though polygon attained its own perfection by becoming identical with its contrary-circle.

If, then, God were a real limit of the creatures, He would have the same nature as the creatures and His proper perfection would be at least of the same genus. God would be the perfect creature—the eternal fulfillment of all that a creature can or should be: the best possible creature, the "infinitized" creature. Just as circle would be polygon because it would be the greatest polygon, so also, God would be creature while being the greatest possible creature. But although of the same nature as the creature, He would yet be distinct from the creature, because divine; and in that very distinction from the creature, God would be identical with the creature. He would be the proper perfection of the creature precisely in that he is distinct from the creature; yet this distinction in perfection would be identity in perfection. God would be the greatest possible creature because He is not a creature; yet His not
being a creature would arise strictly from His being the greatest possible creature.

All this contradiction must be accepted if one teaches that God is the real limit of the creatures; that Cusa does accept it can be seen from his doctrine of God as the "coincidentia". Perhaps Cusa's most significant example of "coincidentia oppositorum" is taken from time. It shows with equal clarity both what he means by his coincidence and the falsehood of his teaching. Cusa says that in the maximum diversity is identity so that the past is not different from the future nor the future different from the present.

Omnis enim diversitas in ipso est identitas; unde eius potestia cum sit unissima, est et fortissima et infinitissima. Tanta quidem est eius unissima duratio, quod praeteritum non est aliud a futuro, et futurum non est aliud a praesenti in ea...(DI., I, 21, p.42)

If, in the maximum diversity is identity, Cusa must mean, that in the maximum, the past in its proper formality of past, is distinct from the future; but, since diversity is identity, the past, in being properly distinct from the future, is at the same time not properly distinct from the future. Cusa must mean that in the eternity of God, those things which are formally
predicated of creatures—namely, past, present and future—are properly divine because they are at the maximum; and being divine they are properly identified one with the other. Yet, since they are the maximum of formalities said of the creatures, they are properly created and therefore distinct one from the other. In identity they are distinct; in distinction, identical, for in the maximum diversity is identity.

Another example is taken from accident and substance. When, Cusa says that in the maximum, diversity is identity, and accident is substance,

...ubi accidens est substantia...(DI., I, 10, p.20)

he must mean that, in God, accident qua accident is different from substance qua substance, while in that very difference accident and substance are formally and properly identical.

Again, when he says that in the maximum body is spirit and motion is rest in such a way that there is a "coincidentia contradictionis", he must mean that these opposites are formally and properly opposed to each other, and yet, formally and properly identical.
To clarify his teaching Cusa gives the example of the infinite curved line identical with straight, where the difference is said to be identity and the unity, multiplicity. Likewise in God, all difference is identity, all multiplicity, unity. Hence, although the essences of all things are in God, distinction is still identity, unity is multiplicity. In God all essences are the divine essence; each essence is all essences; all essences are one essence.

If this is to be understood as being against the principle of contradiction, then Cusa must mean that the essences of all the creatures are formally and properly the divine essence; that in God the creature qua creature is properly divine, the divine, properly creature.

...Quidditas solis absoluta non est aliud a quidditate absoluta lunae-quoniam est
ipse Deus...qui est entitas et quidditas absoluta omnium...(DI., II, 4, p.74)

In all this there should be no doubt that Cusa means a real contradiction, and not just the appearance of it. We hold that God is properly and formally one nature, and yet eminently many. Cusa, on the other hand, means exactly what he says: God is the coincidence, the identity of contradictories. If any question remained in the reader's mind, it should be dispelled by what Cusa says of the infinite line: it is actually triangle, circle and sphere. As the infinite line is actually all the geometrical figures, so is God actually all things. Explaining the manner in which the infinite line is actually all these figures, Cusa makes it very clear that he takes the infinite line to be formally and properly each of these figures, for he says that it is no more a line than it is triangle, circle or sphere—as indeed it would be were it one of these figures formally and properly and the others eminently. Cusa says that it is truly all the figures without composition—i.e., properly each and everyone of the figures in perfect simplicity.

Maxima linea non plus est linea, triangulus, circulus vel sphaera, sed in veritate est illa omnia absque compositione...(DI., I, 19, p.38)
It is clear, then, that Cusa translates into reality the logic of the method of limits by conceiving God as the real maximum and minimum of the creatures; that he identifies the divine with the created; that this identity is achieved in a peculiar type of unity: an absolute unity which is absolute multiplicity, an absolute identity which is absolute diversity. It would seem equally clear that Cusa thought this translation conceivable because he misunderstood the traditional teaching concerning the divine perfection. Because the theologians and philosophers had taught that God is absolute perfection which contains all the perfections of the creatures in an infinite simplicity, Cusa feels quite confident that in teaching that God is the maximum and the minimum of the creatures, because He is the "coincidentia oppositorum", that he was but refining and making more precise the traditional doctrine concerning the divine perfection. Far from refining the doctrine Cusa really destroys it, as can be seen from a review of the true doctrine.

In the true doctrine there is a formal ratio (1) proper to God alone: pure act or Deitas.

(1) Because of the impossibility of giving an adequate translation of the term ratio we will often leave it in the latin.
Although this ratio is formally one, it is eminently many, containing as it does, all created perfections by way of eminence. But created perfections are of two kinds. Some contain in their formal and proper ratio the note of imperfection; e.g. "created being" has the imperfection of dependence, "man" has the imperfection of body. Because of this, they are called mixed perfections. Those perfections, however, which in their proper and formal ratio have nothing of the imperfect, e.g., wisdom, being, justice, are called the simple perfections.

...Scito primo perfectionem esse duplicum: quaedam est perfectio simpliciter, et quaedam est perfectio in hoc vel illo. Perfectio simpliciter est illa quae in suo proprio ac formali conceptu dicit perfectionem cum nulla imperfectione, ut sapientia, bonitas, et similia. Perfectio vero in hoc vel illo est quae in suo proprio ac formali conceptu dicit perfectionem imperfectioni mixtam, ut humanitas, aequitas, et his similia. (Cajetan, In De Ente et Essentia, Cap. VI, q. XIII, n. 111. (Ed. Laurent)

Since the mixed perfections contain in their formal and proper ratio the note of imperfection, they cannot be in God formally, since anything which in its very formality implies imperfection must be excluded from Him. Hence they can

(1) S. Thomas, Ia, q. 4, a. 2, c.
be in God in a virtual manner only, and eminently.
The simple perfections, their formal rationes hav­ing no intrinsic note of imperfection, are in God formally. But it must be remembered, however, that a perfection can be had formally in two ways: 1) formally and according to its proper ratio; or, 2) formally again, but as contained in the proper ratio of a higher order. Considered formally according to proper rationes, one simple perfection is formally distinct from another, for their proper and formal rationes are not mutually inclusive. E.g., the formal and proper ratio of wisdom and that of justice are formally distinct. Now, the simple perfections cannot be present in God according to this mode, since it would demand an actual formal multiplicity in God's essence. This type of formal distinction is impossible in God who is pure act.

...Perfectiones esse in aliquo formaliter contingit dupliciter. Uno modo in suis propriis naturis distinctas et limitatas, sicut in homine est esse, intelligere, et velle, etc. Alio modo contingit eas esse formaliter in aliquo superioris ordinis unitas et illimitatas, sicut in solis luce sunt virtus calefactiva et desiccativa et alia huiusmodi. Nec parum distant isti duo modi inter se. Longe namque excellentius est esse in aliquo secundo modo ut in exemplo dato apparat. Quamvis igitur perfectiones omnium generum excellentiori modo sint in Deo quam in creaturis, quia
tamen perfectiones non simpliciter sunt in eo virtualiter tantum (eis enim mon denominatur talis) perfectiones autem simpliciter sunt in eo formaliter, et non in propriis naturis limitatae, sed ut in re superioris ordinis realiter indistinctae et illimitatae... (Ibid., n.111)

...Deus non habet omnes perfectiones in seipsis, id est, distinctas ab invicem in propriis naturis, sicut homo habet sapientiam, justitiam, prudentiam, etc. Sic enim in Deo oporteret esse maximam compositionem, sed habet eas indistincte unitas in suo esse simplicissimo. (Ibid. n.109)

While the simple perfections are in God formally, they are in Him formally as contained in the distinctly, uniquely and incommunicably divine ratio of pure act.

Because these simple perfections are formally and eminently contained in God according to the formal ratio of pure or infinite act, in Him they are formally infinite, and thus formally identical one with the other. Divine wisdom, justice, and goodness are formally infinite and formally identified with each other. However, this identification must be correctly understood. It must not be thought, as Cusa did, that in God the simple perfections are formally identical with each other in such a way that the proper formal ratio of one is the same proper formal ratio of the other, as though
in God wisdom and goodness were the same ratio, proper to wisdom and proper to goodness. Such an identification is contradictory: the ratio of one perfection, while being proper to it, would also be proper to a different perfection; each perfection would be properly identical with, and properly distinct from, the other perfection. Hence in God the identification is found in a third ratio of a higher order: the ratio of pure or infinite act, which contains these simple perfections in its incommensurable eminence.

...Scito quod duas perfectiones iungi, ad propositum, contingit dupliciter: scilicet identice, et formaliter. Identice quidem, ut si fingamus quod sapientia Socratis et eius iustitiae sint una met res. Formaliter autem, potest imaginari dupliciter. Primo, si fingamus quod propria ratio formalis sapientiae et propria ratio iustitiae sint una ratio formalis, ita quod illa una ratio non sit tertia ratio, sed sit tantum propria sapientiae et iustitiae ratio. Et huiusmodi identitas est simpler cert impossible, implicansque duo contradictoria. Si enim illae duas sunt una ratio tertia, ergo non sunt una ratio: quoniam nulla ratio est identitatis formalis unius ad aliam, ex quo secundum se non sunt una. Et si sint una ratio, ergo sunt una tertia ratio: eo quod una secundum se non est altera. Secundo test intelligi, si fingamus rationem sapientiae et rationem iustitiae eminenter caudi in una ratione formalis superioris ordinis, et identificari formaliter. Et haec identitas est non solum possible, sed de facto omnium perfectionum
in Deo. Non est enim putandum ratio-nem formalem propriam sapientiae esse in Deo: sed ut in littera habetur, ratio sapientiae in Deo, non sapien-tiae propria est, sed est propria su-perioris, puta deitatis, et communis, eminencia formali, iustitiae, bonitati, potentiae, etc. Sicut enim res quae est sapientia, et res quae est iusti-tia in creaturis, elevantur in unam rem superioris ordinis, scilicet deitatem, et ideo sunt una res in Deo; ita ratio formalis sapientiae et ratio formalis iustitiae elevantur in unam rationem formalem superioris ordinis, scilicet rationem propriam deitatis, et sunt una numero ratio formalis, eminenter utramque rationem continens, non tantum virtualiter, ut ratio lu-cis continet rationem caloris, sed formaliter, ut ratio lucis continet rationem virtutis calefactivae. Unde subtilissime divinum s.Thomae inge-nium, ex hoc quod ratio sapientiae in Deo est formaliter non solum ipsa, sed etiam ratio iustitiae, et conse-quenter est ratio propria non sapien-tiae sed alciuus tertii, in creatu-ris autem est formaliter ipsa propria ratio sapientiae, intulit: Ergo alia est ratio sapientiae in Deo, et alia sapientiae in creaturis; ac per hoc, nomen commune non dicitur de eis se-cundum unam rationem. (Cajetan, in Ia, q.13, a.5.(#6.)

Hence there is a perfection, the proper ratio of God, which can in no way be said formally of the creatures in the natural order. The mixed perfections can in no way be said formally of God. Simple perfections can be said formally both of God and of the creatures, not univocally but ana-logously. When God is said to be wise, He is wise
not by the formal ratio proper to wisdom, but by the formal ratio of pure act which eminently contains the perfection of wisdom; when man is called wise, he is wise by the formal ratio proper to wisdom.

...Omnes rerum perfectiones, quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in Deo praeeexistunt unite. Sic igitur, cum aliquod nomen ad perfectionem pertinens de creatura dicitur, significat illum perfectionem ut distinctam secundum rationem definitionis ab aliis: puta cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essentia hominis, et a potentia et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus huiusmodi. Sed cum hoc nomen de Deo dicimus, non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia vel potentia vel esse ipsius. Et sic, cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendet rem significatam: non autem cum dicitur de Deo, sed relinquuit rem significatam ut incomprehensam, et excedentem nominis significationem. (S, Thomas, la, q.13, a.5)

In man, the ratio of wisdom is the perfection of wisdom and not some other perfection; in God the ratio of wisdom is all perfection for the ratio of wisdom in God is not proper to wisdom but proper to pure act. Hence, it is simpliciter different from the ratio of wisdom which is predicated of man; only secundum quid, in analogy is the ratio one.

...Alia est ratio sapientiae in Deo, alia sapientiae in creaturis; ac per
hoc, nomen commune non dicitur de eis secundum unam rationem. Quod ut clarius percipiatur, exempla subdamus. Si enim quaeratur: quid est homo intuendum sapiens? respondetur quod ordinativus, vel aliquid huiusmodi. Si vero quaeratur: quid est Deus intuendum sapiens? respondendum est quod aliquid eminenter praehabens in se esse ordinativum. Ubi manifeste patet quod, licet ly sapiens sit nomen commune Deo et homini, ratio tamen utriusque secundum illud nomen, non est omnino eadem; propter hoc, quia ratio sapientiae in homine est solum ipsa, in Deo vero est ipsa et aliae; imo nec ipsa nec aliae, sed altior quaedam ratio. (Cajetan, ibid, 7.)

Cusa not only fails to make these distinctions but his neglect leads to positively erroneous assertions. Because in God there is one formal and proper nature which is eminently many natures, Cusa believes that in God the one taken formally and properly as one, is identical with the many taken formally and properly as many. Because all the perfections said of the creatures are in God in a state of absolute perfection, he thinks that this state of absolute perfection is proper to them. He fails to realize that this absolute perfection is not proper to them but proper to Pure Act. He does not seem to understand that these perfections, the mixed and the simple, attain absolute perfection in God only because in Him they are present, not according to their own
proper rationes, but as contained in the eminence of a ratio proper to God alone. He does not seem to appreciate that the infinity which these perfections have in God is not an infinity proper to them but an infinity proper to God.
CHAPTER TWO

1. Cusa's conception of God as the unique "ratio" of all things.

In *Physics IV*, c.14, 224a 2-15, Aristotle says: "It is said rightly, too, that the number of the sheep and of the dogs is the same number if the two numbers are equal, but not the same decad or the same ten; just as the equilateral and the scalene are not the same triangle, yet they are the same figure, because they are both triangles. For things are called the same so-and-so if they do not differ by a differentia of that thing, but not if they do; e.g. triangle differs from triangle by a differentia of triangle, therefore they are different triangles; but they do not differ by a differentia of figure, but are in one and the same division of it. For a figure of one kind is a circle and a figure of another kind a triangle, and a triangle of one kind is equilateral and a triangle of another kind scalene. They are the same figure, then, and that, triangle, but not the same triangle. Therefore the number of two groups also is the same number (for their number does not differ
by a differentia of number), but it is not the same decad; for the things of which it is asserted differ; one group are dogs, and the other horses."

In Cusa, we find this scheme applied to the various rationes of things. The ratio line is the same for a line of two feet and for one of three. It is true that they differ as two and three. But that is because we consider them with respect to what divides line, namely, the object. If, on the contrary, we consider any line with respect to a sufficiently remote genus, the same ratio will be predicable of the one and of the other. Just as we can say that the equilateral triangle and the scalene triangle are the same figure, so we can say that the line of two feet and the line of three can be the same line, provided we suppose an intermediary, such as "straight line", which is common to all straight lines of various length. Let us now read a relevant passage from Cusa:

Adhuc circa idem: Linea finita est divisibilis et infinita indivisibilis, quia infinitum non habet partes, in quo maximum coincidit cum minimo. Sed finita linea non est divisibilis in non-lineam, quoniam in magnitudine non devenit ad minimum, quo minus esse non possit, ut superius est ostensum, Quare finita linea in ratione lineae est indivisibilis; pedalis linea non est minus linea quam cubitalis. Relinquitur ergo,
quod infinita linea sit ratio lineae finitae. Ita maximum simpliciter est omnium ratio. (DI., I, 17, p.33)

Adhuc: sicut linea infinita est indivisibilis, quae est ratio lineae finitae, et per consequens immutabilis et perpetua, ita et ratio omnium rerum, quae est Deus benedictus, sempiterna et immutabilia est. Et in hoc aperitur intellectus magni Dionysii dicentis essentiam rerum incorruptibilem et aliorum, qui rationem rerum aeternam dixerunt; sicut ipse divinus Plato, qui—ut refert Chalcidius—in Phaedone dixit unum esse omnium rerum exemplar sive ideam, utin se est; in respectu vero rerum, quae plures sunt, plura videntur exemplaria. Nam cum lineam bipedalem et aliam tripedalem et sic deinceps considero, duo occurunt: scilicet, ratio lineae, quae est in utraque et omnibus una et aequalis, et diversitas, quae est inter bipedalem et tripedalem. Et ita alia videtur ratio bipedalis et alia tripedalis. Manifestum autem est in infinita linea non esse aliam bipedalem et tripedalem; et illa est ratio finitae. Unde ratio est una ambarum linearum, et diversitas rerum sive linearum non est ex diversitate rationis, quae est una, sed ex accidenti, quia non aequa rationem participant. Unde non est nisi una omnium ratio, quae diversimodo participantur. (DI., I, 17, p.33)

Hence it is obviously by following the scheme of predication that Cusa establishes the unique ratio of all things. Note, too, that in this order, a predicable, such as "animal" attributed as genus, has the nature of form; the differences are on the part of the subject—e.g.—animal is predicated of rational animal. We believe the
following text must be understood in the same light:

...Non est nisi una forma formarum, et veritas veritatum, et non est alia veritas maxima circuli quam quadranguli. Unde formae rerum non sunt distinctae, nisi ut contracte; ut sunt absolute, sunt una indistincta, quae est Verbum in divinis. (DI., II, 9, p.94)

St. Thomas, in his treatise on the divine ideas (Ia, q.15, a.2, c.) distinguishes the idea—namely, that which is represented—from that by which the idea is known, i.e., the intelligible species. The ideas are indeed the rationes of all things, their exemplary forms.

Quae quidem licet multiplicentur secundum respectum ad res, tamen non sunt rea-liter aliud a divina essentia, prout eius similitudo a diversis participari potest diversimode.(Ia, q.44, a.3, c.)

Hence, while they are not really distinct from the divine essence, they are the divine essence only insofar as the likeness of that essence can be shared by different things in different ways. They are the divine essence as participable in such and such a manner. While the divine essence represents all things, it does not represent them as the divine essence itself, but as likeness of the divine essence. That which is represented, is represented in its proper otherness—in likeness, not in identity.
It is true that the divine essence may be called the ratio of man, and of other things, provided we understand this to mean that it is the ratio of the "ratio man", and of the ratio of anything other than God.

Cusa's understanding of this problem is quite different. Not only does he lead all natures back to a highest ratio in predication, identifying it with God; he also denies the very diversity of these rationes by formally identifying them with the divine essence. The infinite ratio of line is "una ambarum linearum", and he calls God "ratio omnium rerum" in this sense. He holds, therefore, that in God, the distinct rationes are not distinct; the ideas, considered as "that which is represented", are a single ratio.

Sit igitur nostra speculatio—quam ex isto, quod infinita curvitas est infinita rectitudo, elicimus—transsumptive in maximo de simplicissima et infinitissima eius essentia: quomodo ipsa est omnium essentiarum simplicissima essentia; ac quomodo omnes rerum esse[n]iae, quae sunt, fuerunt aut erunt, actu semper et aeternaliter sunt in ipsa ipsa essentia, et ita omnes esse[n]iae sicut ipsa omnium essentia; ac quomodo ipsa omnium essentia ita est quaelibet quod simul omnes et nulla singulariter; ac quomodo ipsa maxima essentia, uti infinita linea est omnium linearum adequatissima mensura, pariformiter est omnium essentiarum adequatissima mensura. (DI., I, 16, p.32)
In *Metaphysics*, VII, c.17, Aristotle shows that it is senseless to ask the why of the why. The *propter quid* is something ultimate.

(Cf. St.Thomas, *ibid.* lect.17) Nor does one ask properly "Why Socrates is Socrates?", unless one means: "Why is Socrates a man? why does he have a bad temper?, or something of that nature.

Let us state what, i.e. what kind of thing, substance should be said to be, taking once more another starting-point; for perhaps from this we shall get a clear view also of that substance which exists apart from sensible substances. Since, then, substance is a principle and a cause, let us pursue it from this starting-point. The 'why' is always sought in this form—'why does one thing attach to some other?' For to inquire why the musical man is a musical man, is either to inquire—as we have said—why the man is musical, or it is something else. Now 'why a thing is itself' is a meaningless inquiry (for [to give meaning to the question 'why'] the fact or the existence of the thing must already be evident—e.g. that the moon is eclipsed—but the fact that a thing is itself is the single reason and the single cause to be given in answer to all such questions as 'why the man is man, or the musician musical', unless one were to answer 'because each thing is inseparable from itself, and its being one just meant this'; this, however, is common to all things and is a short and easy way with the question). But we *can* inquire why man is an animal of such and such a nature. This, then, is plain, that we are not inquiring why he who is a man is a man. We are inquiring, then, why something is predicatable of something (that it is predicatable
must be clear; for if not, the inquiry is an inquiry into nothing). E.g. why does it thunder? This is the same as 'why is sound produced in the clouds?' Thus the inquiry is about the predication of one thing of another. And why are these things, i.e. bricks and stones, a house? Plainly we are seeking the cause. And this is the essence (to speak abstractly), which in some cases is the end, e.g. perhaps in the case of a house or a bed, and in some cases is the first mover; for this also is a cause. But while the efficient cause is sought in the case of genesis and destruction, the final cause is sought in the case of being also.

The object of the inquiry is most easily overlooked where one term is not expressly predicated of another (e.g. when we inquire 'what man is'), because we do not distinguish and do not say definitely that certain elements make up a certain whole. But we must articulate our meaning before we begin to inquire; if not, the inquiry is on the border-line between being a search for something and a search for nothing. Since we must have the existence of the thing as something given, clearly the question is why the matter is some definite thing; e.g. why are these materials a house? Because that which was the essence of a house is present. And why is this individual thing, or this body having this form, a man? Therefore what we seek is the cause, i.e. the form, by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance of the thing. Evidently, then, in the case of simple terms no inquiry nor teaching is possible; our attitude towards such things is other than that of inquiry.

Now Cusa, quite logically, contradicts Aristotle on this very point, and, at the same time offers the solution we could expect.
Ego autem attendo, quomodo, etsi Aristoteles repperisset species aut veritatem circa illa, adhuc propterea non potuisset attigisse "quod erat esse", nisi eo modo, quo quis attingit hanc mensuram esse sextarium, quia est "quod erat esse sextario": puta, quia sic est, ut a principe reipublicae, ut sit sextarium, est constituendum. Cur autem sic sit et non aliter constitutum, propterea non sciret, nisi quod demum resolutus diceret: "Quod principi placuit, legis vigorem habet."

Et ita dico cum sapiente, quod omnium operum Dei nulla est ratio: scilicet cur caelum caelum et terra terra et homo homo, nulla est ratio nisi quia sic voluit, qui fecit. Ulterius investigare est fatum, ut in simili dicit Aristoteles, velle inquirere primi principii 'quodlibet est vel non est' demonstrationem. Sed dum attente consideratur omnum creaturam nullam habere essendi rationem aliunde, nisi quia sic creata est, quodque voluntas creatoris sit ultima essendi ratio, sitque ipse Deus creator simplex intellectus, qui per se creat, ita quod voluntas non sit nisi intellectus seu ratio, immo fons rationum, tunc clare videt, quomodo id, quod voluntate factum est, ex fonte prodit rationis, sicut lex imperialis non est nisi ratio imperantis, quae nobis voluntas apparet. (B. 29)

While he does not mention the true reason for his objection, we may already find it in his notion of finite and infinite ratio. For, if the divine essence is the absolute ratio "man", say, it is because man himself has no real propter quid of his own. Ultimately the divine essence is the only propter quid anything has. Any created essence
is, as to its very "quid" the result of a composition freely performed. The enquiry after the ultimate "what a thing is in itself" will always be reduced to the question "Why was it made to be whatever it is?". Cusa will answer: "rational animal is rational animal because God willed rational animal to be rational animal". Hence, even that which is signified by the essential definition, is, what it is, because God has willingly composed it to be what it is. Whatever a nature is, it is always reducible to the ultimate indistinction of the maximum.

This Cusa applies to the case of numbers, as we have already seen. Take the number two. What we would call its "intrinsic ratio" has a double reality: first in God as identified with the infinite ratio of the maximum, the complication of all things, the supreme distinct indistinction; then there is the finite number two. Now in Cusa's mind, we may ask "why is two two?" To this question he would answer: In the first case, the why is none other than God Himself; in the second, because God has willed the finite two to be two. Hence, twoness, in its finite mode, is the result of a free and artificial complication.
The finite too, is in its own way a complication, not merely, as we hold, because of the real many in every created suppositum, the composition of act and potency, substance and accident, being and operation; but because it is, even as to its very "quid", the product of a voluntary agent.

All this is quite in conformity with the model of variable and limit. God, as we have seen, is the one complication of all things, just as the limit 2, though one, is conceived as the infinite sum of the variable converging toward it. The limit does not actually come from the converging series; God's complication is no outgrowth from the finite universe. A text already quoted is again to the point:

Quidquid enim possibile est, hoc est actu ipsum maximum maxime; non ut ex possibili est, sed ut maxime est; sicuti ex linea triangulus educitur et infinita linea non est triangulus, ut ex finita educitur, sed actu est triangulus infinitus. Praeterea, ipsa possibilitas absoluta non est aliud in maximo quam ipsum maximum actu, sicut linea infinita est actu sphaera. (supra p.7)

To say that God is "omnium complicatic" is more than to say that He possesses eminently the perfection of any possible creature. It means, quite definitely, that He is conceived in terms of
composition, even when real composition is at
the same time denied. Cusa evades this contra-
diction by attributing it to reason.

Let us now pass on to a brief criti-
cism of these views.

2. Critique of this doctrine.

First, we must point out an obvious
confusion, in Cusa, of the notion of an universale
in causando with that of an universale in praedi-
cando. Because God is the supreme cause of all
things, Cusa believes Him to be also the supreme
ratio predicated of all things. The first cause
of all things being divinely perfect, the ratio
in se of anything he causes must be divinely per-
fect. And, since the first cause of all things
is infinite, then, the natura in se of anything
he causes must also be infinite. This confusion
of the notions: universale in causando and uni-
ersale in praedicando can be shown from many
texts. Thus, when explaining the abso-
lute being of God by the example of figure, Cusa
first abstracts figure from the inferiors of
which it is predicated (figure as universale in
praedicando): circle, triangle and hexagon. He
then considers that figure actually possesses all
the perfection of these inferiors (figure as an
universale in causando). So too, with God's being.
After abstracting being from that of which it is
predicated, Cusa considers this being as formally
possessing the perfections of all beings.

Adhuc mathematice aenigmatizando consi-
dera, quomodo summa aequalitas quanti-
tatum, ipsas ab omni pluralitate absolvit, puta: si concipis, circuli a centro
ad circumferentiam lineas, ut describi-
tur in pavimento, videntur esse aequales,
sed non sunt, propter pavimenti fluxibilita-
tem et materiam, ita quod nulla est alteri
praecise similis, ut in docta ignorantia
ostenditur. Sed dum intellectualter cir-
culus in se consideratur, lineae multae
in pavimento, non possunt ibi esse aliae
et aliae, quia causa alteritatis cessat,
scilicet materia, sic nec sunt plures.
Sicut ergo de lineis dictum est, ita de
omni quanto, scilicet superficie et cor-
pore. Quando igitur video in pavimento,
umam superficiem terminari figura circuli,
et aequalem superficiem figura triangu-
lari terminari, et aequalem, figura hex-
agonali, et ita de omnibus signabilibus
figuris, et post haec considero, plures
videri superficies illas aequales, ob sub-
jectum alius et alius, in quo aliter et
aliter describuntur: abstraho igitur men-
taliter, a subjecto, et video quomodo
prius una et eadem superficies, fuit mihi
alia et alia visa, quia vidi in alio et
alia loco, et subjecto. Et deinde ad-
vero, quod una et eadem superficies, est
circulus, est trigonus, et hexagonus, et
omnis figura, qua superficies figurari
et terminari potest. Per hoc aenigma,
entitatem ad hoc et illo absolutum, video
actu esse omnium et singulorum entium,
essendi formam, quomodocumque formabilem,
non quidem similitudinarie et mathematice:
sed verissime et formaliter, quod et vita­liter dici potest, et hoc aenigma mihi pla­cet. Nam eandem superficiem posse esse circulum et rectilineam et polygoniam et ejus praxim nuper ostendi. Esto ergo, quod possibile esse, ponatur actu esse, uti in theologicis fatendum est, utique tunc ae­nigma clarius dirigit: quia secundum mathe­maticae perfectam comprehensionem ad theo­logiam, aenigma propinquius fieri posse, arbitrbor. Et haec de hoc, nunc sic dicta sint. (P. p.263)

Conceiving God as the absolute ratio of creatures, Cusa can then say that, in a certain sense, the study of God is an easy one.

...Nulla est facilior difficultas quam divina speculari. (S.II, p.25)

For if one desires to have a concept of God, all he need do is to conceive of concept, for God is abso­lute concept; for a more precise concept of God, all he need do is to conceive of precision, for God is absolute precision; for a true concept of God, all he need do is to conceive truth, for God is absolute truth. In fact the study of God is so easy that any question asked of God already presupposes the answer; for since God is the supreme ratio, He is signified in each and every term. Thus if one asks: whether God is, the question presupposes the notion of being; but God is absolute being. If one asks: what is God? the question presupposes the notion of quiddity; but God is absolute quiddity.
Idiota. Nulla est facilior difficultas quam divina speculari, ubi delectatio coincidit in difficulitate. Sed quid optas dico?

Orator. Ut mihi dicas: Ex quo Deus est maior quam concipi possit, quomodo de ipso facere debeam conceptum?

Idiota. Sicut de conceptu.

Orator. Explana.

Idiota. Audisti, quomodo in omni conceptu concipi tur inconceptibilis. Accedit igitur conceptus de conceptu ad inconceptibilem.

Orator. Quomodo tunc faciam praecisionem conceptum?

Idiota. Concipe praecisionem; nam Deus est ipsa absoluta praecisio.

Orator. Quid tunc per me agendum est, quando de Deo rectum conceptum facere propono?

Idiota. Tunc te ad rectitudinem ipsam convertas.

... ...

Idiota. Omnis quaestio de Deo praesupponit quaesitum, et id est respondendum, quod in omni quaeestionone de Deo quaestio praesupponit; nam Deus in omni terminorum significattonem significatur, licet sit insignificabilis.

Orator. Declara queso, quia nimis admiror, ut vix quae dicis aure percipiam.

Idiota. Nonne quaestio, an sit, praesupponit entitatem?

Orator. Immo.

Idiota. Cum ergo a te quaesitum fuerit, an sit Deus, hoc quod praesupponitur dico, scilicet eum esse, quia est entitas in quaeestion praesupposita. Sic si quis quasierit, quid est Deus, cum haec quaestio praesupponat quidditatem esse, respondebis Deum esse ipsam quidditatem absolutam. Ita quidem de omnibus.
Neque in hoc cadit haesitatio. Nam Deus est ipsa absoluta praesuppositio omnium, quae qualitetcumque praesupponuntur, sicut in omni effectu praesupponitur causa. Vide igitur orator, quam facilis est theologica difficultas. (S,II,25)

This text is a good illustration of Cusa's confusion between an "universale in praedicando" and an "universale in causando"; between total abstraction and formal abstraction. (1) Cusa proceeds as though the higher our mind rises in the scale of predication, the more it reaches a higher cause; as though the more abstract or absolute a notion in the scale of total abstraction, the more abstract or absolute the notion in the order of formal abstraction. In truth the process is reverse. As one ascends in the order of predication, each genus becomes more of a universal in predication than the preceding one, for the intrinsic actuality, the intrinsic determination, in each succeeding generic notion diminishes, and the potentiality increases. Thus, as one goes from the species "man", to the genus "animal"; and then to the higher genus "living body", and from there to a still higher genus "body", each genus is less actual than the preceding one, each is more potential than the foregoing. Body can be predicated

(1) Cf. Cajetan, In De Ente et essentia, nn.2-8.
of the living and non-living, of animal and non-animal. This is because its intrinsic composition is less actual than the composition of the notion "living body", or the notion "sensitive living body". Hence, as one prescinds from actuality in the mode of total abstraction, one rises in the order of predication.

It is entirely different with the order of causation. As one rises in the scale of causation, each succeeding cause becomes more universal than the preceding one, i.e. capable of causing more kinds of effects than the preceding one. The reason is that intrinsic actuality becomes greater with each succeeding cause. Thus things in the vegetative order can bring about effects both of the corporeal and the vegetative order; animals bring about effects in the corporeal, vegetative, and animal order; man produces effects in these orders and also in the human; God Who is pure actuality is the absolutely universal cause. Hence as one abstracts from potentiality (formal abstraction), one rises in the order of causation.

Cusa confuses these two orders. Because God is supreme in the order of causation, Cusa believes He is supreme in the order of what can be predicated; that because God is the cause of all
things, He is also the ratio that is predicated of all things; because creatures are more perfectly present in God than they are in their own proper being, God is their proper perfection.

This indeed is a deeply erroneous doctrine. Logically, he must maintain that God and the creature have the same proper nature; that the most unique of all beings, the universal cause, is also the most common of all, the universal predicate; the very being of God is the intrinsic being of the creature. Indeed, one must accept these conclusions, if one conceives of God as the maximum and minimum of the creatures.

Let us now turn to a further criticism, related to the previous one, and based on the principle of predication with identity. Line may be considered as a remote genus; finite line as a proximate genus; straight and curve as species. This gives us the following schema:
Now, according to the principle quoted from Aristotle, the remote genus may be predicated of the species with identity, thus: straight and curve are the same line. But we may not attribute finite line with identity; we must not say: straight and curve are the same finite line. The reason is that the species divide the proximate genus, whereas they are not the proper divisions of the remote genus. The proper differences of line would be: Infinite and finite.

Now, straight may be defined as the limit of curve. If, *per impossibile*, the limit could be reached, finite line could be predicated with identity. But the identity would be more than that of mere predication, since we could then say that curve is straight, the difference being one in name only. Indeed, they would cease to be species of finite line, since curve would coincide only with infinite straight. Yet, it would be the two species of finite line which would be the same infinite line. Hence finite line and infinite line would have to be the same line. Line, then, would be the one and sufficient ratio of both infinite and finite, straight and curve.

It is only through such reasoning that Cusa arrives at the notion of infinite line. It
shows clearly that he confuses the mere generality of predication with universality of causation, and, at the same time, destroys all the predicationally inferior rationes, absorbing them in the contradictory identity of the line which is distinctly and indistinctly all that the inferiors are.

But it is not enough to point out that he confuses logical and real. The confusion involves, at the same time, an identification of the highest and the lowest in reality itself; worse than that, it reduces the highest to the lowest. He identifies that which, in the order of predication, is in the nature of form, with that which is as form in nature itself. E.g. animal as predicated of the subjects man and brute, expresses what they have in common. Yet, what they have in common, is what is less perfect in man and in the nature of subject with relation to the difference: rational. Hence, that which, in nature, is subject and viewed as determinable, becomes the higher form in nature. This reminds us of David of Dinant.

It is also clear that he confuses the objective ratio of anything, with the intelligible species by which it is known. Indeed, we need as many formal concepts as we know natures distinctly. But the separated substances know the same natures
more perfectly by fewer species. As we pointed out in the introduction, this is a distinctly noetic aspect of the problem of the one and the many. The confusion of it with the natural problem entails a negation of both ratio and of the species intelligibilis in which the former is attained. For, in Cusa's position, on the one hand the rationes, indeed the very ratio infinita can be attained only by identification with intelligible species—"that which" with "by which"—; the very ratio of intelligible species, which, in this respect is, itself, an objective ratio, a "quod intelligitur", he must identify formally with the species as that by which, as "quo", and thus he completely destroys the very notion "quid". On the other hand, the intelligible species, being that "by which" the known is known, is also denied.

Nor is it little wonder that Cusa should formally identify that which the divine ideas represent, with the ratio of God Himself and with that by which God knows all He knows.

By his conception of "quidditas absoluta" as the true quidditas of all things, he already teaches Leibnitz' theory of identity, sufficient reason and monads. This conception however consti-
tutes a negation of the identity of a thing with itself, as is clear from the text we quoted from *Metaphysics VII*. No further explanation is called for.
CHAPTER THREE

1. Cusa's conception of God as Possest.

Cusa's conception of God as the unique ratio is the foundation for his notion of God as the coincidence of absolute actuality and absolute possibility, i.e., of God as the "Possest". Before examining this conception, we must make some necessary distinctions regarding the terms: actuality and possibility.

The word actuality has several meanings (1).

When used in all its generality it designates whatever may be said "to be" in any way. Thus understood it stands for the logically common notion of "to be". This type of actuality or being can be said of both logical and real being, of God and of the creature, of that which is merely possible and of that which is actual, of substance and accident, of the orders of essence, of existence, and of operation. For actuality or being thus understood signifies the confused notion of "to be", by which anything is in some way or other. When confined to signify: that which is or can be

(1) In V Metaph., lect.9, nn.889-897.
in the real order, the term actuality stands for the notion of real being. And within this order, it can be restricted to mean that which actually is, as opposed to that which is only in the sense that it can be; i.e. it can signify the actual as opposed to the possible or potential.

Again, actuality thus taken, can be said either of the Pure and Absolute actuality of God, or of the participated and limited actuality found in the creature. The latter can then be further divided into the various kinds of existing created being.

Of these various acceptations of the term actuality there are two which, in a special way, may be qualified as absolute actuality; first, the actuality of God who is absolute actuality in the sense that He is esse subsistens; secondly, the logically common notion of being which is absolute actuality in that it is predicable of anything that may, in some way, be said "to be".

Let us now turn to some of the meanings of the term: possibility. Possibility, in the sense of "able to be", is of various kinds. There is that which is opposed to the impossible. Since
the impossible is that which implies contradiction, the possibility opposed to it can be said of whatever implies no contradiction. Thus understood, possibility can be said of the logical and of the real; of God and the creature; of the necessary and the contingent; of the actual and of the potential.

Possibile enim quoddam est quod ad necessarium sequitur. Nam quod necesse est esse, possibile est esse; quod enim non possibile est esse, impossibile est esse; et quod impossibile est esse, necesse est non esse; igitur quod necesse est esse, necesse est non esse. Hoc autem est impossible. Ergo impossible est quod aliquid necesse sit esse, et tamen non possibile illud esse. Ergo possibile esse sequitur ad necesse esse. (III, Contra Gentes, c.86)

When possibility thus taken is said of that which is in potency, in no way does it designate that which is characteristic of what is in potency alone as opposed to act; nor does it mean that that which is yet to be, shall not necessarily come about. It merely means that to be in potency or to be in act, to be necessary or to be contingent, implies no contradiction, and nothing more.

Again, the term possible may be used to signify that which can be produced. Thus anything which, although it does not exist, yet involves no
contradiction, but can be made to exist, is possible in this narrower sense which cannot be predicated of God, nor of anything that does exist in so far as it exists. In turn, that which is possible in this sense, may further be possible in two ways. If it exists neither in potency, nor in act, but only in the power of God who can make it because its being implies no contradiction, and because God contains the perfection of all being, (1) we call its possibility objective, logical, absolute or pure possibility. (2) When we prescind from the context, such expressions as "logical" and "absolute possibility" are indeed ambiguous, for both are, at times, used to signify that which is opposed to the impossible and predicable of whatever is in any way, and again to stand for the present meaning of possibility. This possibility is predicable of all that God can make. If, however, it is already given in reality, but not yet in act, as a house that may be built, its possibility is called physical, subjective, or real possibility. This subjective possibility, which is often called potentiality, can be either pure

(1) *Ia*, q.25, a.3.
potentiality, as prime matter which is the subject of first or substantial act, or it can be the potentiality of a being which is actual in some respects but still in potency for further actualization. E.g., an essence, while actual in the order of essence, is potential in the order of existence.

To avoid confusion by lack of sufficient context, we shall henceforth restrict the meaning of absolute possibility to that which is opposed to what is impossible in any way, whereas we will apply the expression "logical possibility" to that which implies no contradiction in the sense that it can have the nature of real being.

There is still another meaning of the term possible, which St. Thomas explains in the passage which immediately follows the one which we have just quoted:

Hoc autem possibile (i.e., the one opposed to the impossible) non est necessarium defendere contra hoc quod effectus ex necessitate causari dicuntur, sed possibile quod opponitur necessario, prout dicitur possibile quod potest esse et non esse. Non dicitur autem aliquid per hunc modum possibile vel contingens ex hoc solum quod quandoque sit in potentia et quandoque in actu, ut praedicta responsio supponit; nam sic etiam in motibus caelestibus est possibile et contingens; non enim semper est coniunctio vel oppositio solidi aut lunae in actu, sed quandoque quidem in actu, quandoque autem in potentia; quae tamen necessaria sunt, cum de
his dentur demonstrationes. Sed possibile vel contingens quod opponitur necessario, hoc in sua ratione habet, quod non sit necesse illud fieri quando non est. Quod quidem est quia non de necessitate sequitur ex causa sua. Sic enim dicimus quod Sortem sessorum esse est contingens, ipsum autem esse morturum est necessarium, quia secundum horum ex causa sua de necessitate sequitur, non autem primum. Si ergo ex motibus caelestibus de necessitate sequitur quod eorum effectus sint quandoque futuri, tollitur possibile et contingens quod necessario opponitur.

Even the incorruptible creatures are sometimes called contingent. Contingent, then, is predicable of everything except God. This meaning of contingent, however, must be distinguished from the one just quoted. It signifies that no creature, whatever necessity it may have, (1) is of itself, but that it is freely created by God as to all that it is. This contingency is called extrinsic, as opposed to the intrinsic contingency of the generable and corruptible.

With these distinctions in mind let us now examine the following text from Cusa's work De Possess.

Omnis enim creatura, actu existens, utique esse potest; quod enim esse non potest, non est, unde non esse, non est creatura. Si enim est creatura, utique est. Creare etiam, cum sit ex non esse, ad esse producere: utique clare ostendi ipsum non esse, nequaquam

(1) Cf. II, Contra Gentes, c. 30.
creaturam esse, neque hoc parum est appre­prehendisse. Dico autem consequenter, cum omne existens, possit esse id, quod actu est: hinc actualitatem conspicimus absolutam, per quam quae actu sunt, id sunt quod sunt. Sicut cum alba videmus, visibili oculo, albedinem intellectualiter intuemur, sine qua album non est al­bum. Cum igitur actualitas sit actu, utique et ipsa esse potest, cum impossi­bile esse, non sit. Nec potest ipsa absoluta possibilitas, aliud esse a pos­sese, sicut nec absoluta actualitas, aliud ab actu. Nec potest ipsa iam dicta possibili­tas, prior esse actualitati: que­madmodum dicitus, aliquem potentiam praecedere actum. Nam quomodo prodivis­set in actum, nisi per actualitatem? Possi­se enim fieri, si seipsum ad actum produceret, esset actu, antequam actu es­set. Possibilitas ergo absoluta, de qua loquimur, per quam ea quae actu sunt, actu esse possum: non praecessit actualitatem, neque etiam sequitur. Quomodo enim actualitas esse posset, possibili­tati non existente? Coeterna ergo sunt absoluta potentia, et actus, et utriusque nexus. Neque plura sunt aeterna, sed sic sunt aeterna, quod ipsa aternitas... Nominabo autem hanc, quam sic videmus aeter­nitatem, Deum gloriosum...(P., p.250)

"Omnis enim creatura....apprehendisse."

According to this text, any creature which actually exists, is also possible; for that which cannot be, i.e., that which is impossible, is not. The possi­bility of which Cusa is speaking is clearly that possibility which is opposed to the impossible. From this he concludes that non-being is not a crea­ture. "...Non esse non est creatura." If non-being were a creature, non-being would be. This is clear
from the fact that creation is the production from non-being to being. "Creare etiam, cum sit ex non esse, ad esse producere." For, if the creature is established by creation, that from which it is produced cannot itself be a creature.

"Dico autem...aliud ab actu." Since everything which actually exists is possible, i.e., can be that which it actually is, we see therein, Cusa adds, that absolute actuality by which those things which actually are, are that which they are. Absolute actuality is both "that which" (quod) and "that by which" (quo), for it is that, and that by which things are, and are that which they are. If we understand Cusa correctly, he seems to distinguish actuality "as that which" (1), from actuality as the act by which actuality is actual.(2)

Evidently, this refers to what we have called the common, logical notion of being, i.e., being in its most confused generality. For this term alone can be said of anything that is, in whatever way it is, whether it be logical or real, divine or created, per se or per accidens, etc. Furthermore, this most general notion of being

(1) "Cum igitur actualitas sit actu, utique et ipsa esse potest..."

(2) "...Per quam quae actu sunt, id sunt quod sunt."
can be both subject and predicate in a proposition. For instance, we say that it is the "most general" notion; we also say that being of reason is being. And thus, it is both "that which" (quod) and "that by which" (quo).

The same process of thought is indicated by Cusa's conception of absolute possibility, i.e., the possibility which is opposed to the impossible. From the fact that actually existing things may be called possible in this sense, we rise to the knowledge of absolute possibility. Here again we find the distinction of quod and quo. The former aspect is designated by the term possibiltas; the latter by posse. "Nec potest ipsa absoluta possibilitas, aliud esse a posse."

"Nec potest....Deum gloriosum." Having made the distinction between absolute actuality and absolute possibility, Cusa now endeavors to show that these two notions are identical and that they constitute the very being of God. His procedure seems to be the following. Absolute actuality is possible, for if it were impossible, it would not be. "Cum igitur actualitas sit actu, utique et ipsa esse potest, cum impossibile esse, non sit."

But that by which anything is possible, is posse.
Hence absolute actuality is possible by posse. Since absolute actuality is an absolute, the posse by which it is possible must be absolute posse; but absolute posse is absolute possibility. "Nec potest ipsa absoluta possibilitas, aliud esse a posse."

Hence absolute actuality, being absolute posse is absolute possibility. So too, absolute possibility is absolute actuality. Absolute possibility is possible by absolute posse; but that by which anything is that which it is, is actus; hence absolute posse is actus. Since absolute posse is an absolute it must be absolute actus. If absolute posse, which is identical with absolute possibility, is absolute actus, which is identical with absolute actuality, it follows that absolute possibility is absolute actuality. Hence absolute actuality is absolute possibility; absolute possibility is absolute actuality.

Nor is one without the other. How could absolute actuality be, if it were not possible to be? How could absolute possibility be that which it is, without absolute actuality? Neither precedes the other; neither follows the other. If they neither precede nor follow each other, they must be coeternal; but there cannot be many eternities; hence they are eternity; they are God.
2. Critique of this doctrine.

Quite obviously Cusa has confused the absolute being of God with the formally universal notion of being. In so doing he has reduced *esse subsistens*, which is God, to the *esse universale* which is said of all beings. This is precisely the error against which St. Thomas warns us *De Ente et Essentia*:(1)

> Nec oportet si dicimus quod Deus est esse tantum ut in errorem eorum incidamus qui Deum dixerunt esse illud esse universale quo quaelibet res formaliter est. Hoc enim esse quod Deus est huius conditionis est quod nulla sibi additio fieri possit. Unde per ipsam suam puritatem est esse distinctum ab omni alio esse, sicut si esset quidem color separatus ex ipsa sua separatione esset aliquid a colore non separato. Propter quod in commen
to nonae propositionis libri de Causis dicitur quod individualio primae causae quae est esse tantum est per puram bonitatem eius. Esse autem commune sicut in intellectu suo non includit additionem, ita non includit in intellectu suo aliquam precisionem additionis, quia si hoc esset, nihil posset intelligi esse in quo super esse aliquid adderetur.

Cajetan's commentary on this passage (1) applies to Cusa:

Hic excluditur primus quorumdam error talis scilicet: Deus est commune esse omnium. Imaginati sunt isti quod cum omnia conveniant in hoc quod habent esse, ipsum esse omnium, quo res formaliter sunt in communi seu in universali sit ipse Deus glorigus.

Cusa has done just that. Because all things have being, he rises to the notion of absolute or universal being by which all things are. "Cum omne existens, possit esse id, quod actu sunt: hinc actualitatem conspicimus absolutam, per quam quae actu sunt, id sunt quod sunt." This absolute or universal being is then said to be God. Again, when Cajetan continues:

Moti sunt/tali ratione: Esse nulla additio specificatum est esse commune; Deus est esse nulla additio specificatum: ergo Deus est esse commune.

it would seem as though he were but repeating the very words of Cusa:

Neque quidquam intelligi potest esse sine esse. Absolatum autem esse non potest esse alium quam maximum absolute. Nihil igitur potest intelligi esse sine maximo. (DI. I, 6, p.14)

Cajetan then goes on to point out the basic fallacy in this reasoning:

Sed peccat ratio illa propter multiplicem majoris intellectum. Dupliciter enim

(1) In De Ente et Essentia, cap.6, n.108. (ed. Laurent)
intelligi potest esse a nulla additione specificari. Uno modo secundum rem extra animam subsistendo, alio modo secundum intellectus cogitationem tantum, primo modo major est falsa, minor autem vera; secundo modo major est vera, minor autem falsa: esse namque commune per intellectum in sua abstractione acceptum nullam contractionem includit, secundum vero quod est extra intellectum, sine contractione non inventur, omne namque esse est contractum ad substantiam vel accidentem; esse autem quod est quiditas divina est purum absque omni additione secundum rem et ex ipsa sua puritate secundum rem est distinctum ab aliorum esse, et hoc est nullo modo commune, sicut albedo separata ex hoc ipso quod esset pura albedo esset distincta albedo ab alis albedinis cum substantiis mixtis et non esset albedo in communi. Peccat secundo major illa, quia contingit adhuc dupliciter esse nulla additione specificari seu contrahire. Uno modo actu tantum; alio modo actu et potentia. Primo modo major est vera, minor vero falsa. Secundo modo major est falsa, minor autem vera. Esse namque in communi, licet nulla sit additione contractum, est tamen contrahibile, aliter nulla res haberet esse quae aliquid addit supra ipsum esse; et sic homo non haberet esse cum ultra esse habeat humanitatem, quantitatem, etc. Unde esse commune actu tantum specificatione caret; esse vero divinum nullam specificationem habet actu, nec aliquam habere potest et ideo actu et potentia additione caret. Et haec est solutio quam in littera S.Thomas ponit sub aliis verbis, dicens quod omne commune nec includit nec excludit additionem, id est non includit actu, potest tamen haber illam. Esse vero divinum non solum non includit illam, immo excludit, id est, non solum non includit actu immo nec potentia et sic excludit illam: quod enim impossibile est convenire alicui excluditur omnino ab illo. De his diffuse habes in I contra Gentiles (cap.XXVII).
Failing to make this distinction between the two kinds of universal or absolute being, Cusa conceives of God as the universal notion of being. And since there is no distinction between actuality and possibility explicitly set forth in this common notion of being, he says that God is anterior to the actuality which is distinguished from potency, and anterior to the possibility which is distinguished from act.

...Dico, nunc nobis constare Deum ante actualitatem, quae distinguitur a potentia, et ante possibilitatem quae distinguitur ab actu, esse simplex mundi principium. (P. p.251)

And since this universal notion of being can be said of all that is, whether this be actual, or only as what can be, Cusa says that only God is that which can be.

...Solus Deus id sit quod esse potest...(P. p.251)

When Cusa considers further his notion of God as all that which can be, i.e., God as all possible being, he continues to exploit this confusion of the various meanings of possibility. "To be all possible being" can be understood in diverse ways. The esse subsistens, which is God, may be called all possible being in the sense that God is, actually and necessarily, but in an eminent manner, all that which
implies no contradiction. Further, the phrase "to be all possible being" can designate any one of the generic notions of possibility. Thus, the universal notion of possibility which is opposed to the impossible can be said to be all possible being, in so far as it is predicable of any being. "To be all possible being" might also mean "to be all that which can be produced". Thus understood, the phrase might be said by reference either to the general notion of objective possibility, or to that of subjective possibility such as the pure potentiality of prime matter. Thus, we can say that prime matter is potentially all the beings that can be educed from it.

Although the whole of De Possesse is marked with Cusa's confusion concerning the modes in which God, as well as the different kinds of possibility, can be said to be all that is possible, this same confusion can best be seen in De Mente, wherein he teaches that God is objective possibility, and in De Docta Ignorantia, in which he maintains that He is prime matter. Let us first examine the following text from De Mente, c.XI.

PHILOSOPHUS. Tetigisti superius de trinitate Dei et trinitate mentis: oro declares,
quomodo omnia in Deo sunt in trinitate, similiter et in mente nostra.

IDIOTA. Vos philosophi asseritis decem genera generalissima omnia complecti.

PHILOSOPHUS. Ita est perfecto.

IDIOTA. Nonne dum ea, ut actu sunt, consideras, divisa esse conspicis?

PHILOSOPHUS. Immo.


PHILOSOPHUS. Aperta et delectabilis ostensio est, quam facis, sed adice: quomodo in trinitate?

IDIOTA. Alibi de hoc agendum foret, ut clarius dixi posset; nunc tamen, quia statui omnia, quae exigis, pro posse adimplere, sic recipio: habes omnia ab aeterno in Deo Deum esse. Considera igitur rerum universitatem in tempore, et cum impossibile non fiat, nonne vides eam ab aeterno fieri posuisse?

PHILOSOPHUS. Mens assentit.

IDIOTA. Igitur omnia in posse fieri mentaliter vides.

PHILOSOPHUS. Recte as.

IDIOTA. Et si fieri potuerunt, erat necessario posse facere, antequam essent.
PHILOSOPHUS. Ita erat.

IDIOTA. Sic ante rerum universitatem temporalem vides omnia in posse facere.

PHILOSOPHUS. Video.

IDIOTA. Nonne, ut in esse prodirer rerum universitas, quam vides oculo mentis in absoluto posse fieri et in absoluto posse facere, necesse erat nexus ipsius utriusque, scilicet posse fieri et posse facere? alias, quod potuit fieri per potentem facere, numquam fuisse factum.

PHILOSOPHUS. Optime ais.

IDIOTA. Vides igitur ante omnem rerum temporalem existentiam omnia in nexu procedente de posse fieri absoluto et posse facere absoluto. Sed illa tria absoluta sunt ante omne tempus simplex aeternitas. Hinc omnia conspiciis in simplici aeternitate triniter.

PHILOSOPHUS. Sufficientissime!


"Tetigisti....hinc omnia in Deo unum."

The predicaments, declares Cusa, comprise all created beings. As these predicaments are now, in the creatures, they are divided one from the other;
e.g. quantity and quality are different. But, says Cusa, if we consider the predicaments as they were before the beginning of created existence, that is, as they were one and undivided, what else can they be but eternity? "Sed dum ea ante inchoationem essendi consideras sine divisione, quid tum aliud esse possunt quam aeternitas?" For eternity is that which precedes all division. Being eternity, they are God. Hence all being, the ten predicaments, as they are in absolute perfection, are God. "...Hinc rerum universitas est in perfectione, quae Deus est." As God, they cannot be a many; they cannot be distinct one from the other; they can only be absolute unity. "...Hinc omnia in Deo unum."

"Aperta....de hoc sufficiant." Since God is a unity which is a trinity, the predicaments, as they are in God, are a trinity. How to show this trinity? First, all the creatures which now actually exist in time, are possible, for what is impossible, is not. Hence from all eternity there were capable to be made. From all eternity there has been the possibility to be made, i.e., absolute posse fieri. "Igitur omnia in posse fieri mentaliter vides." If the creatures
from eternity, have been able to be made, the possibility to make them must have been eternal. "Sic ante rerum universitatem temporalem vides omnia in posse facere." From eternity, then, there have been absolute posse fieri and absolute posse facere. For the totality of creatures, which has existed in posse fieri and posse facere from eternity, to come into being in time, it was necessary that there be a union of posse fieri and posse facere. Unless there were a union between that which can be made, and that which can make, nothing would be made. Thus, says Cusa, before the temporal existence of all things, there was an absolute union, absolute nexus, proceeding from posse fieri and posse facere. "Vides igitur ante omnem rerum temporalem existentiam omnia in nexu procedente de posse fieri absoluto et posse facere absoluto."

Since these three: absolute posse fieri, absolute posse facere, and absolute nexus were before all time, they are simple eternity. "Hinc omnia conspicis in simplici aeternitate triniter." Hence absolute posse fieri, i.e. all things that can be made; absolute posse facere, i.e. that which can make all things; and the absolute union of the two, are one infinite absolute. They are Deitas. "Attende igitur,
quomodo absolutum posse fieri et absolutum posse facere et absolutus nexus non sunt nisi unum infinitum absolutum et una deitas." Although they are all eternal, according to the order of nature absolute posse fieri is first. "Et ordine prius est posse fieri quam posse facere." For absolute posse facere presupposes absolute posse fieri, that is, the possibility to make all things presupposes that all things can be made. Even the very power of making presupposes that it itself can be made. Hence, according to the order of nature there is first absolute posse fieri, then absolute posse facere, and thirdly, the union of the two. Absolute posse fieri, absolute posse facere, and their union, are God, one and triune.

The first error to be noted here is his misunderstanding of the mode in which the predicaments are present in God. According to the Thomists the predicaments are the supreme genera of created being; hence they properly signify the mixed perfections. In their proper formalities the simple perfections are not predicamental being, for of themselves they have nothing of the imperfection of created being. They become predicamental being only when limited by created subjects which cannot possess them
according to the totality of their proper perfections. Because the predicaments, in their very rationes, denote the imperfection of created being, they are not in God formally, but virtually. Cusa not only teaches that the predicaments are formally in God, he says that they are Deitas, i.e., the proper formality of God. He seems to think that in themselves the predicaments bespeak only perfection; that any imperfection said of them rises from their presence in the creatures. This is to confuse the predicamental perfections with the simple perfections. The predicaments properly signify the various genera and species of created being; the genera and species, by their very formality of being genera and species, signify limitation and imperfection. To conceive of the predicaments without imperfection is to conceive of them apart from their formality of being genera and species. To do this is to destroy the very formality of predicamental being, for one attempts to conceive of a formality apart from that which essentially constitutes it as a formality.(1) Yet, this is

(1) John of St. Thomas explains this as follows: "Quia perfectiones quae sunt in certo genere, ex suo quidditativo conceptu et formali spectant ad illud genus, ut animal, equus, lapis, etc.; quod patet manifeste, quia praedicata generica et
precisely what Cusa has done to the detriment of both God and the creature.

From the presence in God of the predicaments, i.e. of all creatures, Cusa goes on to show that God is objective possibility. The argument, which rises from a misconception of the attribute of divine omnipotence, seems to be the following. Omnipotence, absolute *posse facere* is a divine attribute, and since the attributes of God are identical with God, God's essence is the absolute power

(cont. note p.70)

differentialia quibus contrahuntur, et ex quibus constituitur species, sunt illi essentialia; quia genus et differentia essentiae constituant species, quae ponitur in praedicamento; ergo perfectio specifica et generica, intrinseca et essentialiter importat perfectionem sic limitatam, quod ex vi sui conceptus includit imperfectionem quae ingreditur essentiae eius conceptum. Si autem abstrahatur et purificetur ab illa ratione imperfectionis et limitationis, purificatur ab eo quod est sibi essentiale ex vi formalis sui conceptus, in eo in quo distinguitur a perfectione simpliciter simplici, et destruitur ipsa essentialis ratio talis perfectionis praedicamentalis: quia de essentiali conceptu illius est perfectio genera seu determinati generis. Sed non potest formaliter esse in Deo, nisi destruatur illa ratio generica et limitata; ergo nisi destruat essentialis illa ratio, non ponitur in Deo. Nam vel illa purificatio et denudatio ab imperfectione est talis quod relinquuit illam perfectionem extra omne genus et praedicamentum: vel non. Si non relinquit: ergo prout sic non ponitur in Deo, cui repugnat omnis ratio generica et praedicamentalis. Si relinquit extra praedicamentum: destruit essentialem eius rationem, quia essentialiter constat ex praedicatis genericis et praedicamentalibus, cum constitutur essentialiter ex genere et differentia."(Curs. Theol., t.I, d.5, a.2, p.507)
to make all things. But the power to make all things presupposes that all things can be made. Hence, the creatures as possible are presupposed to divine omnipotence. If omnipotence is eternal and divine, that which is presupposed to it must also be eternal and divine. Likewise, the union between that which can make and that which can be made, must be eternal and divine. But, in God, all is absolute unity; hence the power to make all creatures, the creatures that can be made, and the union of the two, are God, one and triune.

By reasoning in this fashion, Cusa destroys both the essence of God and the trinity of the Persons; but for the moment we are concerned only with his conception of God as objective possibility. His error, as we have said, is based upon a false conception of the attribute of omnipotence. For, in truth, omnipotence can be considered either formally or radically. Considered formally, it is an attribute of God and hence rationally distinct from the divine essence. (1) Since omnipotence, as an attribute, is the power of God

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(1) We refer to the distinction which John of St. Thomas terms: "Distinctio rationis ratiocinatae non secundum totalem praecisionem sed secundum explicitum et implicitum." Curs. theol., t.I, d.4, a.6, pp.483-485.
to make that which is possible absolutely, i.e.
objectively possible, in that it does not involve
contradiction and can, therefore, have the nature
of being, there is an order between the attribute
and its object. For we cannot say that God is om-
nipotent because He can make all the things that are
possible to His power, but because He can make all
things that are possible absolutely.

Possibile autem dicitur dupliciter,
secundum Philosophum, in V Metaphy.
Uno modo, per respectum ad aliquam
potentiam; sicut quod subditur huma-
nae potentiae, dicitur esse possibili-
le homini. Non autem potest dici
quod Deus dicatur omnipotens quia
potest omnia quae sunt possibilia
naturae creatae, quia divina poten-
tia in plura extenditur. Si autem
dicatur quod Deus sit omnipotens,
quia potest omnia quae sunt possi-
bilia suae potentiae, erit circula-
tio in manifestatione omnipotentiae;
hoc enim non erit aliud quam dicere
quod Deus est omnipotens, quia po-
test omnia quae potest. Relinqui-
tur igitur quod Deus dicatur omni-
potens, quia potest omnia possibili-
aria absolute, quod est alter modus
dicendi possibile. Dicitur autem
aliud possibile vel impossibile
absolute, ex habitudine terminorum;
possibile quidem, quia praedicatum
non repugnat subiecto, ut Socratem
sedere; impossibile vero absolute,
quia praedicatum repugnat subiecto,
ut hominem esse asinum. (Ia, q.25,
a.3, c.)

But omnipotence can also be considered ra-
dically, that is, as it is the divine essence. Con-
sidered in this manner, omnipotence does not presuppose the possibility of the creature; on the contrary, the creature, even as to its objective possibility, necessarily depends upon the divine essence. For the divine essence contains the perfection of the whole of being, and because it contains the whole of being, it necessarily follows that it contains within its eminence the creature as possible being. Hence the possibility of the creature, the fact that the creature can have the nature of being, and therefore can be made, follows upon the superabundance of the divine essence, that is, upon omnipotence understood radically. This is what St. Thomas refers to in the passage following the one we have just quoted:

"Est autem considerandum quod cum unum-quadque agens agat sibi simile, unicuique potentiae activae correspondet possibile ut obiectum proprium, secundum rationem illius actus in quo fundatur potentia activa; sicut potentia calefac-tiva reffertur ut ad proprium obiectum ad esse calefactibile. Esse autem divinum, super quod ratio divinae potentiae fundatur, est esse infinitum, non limitatum ad aliquod genus entis, sed praehabens in se totius esse perfectio-nem. Unde quidquid potest habere rationem entis, continentur sub possibilibus absolu-tis, respectu quorum Deus dicitur omnipotens."

John of St. Thomas brings out its full meaning:

"Ubi aperte loquitur D. Thomas de eo quod se habet antecedenter ad conceptum omni-potentiae, ut attributum est: quia loquitur
de esse divino super quod fundatur ratio divinae potentiae; essentia autem, ut fundans divinam potentiam, non est attributum potentiae, sed antecedenter se habens, utpote fundamentum potentiae, et radicaliter potentia, non formaliter. Et quia hoc esse divinum continet seu praehabet in se perfectionem totius esse, quidquid potest habere rationem entis, habet possibilitatem absolutam. Quae causalis necessarium consequentiam importat: nam si ex hoc continetur aliquid sub ratione possibility, quia essentia Dei praehabet in se perfectionem totius esse, manifeste sequitur ipsa possibilitas seu ratio entis possibilis necessario ex illa continet Dei: quia haec, ante omnem liberam actionem, continet omnem perfectionem entis." (Curs. theol., T.III, d.31, a.1, p.580)

More proximately however, the objective possibility of a creature follows upon God's knowledge of His essence. A creature is objectively possible in that, its notes being compatible, it has the notion of being and therefore can be produced by divine omnipotence. But the determined notes which form the essential predicates of the creature's essence rise from God knowing His essence as imitable by creatures. Hence the determined being of the creatures is established by God knowing His essence as imitable in this way by one creature, and in another way by that. Hence, the creature as possible depends fundamentally upon the divine essence, formally upon God's knowledge of the divine essence.
...Plures ideae sunt in mente divina
ut intellectae ab ipso. Quod hoc modo
potest videri. Ipse autem essentiam
suam perfecte cognoscit; unde cognos-
cit eam secundum omnem modum quo co-
gnoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci
non solum secundum quod in se est, sed
secundum quod est participabilis secun-
dum aliquem modum similitudinis a crea-
turis. Unaquaeque autem creatura habet
propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo
modo participat divinae essentiae simi-
lutudinem. Sic igitur inquantum Deus
cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imita-
 bilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam
ut propriam rationem et ideam huius
creaturae. Et similiter de aliis...
(Ia, q.15, a.2, c.) (1)

Not distinguishing between the mode in
which the creature as possible precedes the attrib-
ute of omnipotence, and that in which it follows

(1) In this connection, John of St. Thomas says:
"Est autem idea divina summa et prima regula totius
veritatis creatae. Ergo per hoc res redduntur ab-
solutese possibles: quia id quod excogitat Deus et
format, ut imitabile a se, est quod unicumque rei
congruum et conveniens est, nec sibi repugnans;
ergo est possibile, quia illud est possibile rei
quod non est repugnans illi. Antecedenter autem
ad ideas divinas, nihil intelligitur ut determi-
nate et distincte formabile, nec rebus distributa
sua praedicata quae eis sint debita vel convenien-
tia: hoc enim fit a Deo artificioso et intelli-
gibiliter, non naturaliter: quia fit eo modo quo res
ipsae formabiles sunt a Deo, solum autem per artem
formabiles sunt. Antecedenter vero ad artem et
intellectum divinum, solum radicaliter intelligun-
tur formabiles et possibles, quatenus scilicet in
infinito esse Dei omnis ratio entis et perfectio
radicaliter intelligitur esse contenta: ad ejus
enim essentiae participationem res sunt factibiles.

Neque ad hoc, ut res dicuntur formabiles et idea-
tae, ac contentae in virtute idearum tamquam in re-
gulâ et mensurâ eorum quae sibi convenire possunt,
requiritur aliqua causalitas per modum actionis
transuenta: sed sufficit ipsa formatio rerum in
mente divina per modum actûs immanentis, per quem
res dicuntur formatae et contentae in virtute idea-
rum divinarum." Curs. theol., t.III, d.31, a.1,
nn.15-16, p.582a.
upon the divine essence and divine knowledge, Cusa, considering only the first mode, imagines that the creature as possible must be divinity itself since it precedes omnipotence. In such a conception the essence of God formally as such becomes the creature as possible; God becomes absolute posse fieri, objective possibility—that which can be produced by God.

Let us now examine De Docta Ignorantia, II, 7-8, wherein Cusa identifies esse subsistens with prime matter. In chapter VII Cusa teaches that the essence of every creature is substantially composed of a material and a formal cause. These two causes are sometimes called possibility and actuality; or potency and act; or matter and form. Why, he would ask, does every created essence have a material cause as an intrinsic component? Because, Cusa says, any creature that is, must have been able to be, for if it had not been able to be, it would not actually be. Hence, the possibility to be, precedes all; it is therefore the intrinsic material component of every created essence. Confusing the possibility opposed to the impossible, with the subjective possibility of prime matter, Cusa maintains that every created essence qua essence is substantially composed of matter and form;
or, as he sometimes says, of possibility and actuality, or potency and act. We shall examine these points later on; for the present they concern us solely in relation to Cusa's notion of God as all things possible.

In chapter VIII Cusa proposes to make a more detailed study of this material cause found in each creature. The chapter is entitled: De possibilitye sive materia universi; the term universum means all creatures.

Universum vero cum omnia complectatur quae Deus non sunt...(DI. II, 1, p.64)

In the first section of this chapter, Cusa gives, what is purported to be a resume of the teachings of the early philosophers, especially of Plato and Aristotle concerning the ultimate material cause. It is obvious that he has completely misunderstood the opinions of these men, for he imagines that all of them, Plato and Aristotle included, postulated a material cause in the essence of every creature. After this initial error, he states that this material cause is the possibility involved in becoming."...Ommium sententia fuit ex nihilo nihil fieri." The ancients, he says, called this material cause "absolute possibility" or "matter".
When he describes this absolute possibility, Cusa employs terms reminiscent of those used by Aristotle (1) and St. Augustine (2) in treating of matter. For, he says,

...Nec est aliquid nec nihil, neque una neque plures, neque hoc neque il­lud, neque quid neque quale, sed pos­sibilitas ad omnia, et nihil omnium actu. (p. 85)

As a summation of what he had given in this section, Cusa says: according to these men, all things had possible existence in absolute possibility; this absolute possibility was held to be infinite, both because it lacked all form, and because it had an ap­titude for all form; this infinity of absolute possi­bility was considered to be the contrary of the in­finity said of God, for the former was infinite be­cause it lacked all form, whereas God was considered to be infinite because He is all form. This, Cusa says, was their teaching on absolute possibility.

Sic in possibilitate absoluta universi­tatem rerum possibiliter dixerunt. Et est ipsa possibilitas absoluta intermi­nata et infinita propter carentiam formae

(1) VII Metaphy., 1029a20.
(2) Confess.XII, c.6.
From what we have seen from this so-called resume of the teaching of the ancients, it is clear that it comprises the following:

1) All creatures have a material cause from which they proceed.

2) This material cause, in the abstract, is called absolute possibility.

3) In relation to the things which can come from it, it is defined as:
   a) absoluta omnia essendi possibilitas.
   b) aptitudo ad omnia.
   c) possibilitas ad omnia.

4) Viewed "in itself" it is defined in terms which should apply only to prime matter, i.e., nec est aliquid nec est nihil, etc.

In the next section of this chapter, Cusa criticises this "opinion" of the ancients. Absolute possibility, declares Cusa, is the least of all possibilities, for it is almost nothing, as even the
early philosophers maintained.

...Possibilitas absoluta...est propinquissime circa non esse (secundum etiam positionem auctorum)...

Note that by the term absolute possibility, Cusa must understand prime matter, for the phrase: "propinquissime ad non-esse" is, obviously, a summation of the definition he has already given of prime matter: "quae nec est aliquid nec est nihil," etc. Hence, when Cusa says that absolute possibility is the least of all possibilities, he must mean that it is least in this sense; of itself it has no actuality. He then continues: if absolute possibility is the least of all possibilities, it is the minimum, and cannot, therefore, be found in the created order. It can only be God. There cannot, then, be anything in the created order from which come all things. While more things can come from one thing than from another, yet there cannot be, in the created order, an absolute possibility from which come all things. For this absolute possibility is God.

...Reperimus impossibile fore possibilitatem absolutam esse. Nam cum inter possibilia nihil minus esse possit quam possibilitas absoluta, quae est propinquissime circa non-esse (secundum etiam positionem auctorum), hinc ad minimum deveniretur atque ad maximum in recipientibus magis et minus, quod est impossibile.
Quare possibilitas absoluta in Deo est Deus, extra ipsum vero non est possibility; numquam enim est dabile aliquid, quod sit in potentia absoluta, cum omnia praefer primum necessario sint contracta. Si enim reperiuntur diversa in mundo ita se habentia, quod ex uno possunt plura esse quam ex alio, ad maximum et minimum simpliciter et absolute non devenitur; sed quia ista reperiuntur, patet absolutam possibilitatem non esse dabilem.(p.87)

This entire chapter is concerned with the material cause from which, so it is supposed, come all the creatures. The very title of the chapter, the texts we have quoted, especially the one containing Cusa's criticism of the "opinion" of the ancients, are clear evidence of this. And yet it is that a bit startling to learn that Cusa teaches God is the material cause from which proceed all the creatures. But, startling as it may seem, Cusa had been forced to maintain such a position by the very logic of his principles.

He tells us that all creatures have a material principle from which they proceed. In the abstract, then, it is a principle which can become all creatures; or, in relation to its most noble form, it is that which can become the greatest possible creature. But Cusa has already conceived God as the greatest possible creature by envisaging Him as the maximum of the creatures. Hence, if the
material principle from which all creatures come were in the created order, there would be a real potency on the part of the creatures to become God. This, of course, could never be admitted. Once he has made the mistake of attributing a material principle to each creature, Cusa is forced to maintain that this material principle can only be something divine.

Briefly, Cusa confused the possibility opposed to the impossible with the possibility of that which may be produced; this, in turn, he confuses with the possibility to be produced from a real subject; and finally, he identifies this subject with the esse subsistens of God.
CHAPTER FOUR

1. Cusa's explanation of the differences between God and the creature.

In its attempt to reduce the number of its cognitive media, reason tends to regard the variable and the limit as one in form, so that all difference between them tends to be material only. Reifying this mere process of reason, Cusa conceives God as the real maximum and minimum compared to which creatures are but more or less whatever they are. He envisages all reality, God and the creatures, as absolutely and univocally one in form, so that by strict consequence he also considers all difference between God and the creatures as outside the order of form or essence. Hence, as we have already stated, Cusa teaches that the difference arises from the fact that God is a form predicated of all reality in the "pure" or subsistent state, whereas creatures are this same form as it is received in a subject. Hence the question: what is this subject which alone differentiates the creatures from God?

Cusa insists that there is no positive cause for the differences between God and the
creatures, but that they are only contingent.
For God is without envy; He would communicate His own being to creature and make the creature's being in the full likeness of Himself if that were possible, for God, he holds, causes only perfection in the creatures; the imperfections which are in creatures are not caused by Him, nor by any other positive cause; they are only contingent.

Quoniam autem ipsum maximum procul est ab omni invidia, non potest esse diminutum ut tale communicare. Non habet igitur creatura, quae ab esse est, omne id quod est: corruptibilitatem, divisibilitatem, imperfectionem et cetera huiusmodi a maximo asterno indivisibili, perfectissimo, indistincto, uno, neque ab aliqua causa positiva. Sicut enim linea infinita est rectitudo infinita, quae est causa omnis esse linealis, linea vero curva, in hoc quod linea, ab infinita est, in hoc quod curva, non ab infinita est, sed curvitas sequitur finitatem, quoniam ex eo curva, quia non maxima—si enim maxima esset, curva non esset, ut superius est ostensum—: ita quidem contingit rebus, quoniam maximum esse non possunt, ut sint diminuta, altera, distincta, et cetera huiusmodi, quae quidem causam non habent. Habet igitur creatura a Deo, ut sit una, discreta et connexa universo et, quanto magis una, tanto Deo similior. Quod autem eius unitas sit in pluralitate, discretio in confusione et connexio in discordantia, a Deo non habet neque ab aliqua causa positiva, sed contingenter.
(DI. II, 2, p.65)

This conception of the finiteness of the creature and of its distinction and difference from God, of
its imperfections, as not from God, but just
contingenter, is repeated by Cusa time and again.

Cum igitur Deus absque diversitate et
invidia communicet et recipiatur, ita
quod aliter et alterius contingentia
recipi non sinat...(DI, II, 2, p.68)

Quis est igitur, qui intelligere queat,
quomodo diversimode una infinita forma
participetur in diversis creaturis,
cum creaturae esse non possit aliud
esse quam ipsa resplendentia, non in
aliquo positivo recepta, sed contingenter
diversa? (DI, II, 2, p.68)

But what does Cusa mean by this term:
contingenter? To understand it in Cusa's sense,
we must appreciate his doctrine of the creature
as a contraction of God. Being a more or less of
God who is the maximum and minimum, the creature
is thereby a limitation of, a participation of,
or a contraction of God. Whereas God is absolute
unity, the creature is only contracted unity. The
stone of the sensible world is contracted stone,
whereas God is absolute stone. He is the absolute
sun or moon. Hence the basic note of the creature
is that it is a more or less of the maximum or mini-
mum, or a contraction of the absolute.

Contraction, declares Cusa, comprises
three notions: that which is contracted (contrahi-
bile); that which contracts (contrahens); and the
union or composition of the two brought about by
the movement called nexus which links the one and
the other, and holding them in identity at infinity.

Non potest enim contractio esse sine
contrahibili, contrahente et nexu, qui
per communem actum utriusque perfici-
tur....Quae potentia, actus et nexus
dici possunt. (DI, II, 7, p.82)

Est deinde nexus contrahentis et contra-
hibilis sive materiae et formae aut pos-
sibilitatis et necessitatis complexio-
nis, qui actu perficitur quasi quodam
spiritu amoris motu quodam illa unien-
tis. Et hic nexus determinata possibi-
licitas a quibusdam nominari consuevit,
quoniam posse esse ad actu esse hoc vel
illud determinatur ex unione ipsius de-
terminantis formae et determinabilis
materiae. (DI, II, 7, p.83)

IDIOTA. Nonne, ut in esse prodirer rerum
universitas, quam vides oculo mentis in
absoluto posse fieri et in absoluto pos-
se facere, necesse erat nexus ipsius
utriusque, scilicet posse fieri et posse
facere? alias, quod potuit fieri per po-
tem facere, numquam fuisse factum.

PHILOSOPHUS. Optime ais.

IDIOTA. Vides igitur ante omnem rerum tem-
poralem existentiam omnia in nexu proce-
dente de posse fieri absoluto et posse
facere absoluto. Sed illa tria absoluta
sunt ante omne tempus simplex aeternitas.
Hinc omnia conspicis in simplici aeter-
nitate trinitate.

PHILOSOPHUS. Sufficientisisme!

IDIOTA. Attende igitur, quomodo absolutum
posse fieri et absolutum posse facere et
absolutus nexus non sunt nisi unum infi-
nite absolutum et una deitas. Et ordine
prius est posse fieri quam posse facere.
Nam omne facere praesupponit fieri posse, et posse facere id, quod habet, scilicet posse facere, habet de posse fieri. Et de utroque nexus. Unde cum ordo dicat posse fieri praecedere, sibi attribuitur unitas, cui inest praecedere, et posse facere attribuitur aequalitas unitatem praesupponens, a quibus nexus.(M. 11, p.94)

The contractible is called possibility, potency, posse esse, and matter; that which contracts is actuality, act, actu esse, and form. (1)

Contraction, then, is the basic note of a creature. But fundamental to this note is that of contractibility—the abstract notion of contrahibile, which signifies the very possibility of a creature. How could a creature be, if it had not been able to be? Moreover, Cusa adds, contractibility bespeaks changeableness and otherness: the essential characteristics of every creature. (Note Cusa's confusion of the possibility opposed to the impossible, with subjective possibility of prime matter.)

Contrahibilitas vero dicit quandam possibilitatem et illa ab unitate gignente in divinis descendit, sicut alteritas ab unitate. Dicit enim mutabilitatem et alteritatem, cum in consideratione principii. Nihil enim praecedere vitat posse. Quomodo enim quid esset, si non potuisset esse? Possibilitas igitur ab aeterna unitate descendit.(DI, II, 7)

(1) Cf. DI, II, 7-8.
Since the creature is a contraction, the contractibility, possibility, or potency which is one of the constituents of the creature, must also be contracted. As we have seen, God alone is absolute possibility, since He is all things that can be. A creature, on the contrary, is only a contracted possibility, for it cannot be all things; rather each creature is a limited, restricted, or contracted being.

Possibilitas absoluta in Deo est Deus, extra ipsum vero non est possibilitis: numquam enim est dabile aliquid, quod sit in potentia absoluta, cum omnia praeter primum necessario est contracta. (DI, II, 8, p.88)

But if the possibility or potency of a creature is limited and contracted, what contracts it? Cusa teaches that the possibility is contracted by the second constituent element in the creature, the act or the contrahens.

...[In creaturis] omnis igitur possibilitas contracta est; per actum autem contrahitur. (DI, II, 8, p.88)

Just as the possibility or potency in the creature is contracted and limited, so also is the act contracted or limited. For, in the order of act, God alone is the absolute. Hence the act in each creature is a contracted act. This contraction of the act in the creature comes from the possibility or potency.
Quare contrahitur actus per possibilitatem. (DI, II, 8, p.88)

Creatures, then, are contracted beings; their possibility or potency is contracted by their act, and the act by the potency. And it is this act which is part of the creature, that is caused by God,

Contractio autem possibilitatis ex actu est, actus autem ab ipso maximo est. (DI, II, 8, p.89)

But the possibility or potency cannot be caused by God, since He causes only act.

Deus enim, cum sit actus infinitus, non est nisi causa actus. (DI, II, 8, p.88)

Now, if God is not the cause of the possibility or potency in the creature, whence does it come? Cusa says that it is contingenter.

Possibilitas essendi est contingenter. (DI, II, 8, p.88)

Hence, he adds, the contraction of possibility has a reasonable and necessary cause, for it comes from the act which is caused by God. But the contraction of the act in the creature, its finiteness and imperfection, have no reasonable and necessary cause, since they are due to that possibility which is only contingenter.

Contractio autem possibilitatis ex actu est, actus autem ab ipso maximo actu est.
Quare cum contractio possibilitatis sit ex Deo et contractio actus ex contingenti, hinc mundus necessario contractus ex contingenti finitus est. Unde ex notitia possibilitatis videmus, quomodo maximitas contracta evenit ex possibilitati necessario contracta; quae quidem contractio non est ex contingenti, quia per actum. Et ita universum rationabilem et necessariam causam contractionis habet, ut mundus, qui non est nisi esse contractum, non sit contingenter a Deo, qui est maximita absoluta. (DI, II, 8, p. 89)

Since God is the absolute in unity, in being, etc., whereas the creature is only a contraction, the latter cannot be said to be, to be one, to be simple, etc. Yet, neither can it be said to be the opposite of these perfections; or, to put it in another way, it is not nothing, since it descends from being; it is not plurality, for it descends from unity. Nor can we say, Cusa insists, that a creature is composed of both the perfection and of its opposite, e.g. of being and non-being. Briefly, the creature is both from absolute necessity, i.e. from God, and from contingency; its unity is contingenter in plurality; its simplicity is contingenter in composition.

Quis igitur copulando simul in creatura necessitatem absolutam, a qua est, et contingentiam, sine qua non est, potest intelligere esse eius? Nam videtur quod ipsa creatura, quae nec est Deus nec nihil, sit quasi post Deum et ante nihil,
intra Deum et nihil, ut ait unus sapien-
tum: "Deus est oppositio nihil mediatione
entis". Nec tamen potest esse ab esse
et non esse composita, per hoc quod des-
cendit de esse; neque non esse, quia est
ante nihil; neque compositum ex illis.
Noster autem intellectus, qui nequit
transilere contradictoria, divise aut
compositive esse creaturae non attingit,
quamvis sciat eius esse non esse nisi ab
esse maximi. Non est igitur ab esse in-
telligibile, postquam esse, a quo, non
est intelligibile...Et igitur non potest
creatura ut creatura dici una, quia des-
cendit ab unitate; neque plures, quia
eius esse est ab uno; neque ambo copula-
tive. Sed est unitas eius in quadam plu-
ralitate contingenter. Ita de simplici-
tate et compositione et reliquis opposi-
tis pariformiter dicendum videtur. (DI,
II, 2, p.66)

Creatures, then, in the doctrine of Cusa,
are composed of potency, act, and the nexus of the
two. The act has a positive cause: all that is ac-
tual in the creature comes from God. But this ac-
tuality is only a limited and contracted one, for
although God is absolutely good and without envy,
He cannot be received in another as He is in Himself.

Et licet se omnibus communicet liberalis-
sime, cum sit infinita bona, tamen a nullo
capi potest, uti est. Identitas enim in-
finita non potest in alio recipi, cum in
alio aliter recipitur. (S, I, p.22)

But if God, Who is the essence of all things cannot
be received by the creatures with the perfection He
has in Himself, He is received as well as the subject
will allow.
Hence it is the subject which receives God, the subject of the act, the potency, which limits and contracts the creature. This subject is not caused by God, nor by any other positive cause; it is only contingenter. Since the differences between God and the creature are only contingenter, we can say, Cusa teaches, that a creature is Deus occasionatus.

Quis ista intelligere posset, quomodo omnia illius unicae infinitae formae sunt imago, diversitatem ex contingenti habendo, quasi creatura sit Deus occasionatus. (DI, II, 2, p.68)

2. Critique of this doctrine.

In his study of the nature of the creature Cusa has again confused the various kinds of possibility. Because an actually existing creature can be called possible in the sense that it is not impossible, he says that every created essence is intrinsically and substantially constituted from a union of potency and act, or matter and form. The possibility which is opposed to the impossible he identifies with the subjective possibility of prime matter. The argument by which he shows that potentiality is
an intrinsic constituent of the created essence
is clear evidence of this confusion. The text we
have in mind and which we have already quoted,
is the following:

\textit{Contrahibilitas vero dicit quandam possi-
sibilitatem, et illa ab unitate gignente
in divinis descendit, sicut alteritas
ab unitate. Dicit enim mutabilitatem
et alteritatem, cum in consideratione principii. Nihil enim praecedere vide-
tur posse. Quomodo enim quid esset,
si non potuisset esse? (DI, II, \textsuperscript{7}, p.82)}

"Contrahibilitas vero dicit quandam possibilitatem".
But which possibility? Cusa's query: "Quomodo enim quid esset, si non potuisset esse?", clearly indicates that the possibility he has in mind is that which is opposed to the impossible. But this possibility can be said of the entire creature, i.e. of the union of potency and act, in so far as this union involves no contradiction. Yet, he considers contractibility as only one of the essential constituents of the creature, for the determination of contractibility comes from the act which is the other constituent of the same creature. Now, the possibility said of the whole creature becomes, in turn, an intrinsic part of the creature. In other words, he considers the possibility which is opposed to the impossible as a real intrinsic constituent of the creature.

This same confusion is referred to by
St. Thomas in the following objection taken from Ia, q.46, a.1:

AD PRIMUM SIC PROCEDITUR. Videtur quod universitas creaturarum, quae mundi nomine nuncupatur, non incoeperit, sed fuerit ab aeterno. Omne enim quod incoepit esse, antequam fuerit, possibile fuit ipsum esse: aliquin impossibile fuisset ipsum fieri. Si ergo mundus incoepit esse, antequam inciperet, possibile fuit ipsum esse. Sed quod possibile est esse, est materia, quae est in potentia ad esse, quod est per formam, et ad nom esse, quod est per privationem. Si ergo mundus incoepit esse, ante mundum fuit materia. Sed non potest esse materia sine forma: materia autem mundi cum forma, est mundus. Fuit ergo mundus antequam esse inciperet: quod est impossibile.

The reply of St. Thomas shows that the objection is based upon a confusion of the different meanings of the term "possible".

AD PRIMUM ERGO DICENDUM; quod, antequam mundus esset, possibile fuit mundum esse, non quidem secundum potentiam passivam, quae est materia; sed secundum potentiam activam Dei. Et etiam secundum quod dicitur aliquid absolute possibile, non secundum aliquam potentiam, sed ex sola habitudine terminorum, qui sibi non repugnant; secundum quod possibile opponitur impossibili, ut pateat per Philosophum, in Metaphys.

The same error is repeated by Cusa in other texts. Thus, in De Possess we read:

Recte ais: nam sine potentia, et actu, atque utriusque nexu, non est, nec esse potest quicquam. Si enim aliquid horum
deficeret, non esset. Quomodo enim esset, si esse non posset, et quomodo esset, si actu non esset, cum esse sit actus, et si posset esse, et non esset, quomodo esset. Oportet igitur utriusque nexum esse, et posse esse, et actus esse, et nexus: non sunt alia et alia, sunt enim eiusdem essentiae, cum non faciant nisi unum et idem.

(P, p.259)

How does he prove that potency and act are the constituents of every creature? Potency is an intrinsic constituent of the essence, for how could a creature be if it were not able to be? Act too is an intrinsic component, for how could a creature be if it were not actually? Potency and act, then, are the intrinsic constituents of every created essence.

In still other texts he argues to the presence of subjective possibility understood as prime matter, from the fact that the creature can be produced by God. Here, he confuses the posse fieri of objective possibility, with the posse fieri of the subjective possibility of prime matter.

In omnibus igitur, quae principiata sunt, posse fieri....posse facere....et compositionem utriusque....reperire necesse est. (M. 11, p.96)

"To be produced by God" thus becomes identical with "to be educed from matter"; and since "to be educed from matter", means that matter is an intrinsic
constituent of the creature, Cusa attributes matter to each creature, as one of the components of its essence.

In relation to the creature, he has taken as one and indistinct three kinds of possibility: the one opposed to the impossible, the possibility we called objective and the subjective possibility of prime matter. But Cusa makes still another error—even more disastrous—when he identifies subjective possibility with privation. To appreciate the gravity of this mistake, let us first recall the salient points of St. Thomas' doctrine concerning privation.

Whereas negation simply denotes an absence of perfection, privation signifies the absence of perfection in a subject.

...Negation means just the absence of the thing in question, while in privation there is also employed an underlying nature of which the privation is asserted. (IV Phys. 1004a15)

A subject can be called "deprived" of a form merely because it does not possess it, even though this form does not pertain to the perfection of that subject considered in itself. The subject is said to be deprived only in comparison with other subjects which have this perfection. It is in this sense we say the stone lacks sight.
Again, a subject can be called "deprived" when it lacks a perfection which, although it does not pertain to the perfection of its species, does belong to other species of the same genus. Because vision is found in other animals, they who would be naturally unable to see would be said to lack sight. More strictly, however, a thing is subject to privation when it lacks a perfection which it should possess by reason of its species.

Multipliciter enim dicitur privatio. Uno modo, quando aliquid non habet quod natum est haberi ab alio, etiamsi ipsum non sit natum habere illud; sicut si lapis dicatur res mortua, quia caret vita, quam quaedam res natae sunt habere. Alio modo, dicitur privatio, quando aliquid non habet quod natum est haberi ab alio sui generis; sicut si talpa dicatur caeca. Tertio modo, quando ipsum non habet quod natum est habere; et hoc modo, privatio imperfectionem importat. (Ia, q.33, a.4, ad 2)

Understood in the strictest sense, privation is said of a subject which lacks a form which it should possess, not only by reason of its species, but also because it is the time, the place, etc. for this subject to have the form. A man is not properly said to be blind because he cannot see in the dark, nor is a child, nor every man, called ignorant because they do not possess the science of metaphysics.
Ad rationem autem privationis duo requiruntur: quorum primum est remotio habitus oppositi....Secundum quod requiritur, est quod privatio proprie dicta sit circa determinatum subjectum et determinatum tempus. Improprie autem sumitur absque determinatione subjecti et temporis. Non enim caecum proprie dicitur nisi quod est aptum natum habere visum, et quando est natum habere visum. (V Metaphy., lect.14, n.967)(1)

If privation is negation in an apt subject, what is this subject? It is subjective possibility or potentiality, for to be a subject is of the very nature of potentiality. This potentiality can either be the pure potentiality of prime matter, or a secundum quid potentiality, i.e. the potentiality of a being which, although it has substantial being, is in potency to a further act.

Subjectum autem privationis, et formae est unum et idem, scilicet, ens in potentia: sive sit ens in potentia simpliciter, quae est subjectum formae substantialis et privationis oppositae; sive sit ens in potentia secundum quid et in actu simpliciter, ut corpus diaphanum, quod est subjectum tenebrarum et lucis. (Ia, q.48, a.3)

Since Cusa has reduced all creatures to the level of material substances, it might be well to review briefly the relation of that potentiality which

(1) Cf. V Metaphy., lect.20, nn.1070-1078; IX Metaphy., lect.1, n.1785; X Metaphy., lect.5.
is matter, to privation. St. Thomas, following Aristotle, proves that besides the matter and the form, which are the positive, intrinsic, per se principles of the being of a material substance, there is another principle, particularly related to the becoming and to the passing away of the material substance, namely privation. It is negative however, and principle of becoming per accidens only. It is a principle of a material substance, for matter, the subject of corruptible being, has two formalities. It is the subject of a given form, yet it remains in potency to a form other than the one which actuates it. It is with respect to the form it does not have, but may have as one it is naturally able to have and naturally desires, that matter is called subject of privation. Hence, the latter is a principle of becoming and of corruption. As the negation in matter of the form the latter can have, privation itself is a negative principle; it is a per accidens principle, for, being negative, it contributes nothing positive to the becoming or being of a material substance. Yet, it remains a principle, because matter can become the subject of a form other than the one it now possesses.
only because of the presence of privation. (1)

Because the potentiality of matter may be considered either with respect to the actuating form in facto esse, or with respect to the form it may acquire, i.e. in the order of fieri or becoming, we may easily fall into the error of confusing these two aspects of matter and even of identifying, as a single ratio, matter and privation as the Platonists did. (2) Because they are one as to the subject, it does not follow that they are formally one. They are distinct formalities of the same subject. Potentiality signifies matter's positive order to form, its appetite for form; privation merely denotes the lack of form.

...Et dicit quod licet subiectum sit unum numero, tamen specie et ratione est duo, ut supra dictum est; quia homo et aurum et omnis materia numerum quendam habet. Est eodem consideratione ipsum subiectum, quod est aliquid positive, ex quo fit aliquid per se et non per accidentem, ut hoc quod est homo et aurum; et est ibi considerare id quod accidit ei, scilicet contrarietatem et privationem, ut immusicum et infiguratum.

...Patet ergo secundum intentionem Aristotelis. quod privatio, quae ponitur principium naturae per accidentem, non est aliqua aptitudo ad formam, vel inchoatio formae, vel aliquod principium imperfectum activum, ut quidem dicunt, sed ipsa carentia formae vel contrarium formae, quod subiecto accidit. (In I Physic., lect.13, nn.3-4)

(1) In I Physic., lect.11-12.

(2) I Phys., c.9.
There is another occasion for confusion between potentiality and privation. As negation in an apt subject privation is non-being. There is also a sense in which matter is non-being. If by being we mean that which simpliciter is, being can be said of actual being only, for this alone simpliciter is. So considered, matter is an instance of the quasi-genus non-being, for, of itself, matter is not actual being. Hence, we can say that being is that which is actual; that which is not actual is non-being. Hence, non-being can be predicated both of matter and of privation; of positive potentiality for form and of negation. In turn, negation itself can be either simple negation, or negation in an apt subject: privation.

Dicitur enim non ens tripliciter, Uno modo quod nullo modo est; et ex tali non ente non fit generatio, quia ex nihilo nihil fit secundum naturam. Alio modo dicitur non ens ipsa privatio, quae consideratur in aliquo subjecto: et ex tali non ente fit quidem generatio, sed per accidens, inquantum scilicet generatio fit ex subjecto, cui accidit privatio. Tertio modo dicitur non ens ipsa materia, quae, quantum est de se, non est ens actu, sed ens potentia. Et ex tali non ente fit generatio per se. (In XII Metaphy., lect.2, n.2437)

But if by being we mean not only that which is simpliciter, but also that which is secundum quid, potentiality too is being. In this case, non-being would be
restricted to signify negation and privation.

Since both privation and potentiality can be called non-being, and since they are one in subject, some ancient philosophers confused one with the other.

Dicit ergo primo quod quidem philosophi tetigerunt materiam, sed non sufficienter; quia non distinguebant inter privationem et materiam: unde quod est privationis, at
tribuebant materiam. Et quia privatio se­cundum se est non ens, dicebant quod mate­ria secundum se est non ens. Et sic, si­cut aliquid simpliciter et per se fit ex materia, sic confitebantur quod simplici­ter et per se aliquid fit ex non ente. Et ad hoc ponendum duabus rationibus induce­bantur. Primo quidem ratione Parmenidis dicentis quod quidquid est praeter ens est non ens: unde cum materia sit praeter ens, quia non est ens actu, dicebant eam simplici­ter esse non ens. Secundo vero quia vi­debatur etiam ratione unum: quod hic appelat esse potentia unum, quia ea quae sunt ratione unum, sic se habent quod eadem est virtus utriusque; ea vero quae sunt subjecto unum sed non ratione, non ha­bent eandem potentiam seu virtutem, ut pa­tet in albo et music cloth. Subjectum autem et privatio sunt unum numero, ut et infigura­tum: unde videbatur etiam quod essent idem ratione vel virtute. Sic igitur hic acci­pit unitatem potentiae. (In I Physic., lect.15, n.2)

Cusa commits a similar error. Potentiality, he says, is one of the two essential constituents of every created essence, for it is that which limits or con­tracts the act or perfection of the creature. The latter is caused by God, but the former is only
per accidens and contingenter, for it has no posi-
tive cause: it is caused neither by God, nor by any
other positive cause. Thus conceived, potentiality
cannot be real and positive being. Yet he says that
it is an intrinsic principle of every creature's
being. Now, the only principle of a material being
which is, in one sense, both intrinsic and yet not
positive being, is privation, namely negation in a
subject. Hence, Cusa attributes to privation the
proper formality of potentiality.

It is this confusion of potentiality with
privation which explains Cusa's constant use of the
terms per accidens and contingenter in relation to
potentiality. Privation, since it is non being,
cannot be per se intended by any agent or in any
action. It can only come about per accidens; i.e.
attaining the form which is intended per se, the agent
at the same time brings about the privation which is
consequent to this form. (1)

Since Cusa has reduced one of the two es-
sential constituents of every creature's being to
privation, and since privation is negation in an
apt subject, this privation must have a subject.

(1) Cf. III, Contra Gentes, 4-7.
Now, the other constituent is form, act. Hence, if the subject of privation is intrinsic to the substance of the creature, and if form is the only other intrinsic constituent, form, the very perfection of the creature, must be that subject. Hence, privation is in the act as in a subject. The proper effect of this privation, he says, is to limit the perfection of the creature, i.e. to make the perfection of the creature a finite one. If the act or perfection of the creature is limited, not by something real and positive, but by mere privation, this act, as it is in itself, according to its proper nature, must be infinite and divine. Creatures, then, as conceived by Cusa, are really divinity in privation. If the difference between God and the creature is merely privative, there can be no positive difference between "what God is" and "what the creature is"; God and the creature must be identical as to their positive being. Because of the privation, the creature cannot be called divine, for it does not have the total perfection of divinity; but the perfection which it does possess must be divinity. It is as if we said: In the creature there is actuality. But actuality, as such, does not imply imperfection. Hence, there is, in the creature an actuality which
does not imply imperfection. Yet, this actuality is contracted, not intrinsically (for this is contrary to the nature of actuality as de se implying no imperfection), but extrinsically. This actuality plus the extrinsic limitation intrinsically constitute the creature.

According to this conception, God must be considered as having two states of being: one with, the other without, privation. God without privation is God as He is in Himself; God with privation is God as He is in the creatures. But in either state the actuality, the positive being, is exactly the same. The only difference would be that one state would have relatively more positive being than the other.

This conception leads to the theory that, in creation, God takes on privation—that He becomes creatures:

...In maximo vero idem est esse, facere, et creare, tunc non aliud videtur esse creare quam Deum omnia esse. (DI,II, 2, p.66)

The positive constituent, the positive being of the creature would be divinity itself:

Et sicut in numero explicantc unitatem non reperitur nisi unitas, ita in omni-bus, quae sunt, non nisi maximum reperitur. (DI, II, 3, p.69)
It would mean that, for God, to be in all things is to be, in them, that which they are:

...Ipsum in omnibus id quod sunt. (DI, II, 3, p.72)

Yet it is not as though God were everything that the creature is, for the creature has privation, but He would be its positive, absolute content.

Nam sicut Deus, cum sit immensus, non est nec in sole nec in luna, licet in illis sit id, quod sunt absolute. (DI, II, 4, p.74)

Whatever actuality the creature possesses, would be possessed only in so far as it is in the infinite act.

Quare omnis actualis existentia ab ipso habet, quidquid actualitatis existit, et omnis existentia pro tanto existit actu, pro quanto in ipso infinito actu est. (DI, I, 23, p.46)

The creature would be a falling away from the absolute perfection of God into perfection with privation; its esse would be ab esse, where ab esse would mean not efficient causality, so much as intrinsic formal causality, i.e. what is positive in it would be the divinity within it.

Quis igitur copulando simul in creatura necessitatem absolutam, a qua est, et contingentiam, sine qua non est, potest intelligere esse eius. Nam videtur quod ipsa creatura, quae nec est Deus nec nihil, sit quasi post Deum et ante nihil, intra Deum et nihil, ut ait unus sapientum:
"Deus est oppositio: nihil mediate; entis." Nec tamen potest esse ab esse et non esse composita. Videtur igitur neque esse, per hoc quod descendit de esse; neque non esse, quia est ante nihil; neque compositum ex illis. Nos­
ter autem intellectus, qui nequit tran­
silere contradictoria, divise aut com­positive esse creaturae non attingit, quamvis sciat eius esse non esse nisi ab esse maximi. (DI, II, 2, p.66)

And what is this \textit{ab esse}?

Si consideras res sine eo [Deo], ita ni­
hil sunt sicut numeros sine unitate. Si consideras ipsum sine rebus, ipse est et res sunt nihil. Si consideras ipsum ut est in rebus, res aliquid esse, in quo ipse est, consideras; et in hoc er­ras, ut patuit in proximo capitulo, quo­niam esse rei non est aliud, ut est di­versa res, sed eius esse est ab esse. (DI, II, 3, p.71)

That is, a creature is not one being and God another being, as though two beings were involved. The being of a creature is not something other than the divine being; rather, the being of a creature is intrinsi­cally constituted from the divine being. Its intrin­sic being (its \textit{ab esse}) is the divinity within it. It has absolute necessity because its positive con­tent, i.e. that by which or from which (\textit{a qua}) it is constituted, is the divine being. It also has the note of contingency because of the privation without which it would not be a creature (\textit{sine qua non est}).

This conception of God as having two states of being explains Cusa's doctrine of the Maximum as
complication and as explication.

Deus ergo est omnia complicans in hoc, quod omnia in eo; est omnia explicans in hoc, quod ipse in omnibus. (DI, II, 5, p. 70)

As complication, God is in Himself,—in the state of absolute and eternal perfection, as perfect unity, as the subsistent ratio of reality. As explication, He is in the creatures: it is the unity of God in otherness; His identity in difference; the perfection of God in imperfection; God as descending from the absolute state of the maximum and minimum to the state of the more or less; God in contraction, i.e., God in privation.

God in explication and contraction is still God,—God with privation. Hence all the positive being of the creature, i.e., of God in explication, is divinity; and yet, one can not say that the creature is entirely divine, for there is the privation; nor that the creature is God absolutely. Yet, since all the positive being in the creature is divinity, neither can one deny that the creature is God. In other words, the creature is God, but God in explication, in contraction, with privation.

Homo enim Deus est, sed non absolute, quoniam homo. (C, II, 14, p. 109)

Privation being negation in a subject, belongs to the quasi genus of non-being. If Cusa
conceives God as being with privation, and privation as potency, i.e. as a real subject, he can also say that God is in nothing, where the term "nothing" signifies a real subject. This proposition: "God is in nothing", can be understood in two ways: a) God is in no created being by way of inherence, nor is He a part of that created being; b) just as act can be in a potency as in a subject, so can God be in nothingness as in a subject. When Cusa says that God is in nothing, he understands the proposition in the second sense, for immediately following the passage cited above, wherein he insists that the being of the creature is not different from the being of God (since the being of the creature is ab esse, and we must remember his peculiar understanding of this expression), he adds the following:

Non restat nisi dicere, quod pluralitas rerum exoritur eo, quod Deus est in nihil. (DI, II, 3, p.71)

These words, as they stand, could be interpreted in the traditional sense, i.e. according to the first understanding referred to above. Yet, the very next paragraph in Cusa's text shows that he has the second meaning in mind.

Quomodo igitur poterimus intelligere creaturam ut creaturam, quae a Deo est et nihil etiam ex consequenti et tribuere potest, qui est maximus? Et si
Now there is no difficulty in explaining the proposition: "God is in nothing", when nothing means "no creature". But we are faced with insurmountable difficulty in explaining this proposition when "nothing" stands for a real subject having the properties of potency. For then, absolute non-being, the absolute negation of potency and of act, indeed of all being, of all capability for being,—nothingness. itself—becomes a real subject of actuality. "Quomodo intelligitur pluralitatem rerum per hoc explicari, quod Deus est in nihilo, cum nihil non sit alicuius entitatis" can only be asked by one who considers nihil as a real subject.
1. Cusa's conception of *quodlibet in quolibet*.

In the approach to a limit the variable tends, at it were, to become the limit. It is as if the limit were precontained in the variable, as if one nature were to proceed, as to what it is, from another nature. If, per impossibile, we could generate whole numbers in this way, every number could be drawn from any number. At the limit, therefore, would apply Anaxagoras' assertion: *quodlibet in quolibet*. When the mathematical example is, at least extrinsically applied to the real order, it is as if the mind, provided it observed the laws of the progression, could extract any nature from any other nature. If such a process could be carried through, each being would be the more or less of every other being. There would be but one form, one essence, for the whole of reality. Creatures would be divinity in the order of more or less; each creature would be the more or less of every other creature; God would be the maximum and minimum of all things. There would be a real and universal *quodlibet in quolibet*. Having translated
into reality the logic of the method of limits, Cusa teaches that there is a real quodlibet in quolibet. To appreciate this we must study his doctrine concerning the universe of creatures.

According to Cusa, although all creatures are contractions of God, they are not all equally perfect, for there are degrees of contraction. The most perfect of all contractions is the totality of creatures: the universe which comprises all that is not God.

Universum vero, cum omnia complectatur, quae Deus non sunt...(DI, II, 1, p.64)

This universe of creatures, because it is the most perfect of all the contractions of God, is the contracted maximum.

...Universum est contractum maximum...(DI, II, 4, p.73)

Whatever perfection the absolute maximum possesses in the absolute state, that, the contracted maximum has in the contracted state.

...Illa, ut absoluto absolute maxime conveniunt, contracte convenire affirmamus. (DI, II, 4, p.73)

Thus, there is absolute unity, infinity, simplicity, and eternity in the absolute maximum; there is unity in plurality, finiteness and composition in the contracted maximum. The universe is one, but because
it is a contracted unity, it has existence only in a plurality; the universe is one being, but because it is a contracted being it has existence only in many beings; the universe is perfection, but because it is contracted perfection it has existence only with imperfection.

Unde, quando recte consideratur de contractione, omnia sunt clara. Nam infinitas contracta aut simplicitas seu indistinctio per infinitum descendit in contractione ab eo, quod est absolutum, ut infinitus et aeternus mundus cadat absque proportione ab absoluta infinitate et aeternitate et unum ab unitate. Unde unitas absoluta ab omni pluralitate absoluta est. Sed contracta unitas, quae est unum universum, licet sit unum maximum, cum sit contractum, non est a pluralitate absoluta, licet non sit nisi unum maximum contractum. Quare, quamvis sit maxime unum, est tamen illa eius unitas per pluralitatem contracta, sicut infinitas per finitatem, simplicitas per compositionem, aeternitas per successionem, necessitas per possibilitatem, et ita de reliquis, quasi absolu\textit{ta necessitas se communicet absque permixtione et in eius opposito contracte terminetur. (DI, II, 4, p.73)


Just as the absolute maximum is the absolute principle and end of all things, so too is the contracted maximum the contracted principle and end of all things.

...Principium contractum atque contractus finis rerum...(DI, II, 4, p.73)

As contracted end, the universe is first in the intention of God, for the whole is intended before
the parts.

Tamen, sicut in intentione artificis est prius totum, puta domus, quam pars, puta paries, ita dicimus, quia ex intentione Dei omnia in esse prodierunt, quod tunc universum prius prodit et in eius consequentiam omnia, sine quibus nec universum nec perfectum esse posset. (DI, II, 4, p.75)

Because it is the most perfect created image of the absolute maximum, the universe is the contracted end of each thing; it is the most perfect of the contracted perfections to which each thing can tend.

As contracted principle the universe precedes all creatures by an order of nature.

Universum enim quasi ordine naturae ut perfectissimam praecessit omnia...(DI, II, 5, p.76)

It is because all things were created that each thing was created; it is as a consequence of the totality being made, that the various parts were made. Hence the production of the universe must not be conceived as though one part were made and then another. Rather, the totality was made by one simple emanation from the absolute maximum. Hence it is, that the universe is the contracted principle of each thing, for the existence of each thing came as a consequence of the totality being made.

Quoniam vero dictum est universum esse principium contractum tantum atque in hoc maximum, patet, quomodo per simplicem emanationem
maximi contracti a maximo absoluto totum universum prodiit in esse. Omnia enim entia, quae sunt partes universi, sine quibus universum—cum sit contractum—unum, totum et perfectum esse non potest, simul cum universo in esse prodierunt, et non prius intelligentia, deinde anima nobilis, deinde natura, ut voluit Avicenna et alii philosophi, Tamen, sicut in intentione artificis est prius totum, puta domus, quam pars, puta paries, ita dicimus, quia ex intentione Dei omnia in esse prodierunt, quod tunc universum prius prodiit et in eius consequentiam omnia, sine quibus nec universum nec perfectum esse posset. (DI, II, 4, p.74)

Not only is the universe the contracted principle and end of all creatures, it is also the contracted quiddity of all the essences. In the absolute maximum, all essences are one essence; in absolute unity and perfection the essence of God is each and every essence; the essence of each and every thing is the essence of God. The universe too is the quiddity of all things, but it is a contracted quiddity, for, whereas the absolute quiddity is absolute unity, this contracted quiddity is unity in plurality, identity in diversity. The contracted quiddity is one quiddity, but it exists only as divided into many quiddities.

Est enim Deus quidditas absoluta mundi seu universi; universum vero est ipsa quidditas contracta. Contrario dicit ad aliquid, ut ad essendum hoc vel illud. Deus igitur, qui est unus, est in uno universo; universum vero est in universis contracte. (DI, II, 4, p.75)
As there is only one universe, so is there only one quiddity, but since this universe has existence only in plurality, so too does its quiddity have existence only as contracted into the lesser quiddities of each being in the universe. In the sun the quiddity of the universe is contracted into the quiddity of the sun; in the moon the quiddity of the universe is contracted into that of the moon. So it is for the other beings in the universe.

Nam sicut Deus, cum sit immensus, non est nec in sole nec in luna, licet in illis sit id, quod sunt absolute; ita universum non est in sole nec in luna, sed in ipsis est id, quod sunt, contracte. Et quia quidditas solis absoluta non est alius a quidditate absoluta lunae—quoniam est ipse Deus, qui est entitas et quidditas absoluta omnium—et quidditas contracta solis est alia a quidditate contracta lunae—quia, ut quidditas absoluta rei non est res ipsa, ita contracta non est alius quam ipsa—: quare patet quod, cum universum sit quidditas contracta, quae aliter est in sole contracta et aliter in luna, hinc identitas universi est in diversitate sicut unitas in pluralitate. Unde universum, licet non sit nec sol nec luna, est tamen in sole sol et in luna luna,(DI, II, 4, p.74)

For there is an order in contraction. Before all contraction there is God, the absolute maximum, who actually exists as separated from all contraction. Then there is the universe which actually exists only as contracted by the ten most general genera, the predicaments, which in turn actually exist
only as contracted by the various genera, which in
turn actually exist only as contracted by the diffe-
rent species, which again actually exist only as con-
tracted by the individuals, which alone (aside from
God) have actual existence in themselves.

Est igitur universum quasi decem generalis-
simorum universitas, et deinde genera, deinde
species. Et ita universalia sunt illa secun-
dum gradus suos, quae ordine quodam naturae
gradatim ante rem, quae actu ipsa contrahit,
existunt. Et quoniam universum est contrac-
tum, tunc non reperitur nisi in generibus ex-
plicitum, et genera non reperiuntur nisi in
speciebus; individua vero sunt actu, in qui-
bus sunt contracte universa. (DI, II, 6, p.80)

Hence the universe has actual existence only in the
individuals into which it has been contracted through
the media of the genera and species. By order of na-
ture, the universe, as well as the universals, has a
priority to the individuals: a universality or a
contractability by these individuals. But the uni-
verse, as well as the universals, has no actual ex-
istence apart from the individuals, even though mind
can consider them as abstracted from the individuals.

Et in ista consideratione videtur, quomodo
universalia, non sunt nisi contractae actu;
et eo quidem modo verum dicunt Peripatetici
universalia extra res non esse actu. Solum
enim singulare actu est, in quo universalia
sunt contractae ipsum. Habent tamen univer-
salia ordine naturae quoddam esse universale,
contrahibile per singulare—non quod sunt
actu ante contractionem aliter quam naturali
ordine, ut universale contrahibile in se non subsistens, sed in eo, quod actu est; sicut punctus, linea, superficies ordine progressivo corpus, in quo actu tantum sunt, praecedunt. Universum enim quia non est actu nisi contracte, ita omnia universalia: Non sunt universalia solum entia rationis, licet non reperiantur extra singularia actu; sicut et linea et superficies, licet extra corpus non reperiantur, propterea non sunt entia rationis tantum, quoniam sunt in corpore sicut universalia in singularibus. Intelliget tamen facit ea extra res per abstractionem esse. Quae quidem abstractio est ens rationis, quoniam absolutum esse eis convenire non potest. Universale enim penitus absolutum Deus est. (DI, II, 6, p. 80)

Since the universe exists only as a contraction, and since each quiddity is a contraction of the universe, the universe exists in each quiddity. This does not mean that the universe is to be identified with each lower quiddity, for the universe is the totality of created beings, but it does mean that in each thing the universe is that thing; that although the universe is neither the sun nor the moon but the whole of creation, yet in the sun the universe is the sun; in the moon the universe is the moon.

...Cum universum sit quidditas contracta, quae aliter est in sole contracta et aliter in luna, hinc identitas universi est in diversitate sicut unitas in pluralitate. Unde universum, licet non sit nec sol nec luna, est tamen in sole sol et in luna luna. (DI, II, 4, p. 74)
So it is with all the beings of the universe. In each being the universe is that being for each being is a contradiction of the universe.

Non est autem universum nisi contracte in rebus, et omnis res actu existens contrahit universa, ut sint actu id, quod est. (DI, II, 5, p.76)

And since the universe which is the totality of creatures is in each thing, then everything is in each thing, each thing is everything. Quodlibet est in quolibet. But because each thing cannot be all things actually, for then it would be God, it contracts all things so that they become that thing.

Si acute iam dictis attendis, non erit tibi difficile videre veritatis illius Anaxagorici quodlibet esse in quolibet fundamentum fortassis altius Anaxagora. Nam cum manifestum sit ex primo libro Deum ita esse in omnibus, quod omnia sunt in ipso, et nunc constet Deum quasi mediante universo esse in omnibus, hinc omnia in omnibus esse constat et quodlibet in quolibet. Universum enim quasi ordine naturae ut perfectissimum praecessit omnia, ut quodlibet in quolibet esse potest. In qualibet enim creatura universum est ipsa creatura, et ita quodlibet recipit omnia, ut in ipso sint ipsum contracte. Cum quodlibet non possit esse actu omnia, cum sit contractum, contrahit omnia, ut sint ipsum. Si igitur omnia sunt in omnibus, omnia videntur quodlibet praecedere. Non igitur omnia sunt plura, quoniam pluralitas non praecessit quodlibet. Unde omnia sine pluralitate praecesserunt quodlibet ordine naturae. Non sunt igitur plura in quolibet actu, sed omnia sine pluralitate sunt idipsnum. (DI, II, 5, p.76)
Because in each thing all things are actually that thing, then all the universe is in stone as stone, in the vegetative soul as vegetative soul, in sight as sight, in intellect as intellect, in God as God.

Nam omnia in lapide lapis, et in anima vegetativa ipsa anima, et in vita vita, et in sensu sensus, in visu visus, in auditu auditus, in imaginatione imaginatio, in ratione ratio, in intellectu intellectus, in Deo Deus. (DI, II, 5, p.77)

Since the universe is the contraction of God and since each thing is the contraction of the universe, then quodlibet in quolibet. In man all things are man, in intellect all things are intellect. Thus through the medium of the universe God is contractedly in each thing and through the medium of the universe each thing is in God.

...Deus qui est unitas simplicissima, existendo in uno universo, est quasi ex consequenti mediante universo in omnibus, et pluralitas rerum mediante uno universo in Deo. (DI, II, 4, p.75)

2. Critique of this doctrine.

Since the universe, according to Cusa, is a unity of many complete substances which do not lose their identity in that unity, the universe is an unum per accidens. Being an unum per accidens, the universe is an accidental, actual whole, a kind
of integral whole wherein the being of each part is distinct from the being of the whole of which it is a part. Thus the universe would have the same relation to its parts that a house has to its parts.

Along with this notion of the universe as an unum per accidens, an accidental actual whole, there is also in Cusa the notion that the universe is the supreme created genus. Of this there can be no doubt. The relation of the universe to its parts is the same as that of genus to species:

Est enim Deus quidditas absoluta mundi seu universi; universum vero est ipsa quidditas contracta. Contrario dicit ad aliquid, ut ad essendum hoc vel ilud. (DI, II, 4, p.75)

The universe is contracted into the ten predicaments, then into the various genera, then into species, and finally into the individuals which alone have actual existence:

Est igitur universum quasi decem generalissimorum universitas, et deinde genera, dein de species. Et ita universalia sunt illa secundum gradus suos, quae ordine quodam naturae gradatim ante rem, quae actu ipsa contrahit, existunt. (DI, II, 6, p.80)

He explains the various aspects of the universe, genera, and species in exactly the same way: they
precede their inferiors by an order of nature; they have actual existence only in the particulars; they have separated or abstracted being only in the mind.

Universum enim quia non est actu nisi contracte, ita omnia universalia: Non sunt universalia solum entia rationis, licet non reperiantur extra singularia actu; sicut et linea et superficies, licet extra corpus non reperiantur, propterea non sunt entia rationis tantum, quoniam sunt in corpore sicut universalia in singularibus. Intellectus tamen facit ea extra res per abstractionem esse. Quae quidem abstractio est ens rationis, quoniam absolutum esse eis convenire non potest. (DI, II, 6, p.80)

This conception of the universe as the supreme created genus shows that Cusa has confused the notion of a potential logical whole with that of an actual whole. A potential or logical whole does not actually contain its parts. An actual whole is actually divided by its parts. Now the universe, in relation to its parts is an actual whole, for it actually contains all these parts. The universe is a whole which is actually composed of minerals, plants, animals, men, and angels. Since the universe is not one substance but a union of these many substances, it is only an accidental actual whole. Such a whole cannot be predicated of its parts. Army cannot be predicated of each soldier; house cannot be predicated of the walls of a house.
The relation of genus to species is that of a potential whole, for a genus does not contain the species actually but potentially. The species are not the constituent elements of a genus as are the parts of a house to the house. When species are considered as parts of a genus, it is not because they actually enter into the composition of the genus; they are said to be parts because the genus can be actualized further by the various differentiae to become this or that species. A genus, or a predicable species does have the notion of an actual whole in relation to the elements which constitute its ratio. Thus, house as an actual whole is intrinsically constituted from the union of walls and roof for the purpose of shelter. But when house is considered as an actual whole it is not predicated of its constituent parts; a wall, roof, etc. are not house but actual parts of house. When house is being considered as a potential whole, then the consideration is not centered absolutely upon the intrinsic constitution of house, but rather upon the various ways in which this intrinsic constitution can be further actualized in the species. Hence house as an actual whole is divided into basement, walls, and roof; house as a potential whole
is divided into wooden house, brick house, stucco house. All that is actual in the notion of house—its intrinsic composition—is predicated of each species, for each species contains the whole of the actual constitution of the genus along with the further actualization of the differentia. Thus a brick house contains all the intrinsic constitution of house: basement, walls, and roof, along with the further actualization that these parts are now made of brick.

It is clear, then, that Cusa has confused the notions of actual and of potential whole. He considers the universals: the universe, the genera, and the species as actual wholes composed of their inferiors and then as potential wholes which are predicated of these same inferiors. Thus the universe is first considered as an actual whole composed of all the creatures; its being is constituted from the union of these creatures. Then he considers the universe as a potential whole in relation to these same creatures; the universe is predicated of each and every creature: the stone is the universe; the vegetative soul is the universe; man is the universe. But since the creatures are actual parts of an actual whole—the universe—and since whole is greater than
part, Cusa further concludes that the creatures do not receive all of the perfection of the universe, rather they limit or contract it. In stone the universe becomes stone; in the vegetative soul the universe becomes the vegetative soul; in man the universe becomes man.

Since the universe for Cusa is both actual and potential whole in relation to the creatures, and since the relation of genera and species, and species to individuals is the same for him as the relation of the universe to the creatures, genera become actual and potential wholes in relation to species, and species become actual and potential wholes in relation to the individuals. Thus genera are intrinsically constituted from the species of which are predicated; they are predicated of the parts—species—from which they are intrinsically constituted. The same is true for species in relation to the individuals.

When Cusa says that a genus becomes a species his meaning is far different from the traditional one. According to the traditional teaching, "genus becomes a species" means that that which is imperfect—the genus—has now become that which is perfect—the species. For, something of the potentiality of the genus has now been actualized in the
species; all that is actual in the genus, its constituent notes, is now in the species along with more perfection—that of the differentia. When Cusa says that a genus is contracted into a species, he means that that which is perfect—the genus—has now become that which is imperfect—the species. There is no addition of perfection, but diminution, for the species does not further actualize the genus, but contracts it or makes it more potential; the species does not have all the actuality of the genus, for the actuality of the genus is the sum total of all the perfections of all its species which constitute it as an actual whole.

This explains why Cusa insists that the inferiors never attain the actual perfection of their immediate universal: the genera never achieve the perfection of the universe; the species never attain the perfection of the genera; the individuals never reach the perfection of the species.

Non est igitur nisi unus terminus aut specierum, aut generum aut universi, qui est centrum, circumferentia atque connexio omnium. Et universum non evacuat ipsam infinitam absolute maximam Dei potentiam, ut sit simpliciter maximam terminans Dei potentiam. Non attingit itaque universum terminum maximitatis absolutae, neque genera terminum universi attingunt neque species terminum generum neque individua terminum specierum. (DI, III, 1, p.120)
For any particular to have all the actual perfection of its immediate universal, it would have to have the perfections of all the other particulars under that universal, for its immediate universal is the sum total of all the perfections of its particulars. Hence for an individual to have the perfection of its species, it would have to have all the perfections of all the other individuals; only then would it have the perfection of its species. But to be a perfect species, according to Cusa, means to have all the perfections of the genus. For a perfect genus there is needed the perfections of all the genera. To have all the perfections of all the genera means to have all the perfection of the universe. To have all the perfection of the universe means to be God. The individual who is perfect in his species would have to be a creature who is the creator. This, for Cusa, is the unique prerogative of Christ. (1)

Hence, for Cusa, all created reality is but a more or less in relation to God who is the maximum. An individual is a more or less of a species, which is a more or less of a proximate genus; this in turn is but a more or less of a

(1) DI, III, 1-3.
remote genus, which is more or less of the created universe, which is but a more or less of God who is the maximum. Because God and creation are one in essence and nature, there is a universal quodlibet in quolibet: all reality is each being according to the mode of that being. Yet, this treatment is rather general in that we have not seen what particular genera are contracted by what particular species. To do that we must examine the doctrine taught by Cusa in his work De Conjecturis, for here he claims to give a more detailed outline of the various created genera and species.

In De Conjecturis Cusa teaches that all reality is mind; that mind pervades all being, is in all being; that each being is mind in some way or other.

Mens ipsa, omnia in se ambire, omniaque lustrare, comprehenderque supponens, se in omnibus, atque omnia in se taliter concludat: ut extra ipsum ac quod eius obtutum aufugiat, nihil esse posse affirmat. (C. I, 6, p.78)

But this world of reality, this universe of mind can be reduced to four basic unities: God, intelligence, soul, and sensible body. Now, there is a complete intertwining between these four unities as being and as knowledge. Without the least difficulty Cusa passes from the being of God to man's knowledge of God; from the being of the pure intelligences to man's acts of
intellectual knowledge; from soul as substantial form to man's knowledge by reason and imagination; from sensible body to man's sense knowledge. For this reason De Coniecturis is a nightmare of anguish for a reader accustomed to the precision and formality of St. Thomas. But for the present we are interested in this work because of what Cusa says of real being.

Omitting all reference to the order of knowledge, we can say that these four unities are four kinds of real being; God, intelligence, soul, and sensible body. Intelligence is the immediate contraction of God, soul is the contraction of intelligence, and sensible body is the contraction of soul. Among these four unities there is an order of progression or of descent, as well as an order of regression or of ascent. In the order of descent intelligence is the contraction of God, or the unity in otherness of God; soul is the unity in otherness of intelligence; while sensible body is the unity in otherness of soul. In the order of ascent soul is the unity of sensible body; intelligence the unity of soul, and God the unity of intelligence. Hence all three created unities are descents from God; they are also ascents towards the unity of God.
To illustrate this progression and regression of the creatures Cusa employs the example of two pyramids which penetrate each other. In the one pyramid the base is the light or unity of God while the apex is darkness or the otherness of nothingness; in the second pyramid the base is the darkness of nothingness while the apex is the unity of God.

Facque pyramidem lucis in tenebras, et tenebrarum pyramidem in lucem progredi, et omne inquisibile in figuram redigito, ut sensibili manuductione ad arcana, coniecturam convertere possis. Et ut in exemplo alleveris, universum in eam figuram quae subsequitur conspice redactum. (C. I, 11, p.64)
In the one pyramid is shown the descent of the threefold world of creatures: intelligence (the supreme world or third heaven), soul (the middle world or second heaven), and sensible body (the lowest world or first heaven). In the other is portrayed the ascent of these same creatures. With the descent or contraction of God, there is a progression from unity to otherness, from indivisibility to divisibility, from incorruptibility to corruptibility, from immortality to mortality, from immutability to mutability, from form to formable, act to potency, whole to part, from the universal to the particular. With the ascent there is regression from otherness to unity, from divisibility to indivisibility, from composite to the simple, from mortal to immortal, potency to act.

Nam ratio unitatis est, indivisibilitas in se atque ab alio quolibet segregatio, unde unitatem dicimus multis attributionibus virtutis eius appelari. Nam omne id, quod quandam dicit indivisibilitatem, discretionem, atque connexionem, unitati convenit. Indivisibilitatem igitur in divisibilitatem progredi, non est alium, quam unitatem in alteritatem descendere: ita de incorruptibilitate in corruptibilitatem, immortalitate in mortalitate, immutabilitate in mutabilitatem, immobile in mobilitatem, et ita de ceteris. Et ita pari ratione de forma in formabili, quoniam forma est discretiva, quare unitas, discretio in discretum seu continuum, speciale in confusum, lux in tenebras, subtile in grossum, spiritus in corpus, et similia horum concepito: sic actus in potentiam, totum in partem,
Thus the entire world of reality is a progression from the absolute unity of God toward the otherness of nothingness; it is also a regression from otherness to the simple unity which is God.

In itself, each of these created unities in otherness is a generic unity in otherness, a more or less, a concordance in difference, of its superior. These generic worlds of intelligence, soul, and sensible body, are further contracted into various genera, which in turn are contracted by different
species. Thus God is first contracted by the universe which in turn is then contracted by the world of intelligence. The world of intelligence is next contracted or limited by the highest genus in this region of intelligence. This is contracted by its supreme species, which is then progressively contracted by each species beneath it. When the lowest species of the supreme genus of intelligence is attained, we start a new genus in the world of intelligence, for the highest species of this second genus coincides with the lowest species of the supreme genus. The process of contraction is repeated again and again, until finally the actually lowest species of the actually lowest genus of intelligence coincides with the highest species of the supreme genus of soul. With this coincidence the world of soul begins. The progressions are repeated again and again until finally the lowest species of the lowest genus of soul coincides with the highest genus of the supreme genus of sensible body; with this coincidence the world of sensible body begins and the progressions are again repeated until the lowest species of sensible body is attained.

This shows that Cusa conceives each of the three created unities or worlds as a collection of
genera, the genera as collections of species, and the species as collections of individuals. Each species is but a unity in otherness, or a concordance in difference, of a generic unity in otherness which in turn is a unity in otherness of a regional unity in otherness; the three regions or worlds are but unities in otherness of absolute unity which is God. There can be no question here of predicating one nature of many genera; of predicating one genus of many species; for, in Cusa, the only nature which is one is the divine nature; all other so called natures are but identity in difference, or concordance in difference, or unity in otherness.

From the way in which Cusa describes them the species are as a series of whole numbers which have their principle in unity, or God, and which progress as far as one desires. It is as though each of the progressing species or numbers participated in unity, or God, only through the medium of all the numbers or species which precede it. Each of the numbers or species is but a more or less of a more or less, etc. Thus the species in the world of sensible body would be the more or less of an indefinite progression of more or less.
Since there is but one unity, one nature, one essence involved in all the series, there is a universal quodlibet in quolibet. All being is in each being according to the mode of that being: in God, all is God; in intelligence, intelligence; in soul, soul; and in body, body.

Omnia autem in Deo Deus, in intelligentia intellectus, in anima anima, in corpore corpus...(C. I, 6, p.78)

Thus, in God, there is intelligence, soul, and body, but, in God, all is God.

Et hoc absque scrupulositate intelligis, si advertis absolutam unitatem lapidis, non esse plus lapidis, quam non lapidis, quodcumque omnium una est absoluta unitas, quae est Deus. (C. I, 10, p.83)

In intelligence there is God, soul, and body, but here all is intelligence.

Sic quidem in intelligentiis, affirmamus sensibilem naturam occultari atque absorbere in luce intellectuali...(C. II, 10, p.105)

In soul there is God, intelligence, and body, but here all is soul.

Unde vegetativus spiritus, in sua tenebrositate, occultat intellectual, et eius quaedam signa apparent in ramis ad sustentandum, foliis et cortice ad fructum tutandum...(C. II, 10, p.105)

That is, all reality is either the maximum which is God, or it is one of the multitudinous states of the more or less which is the creature; it is either
absolute being, or one of the various degrees of more or less being which is the creature; it is either absolute mind which is God, or it is one of the different kinds of more or less mind which is the creature; it is either absolute stone which is God, or it is one of the contracted types of stone which is the creature. All reality is either in the subsistent state which is God, or it is received in a subject which is the creature; all reality is either God in perfection or God with privation which is the creature; all reality is either God in complication or God in explication. All reality is each reality; each reality is all reality.

If we made a series of charts of Cusa's notion of contraction we would have something like the following.

1) God
   God contracted --------------Universe of creatures.
   Universe contracted---------Predicaments.
   Predicaments contracted-----Genera.
   Genera contracted----------Species.
   Species contracted--------Individuals.

2) God
   God with privation---------Universe.
   Universe with privation-----Predicaments.
   Predicaments with privation-Genera.
   Genera with privation--------Species.
   Species with privation------Individuals.

3) Absolute unity
   Unity in otherness----------Intelligence.
   Unity in otherness,
     in otherness--------Soul.
Unity in otherness,   
in otherness, in otherness—Body.

4) Maximum
More or less------------------------Universe.
More or less, of a more or less—Predicaments.
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less-----------------Genera.
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less, of a more  
or less--------------------------Species.
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less, of a more  
or less, of a more or less---Individual.

But the important consideration here is that we must not regard these hierarchies as though there were a multitude of essences each having a proper place in the hierarchy. For Cusa teaches that there is only one ratio—the Divinity—which is predicated of the whole of reality. The ratio predicated of God is the same proper and formal ratio that is predicated of the creatures; the differences between God and the creatures do not come from any difference in essence: they come from the various modes in which this ratio or essence is received.

Diceras forte usum berylii praesupponere  
essentiam recipere magis et minus; alio-  
quin per maximum pariter et minimum non  
videretur eius principium.

Respondeo, quod, quamvis essentia secundum  
se non videatur magis et minus recipere, ta-  
men secundum comparationem ad esse et actus  
proprios speciei magis et minus participat  
secundum dispositionem naturae recipientis.  
(B. 20, p.61)
Cusa admits that there are differences between God and the creatures but he denies that these differences come from a diversity of \textit{ratio}. All difference is \textit{per accidens} and \textit{contingenter}; for it is outside the order of essence and it is to be explained entirely by reason of the subject, namely, potency.

Again, it is true that, in a certain sense, Cusa does speak of different essences and different natures. He does admit that the contracted essence of the sun is different from the contracted essence of the moon. But these admissions must be understood in the sense in which Cusa understands them: the essence of moon and sun are really only one essence, the absolute essence of God; but because of the subjects involved, \textit{per accidens} and \textit{contingenter} they are unity in plurality, unity in otherness, i.e. one essence in two subjects. But the otherness, which arises from the subjects involved, is outside the order of essence; therefore, if we regard the essence of the sun and the moon in themselves, i.e. apart from all subjects, we have the absolute unity of the divine essence.
Quando attendis ex multitudine unitatis numerum constitui, ac quod alteritas sequitur multiplicationem contingenter, et advertis compositionem numeri ex unitate et alteritate, ex eodem et diverso, ex pari et impari, ex dividuo et individo, ac quod quidditas rerum omnium exporta est, ut sit numerus divinae mentis, tunc aliqualiter attingis, quomodo essentiae rerum sunt incorruptibles uti unitas, ex qua numerus, qui est entitas, et quomodo res sunt sic et sic ex alteritate, quae non est de essentia numeri, sed contingenter unitatis multiplicationem sequens. Ita quidem alteritas de nullius rei essentia est. Pertinet enim ad interitum alteritas, quia divisio est, ex qua corruptio. Hinc de essentia rei non est. (M. 6, p.72)

The hierarchies, then, are really a series of but one essence. This essence is considered either the absolute state as it exists in itself—God; or as it exists in various subjects—the creatures. Because this one essence, which is predicated of all reality, is found in the perfect state in God, whereas in creatures it is found in various degrees of imperfection, God is the maximum, while creatures are only more or less. Hence any perfection in the creature is only more or less, for God alone is the maximum. Thus the sensible sun and moon are only more and less; God is the absolute or maximum sun and moon; vegetative life as found in the created order is only more or less; for God is absolute
or maximum life; human life as present in this world is only more or less, for God is the absolute or maximum humanity. In each and every order of perfection God alone is the absolute, the maximum, the term, whereas creatures are always contractions, more or less, the terminated; for there is really only one ratio, one essence, one form for the whole of reality. And since there is but one ratio, one essence, one form for all beings, there is a real quodlibet in quolibet:

God is each creature in the maximum state, each creature is God in the state of more or less.

Non est ergo aliud dicere 'quodlibet esse in quolibet' quam Deum per omnia esse in omnibus et omnia per omnia esse in Deo. (DI, II, 5, p.76)

This, briefly, is the doctrine of Cusa concerning the being of God and of the creature. Our treatment is by no means complete, for that could be achieved only by comparing the whole of Cusa with the entire Prima Pars of St. Thomas. None the less, we do feel that this essay is an adequate indication of the foundation of the entire thought of Cusa concerning God and the creature. This foundation, as we have insisted throughout this study, is Cusa's projection into reality of the logic of the method of limits.
We are confident that Cusa cannot be understood apart from the framework of the method of limits. If one interprets his works as though he were proceeding in the natural mode, one loses the perspective which regulates all of Cusa's thought, namely the method of limits. To imagine that Cusa's notion of God as the maximum is identical with that of the *Quarta Via* of St. Thomas; to conceive of the *coincidentia oppositorum* as though it were the traditional doctrine concerning the presence in God of all perfection; to identify Cusa's delineation of the creature as a more or less of God with the Christian conception of the creature as a participation of God—this would be the destruction of Cusa's peculiar approach to the problem of God and of the creature. For it would fail to appreciate that Cusa proceeds according to the mode of a reified method of limits. Because he has misunderstood the legitimate use of the method of limits, Cusa, by translating its logic into reality, has conceived God both as the universal predicate of all things, and as a subjective possibility which has been actualized from all eternity. Far from safeguarding the transcendence of God, such a doctrine really reduces God to the level of the creature. This, as we have tried to show, is a necessary consequent if one
envisages God as the real limit of the creature. It is this same misuse of the method of limits which explains both Cusa's insistence that any perfection said of the creature can only be more or less and his understanding of quodlibet in quolibet.

There is still much to be done. Cusa's conception of man and of human knowledge is most important for a fuller understanding of his doctrine. By reifying a distinctively human mode of cognition, Cusa has, in reality, made man the measure of all being. Making a perfect adequation between measure and mathematics, he insists that all human cognition, especially man's knowledge of God, is mathematical. These pivotal doctrines in Cusa's thought, namely his conception of man, and of human knowledge as mathematical, must still be examined. We hope to study them in another essay.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


