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On the Sweetness of Truth

by Helga Zepp LaRouche

We are pleased to reprint “On the Sweetness of Truth” by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, to assist the reader in working through some of the concepts in Nicholas of Cusa’s work, The Vision of God (De Visione Dei). Cusa’s concept of “the coincidence of opposites” inspires her current organizing of an institution to prevent world war and to bring many forces together to fight global famine and create modern healthcare systems worldwide – the Committee for the Coincidence of Opposites. Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the international Schiller Institute, is not only known for her expertise in Friedrich Schiller’s work, she is also a renowned scholar of Nicholas of Cusa (Nikolaus Cusanus, Nikolaus of Kues), 1401-1464. This article was first presented in the 1987 Festschrift for Lyndon LaRouche, published on the occasion of and in honor of the birthday of her husband, the late economist and statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., during the period of the outrageous, unjust judicial assault against him. Mr. LaRouche many times identified the work of scientist and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa as not only a significant theologian of the 15th Century, but more importantly, as the founder of modern science.

Nicholas of Cusa

“Who is there, who will not be enthralled to the highest degree, when he attentively reflects upon this?” says Nikolaus Cusanus in enraptured enthusiasm in the 19th chapter of *De Visione Dei*. Cusanus continues, “Thou, my God, dost reveal unto me, poor human, one such mystery ..., that to see Thee means at once to be united with Thee.” Indeed, although this work is probably the most difficult among the theological-philosophical writings, it is also written in such a gripping way, that a sympathetic reader can not avoid



Master of the Life of the Virgin

Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, 1401-1464. Proceeding from the principled unity of faith and knowledge leads to a fundamental insight into the physical and natural laws of the universe.

being drawn into the course of the search for truth, and being seized by a glowing yearning to penetrate this mystery. Nikolaus of Kues’ extraordinary pedagogical gift, for drawing his readers and students upwards, poetically, playfully with the aid of the Socratic method, to reach the highest summits of wisdom, here finds a glowing example.

The decision of the Cusanus Society, to publish *De*

Visione Dei, must be considered most appropriate, precisely in this Year of St. Augustine, that is to say, the 1600th anniversary of St. Augustine's conversion to the Catholic faith. Among all the Church Fathers, Nikolaus of Kues [1401-1464] is certainly the most direct successor of Augustine, as may be demonstrated in hundreds of quotations, as well as from their entire shared methodological approach. Furthermore, the problems with which Augustine had to struggle in the period of the collapse of the Roman Empire, are not only related to those with which Nikolaus wrestled after the seizure of Constantinople, but are also very similar to those with which we are confronted today. In Augustine's, as well as at Nikolaus' times, just as in ours, the issue was the most fundamental values of what we call the substance of Western Christian civilization.

Once again, in many places on Earth, blood is being gruesomely shed in most brutal violations of human dignity, under the ostensible flag of religions, while an astounding number of efforts are being made at the same time, to define an ecumenical basis for a lasting peace in this world. But just as in the time of Nikolaus of Kues, the grand and decisive question is upon which principles this ecumenical peace shall exist, upon the highest—and therefore, true—principles, or upon the lowest common denominator, which eradicates precisely those parameters which distinguish true faith from the aberrations of sects and cults of all kinds.

De Visione Dei was written only three months after the work *De pace fidei* (*On the Peace of Faith*) and can indeed be understood as a further development of the ecumenical idea on a higher level. As will be shown, in this work lies the key to the most urgent questions of our time. It defines in a wonderful way a conception for the existential self-conception of the individual human



Cusa was the most direct successor of Augustine, as is evident in their shared methodological approach and in Cusa's many quotations from him. Shown: St. Augustine in His Study by Sandro Botticelli, 1480.

being, and, since it proceeds entirely, in the tradition of Augustine, from the principled unity of faith and knowledge, it thus at once leads to a fundamental insight into the physical natural laws of the universe. Nikolaus here shows us the way upon which we can attain a completeness of our soul, and thus inner peace; and who would want to doubt that precisely in our strife-torn times, this represents a goal which only very few people even know how they might attain. This inner peace, which can issue only from the agreement of human practice with the ordering of divine Creation, is at the same time the only basis upon which peace in the world can ultimately be founded.

Awakening the Creative Power

At the beginning of *De Visione Dei*, Nikolaus writes a dedication to the Benedictine monks at the Tegernsee [Abbey], and only when one has studied the entire work through to its end, does one understand how rigorously this work is composed throughout its parts, and that, in a certain way, the result and the goal of the *manductio*, the didactic explication of ideas, and thus the resolution of the mystery, already rings through in the dedication. It lends itself perfectly to comparison with a great classical composer, who, after having composed an entire symphony, as a prelude so to speak, sets those notes still at the beginning, which contain the key to the composition as a whole.

This key, the significance of which only becomes evident after study of the entire work, lies in the following passages of Nikolaus:

Thus, I pray especially that the Word from on high, and that omnipotent speech (*sermonem*), which alone can reveal itself, be granted me, in order that I, in accordance with your powers of conception, can represent the Wondrous (*mira-*



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Cusa dedicated his De Visione Dei to the monks at the Tegernsee Abbey, a Benedictine monastery on the shores of Lake Tegernsee in Bavaria, Germany.

bilis), which reveals itself over and above every sensuous, comprehensible, and cognizing vision.

Contrary to today's prevalent, banalized understanding of what prayer actually means, it becomes clear here, that Nikolaus wants to awaken the creative power in himself, which alone he trusts to be capable of introducing the monks into the mystery. That he prays for the Word from on high, may well be so interpreted, that he is thus citing the "word" in the same sense in which he employed it in his Sermon No. 2 (from Christmas 1431), "The Word is become flesh, and dwelt among us," thus he prays to the mystery of eternal birth in God, whereby Nikolaus references the Augustinian explanation of the emergence of the Trinity upon the manifold paths of cognition, and where the divine Logos is understood under diverse names, first of all as an expression of divine self-recognition, consubstantial with the Father.

Since Nikolaus repeatedly bases himself on the Augustinian interpretation, the "Word" can indeed be understood here as the ideal original image of the creation. If thus at the beginning of his argument Nikolaus says that he prays in this sense, this then means nothing

else than that he is appealing for the spark of divine creativity, and thus the power, in which he alone places his trust, that he be capable of communicating his message to the monks in such a powerful way, that it may elevate them to the highest possible level of understanding. It becomes thus clear from the very outset, that "prayer" does not at all mean appealing to God for the success of his efforts, but rather to mobilize within himself, to the point of the highest concentration, that Godlike creative force which alone can lead to recognition of the truth. It is the absorption in and concentration upon our very own most original nature, comparable to the concentration that a pianist or a concert director must achieve in the moment before the performance of a great work.

And further on, Nikolaus announces how, in a plastic way (*experimentaliter*), he will introduce the monks into the mystery, and have them "pre-taste a very delicious sample of that supper of eternal happiness of the soul." That Nikolaus repeatedly employs images of delicious dishes and bodily enjoyments to describe the most profound theological-philosophical conceptions, is not only one of the most lovable traits of his *manductio*, it is furthermore a hint of the resolution of what is announced as a mystery.

Nikolaus says quite clearly that it is his aim, to elevate the monks to the divine in a human way, which evidently presupposes a quite definite self-conception in himself, that is to say, that he be capable of doing this. But since this must occur in a human way, he stipulates, this must occur by way of a simile (*similitudine*), commensurate with human powers of comprehension.

Renaissance Perspective

It is most fascinating, that he chooses for this simile an image of the "All-seeing" in the form of an icon of God, particularly when one takes note of Nikolaus' influence upon the development of perspective in painting, especially upon Luca Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci. He now proposes, to a certain degree as a pedagogical exercise, as an experiment, that this icon be hung upon a wall facing northwards, and furthermore,



Attributed to Jacopo de'Barbari, 1495



Self-portrait

Cusa influenced the development of perspective in painting, especially as seen in the work of Luca Pacioli (left) and Leonardo da Vinci.

that all the brothers gather in an extended semicircle around the icon. Regardless of the angle from which they now behold the icon, it appears to each of them, as if the vision of the icon were directed to him alone. It is obvious, that such an impression can only be mediated by a painting which is painted from the standpoint of concave perspective, thus from the standpoint of a lawfully curved space.

Nikolaus then leads the monks one step further, eliciting in them a self-consciousness: that a simultaneity exists in the relationship of the All-seeing icon to each individual monk, that each is at once beheld by the icon, and that each at once can become conscious that this is also true for all others. And further yet, that everyone who, striding from west to east, for example, or east to west, fixing his vision upon the icon, will notice that the vision of the icon moves with him continually.

While such an idea would surpass the simple powers of imagination of the monk, he can learn, by questioning the other monks, who themselves are also in movement, that the vision of the icon remains upon them all, even if they all move in contrary directions.

He will thus learn, that the immobile countenance moves eastwards, that it at once also moves west-

ward, and thus also to the north, and also to the south, and how it looks upon a particular point, such that it looks upon all at once, and as well upon a single movement, as upon all others at once.

And he continues:

And while he becomes aware that this glance forsakes no one, he sees that the icon's vision takes attentive care of each, as if it concerned itself alone for him who discovers, that he is looked upon just now, and for none other, indeed so much, that no one who beholds the vision of the icon can conceive that the icon concerned itself for anyone else. He will also see that the vision thus cherishes the most attentive concern toward the most insignificant of creatures, as if it were the grandest or the entirety of the universe.

If one now imagines these movements of the monks around the icon in the form of a geometric representation, one obtains a multiply-connected and interlaced manifold, produced by multiple rotations, but in which the resting point commands the same attention as the process of movement itself, as also the totality of rest

and all movement at once. That this idea derives neither from a Cartesian, nor a Newtonian linear conception of space, is already evident from the fact that it is the curved perspective which makes it possible for it to appear at each point, as if he, that is to say, the most humble of creatures, were bequeathed the same attention as the entire universe.

Yet, after Nikolaus has thus generated for the monks not only a self-consciousness of themselves, their relations to each other, but also of the icon to all of them, and therewith an idea of a geometry surely leading beyond the purely sensuous powers of imagination, he now surprises them with the next conceptual step.

The 'Absolute Vision' of God

Cusanus now distinguishes, that is to say, between the simile of the All-seeing icon and the "absolute vision" of God, "theos," so named because his vision surpasses the vision of all others. Whereas vision in the sensuous realm, that act of vision which is bound to space and time of the world, bound to particular objects and other such conditions, thus has an existence bounded by virtue of its potentials implicated within it; God is, on the contrary, the truly unlimited existence, wholly real. "He is not proportionally (*improportion-aliter*) more perfect." The sensuous appearance, therefore, of an icon can less approximate the supreme perfection of absolute vision than the notion." Nikolaus here establishes, that the reality of God represents a far higher principle than the manifold relation in the simile of the All-seeing icon, but that this simile has its usefulness nevertheless, because the geometrical projection downwards, adapted to a certain degree to the human senses and human powers of imagination, represents a more complex reality.

In Chapter 2 of *De Visione Dei*, Nikolaus then draws out the point further:

Yet that vision unfettered of all constraints (*visus ... absolutus*) thus encompasses the most appropriate measure and the truest original image of all powers of vision at once, and all modes of vision and each individual one. Without absolute vision, there can indeed be no bounded potential vision.

And regardless of the different subjective ways of beholding or contemplating God, it cannot be different,

by virtue of the "supreme simplicity" of God, although for one or another reason we may assign to God this or that name. For in spite of the diverse characteristics one may attribute to God, He is the "absolute ground of meaning, in which all otherness (*alteritas*) is unity, and every diversity (*diversitas*) is sameness."

After Nikolaus has thus for the first time provided a definition of God, which demonstrates the inadequacy of all definitions themselves, he has at once touched more closely upon the mystery. In God, the simplest of implied potentials coincides with the absolute, all otherness is unity, and each diversity is sameness. How should the poor human understanding, with its potentials only implied and awaiting actualization, solve such a puzzle?

And now, just at this most precarious point, we may well be filled with wonder to see how Nikolaus in his *manductio* leads the monks one enormous step further. He challenges them once again to reflect upon the simile of the icon of God, and to let themselves be stimulated to speculation. But then he says, surprisingly: "Thou art challenged to say: 'Lord, now I behold Thy providence in Thine image in a form of sensuous experience' ..., " and from this passage onwards, the work takes on the form of a prayer, in such a way, in fact, that it *is* such both for Nikolaus, as well as for the monks. He has thus succeeded in achieving what he had prayed for in the dedication, that he might have the power to elevate the monks to his highest point of view, and then he displays to them the simile of implied potential absolute infinity commensurate with sensuous experience, contrasts this then to the actual notion of absolute infinity, and leads the monks yet further, to dialogue, as he himself does, in a direct prayer with God.

The power of recognition proceeds initially from God.

In no way, Lord, by any idea, dost Thou permit me to entertain (*concupere*) the thought, that Thou, Lord, lovest anything else more than me, for Thy vision never foresakes me.... And didst Thou turn Thy countenance from me, it were impossible that I should continue to exist. Yet I know that Thy vision is the supreme beneficence, which can do no other than impart itself to him who is capable (*capax*) of receiving it. Thou wilt thus never be able to forsake me, as long as I remain capable for Thee. It thus be-

hooves me, so far as I am able, to be always more receptive for Thee.

Human Freedom and the Ecumenical Principle

Thus, what is derived here from the simile of the icon—the geometrically founded equality of intensity with which even the humblest of living creatures is contemplated, as well as the universe as a whole—is nothing else than the wonderful definition of human freedom, by virtue of which each individual person is capable of partaking in God, but it is his own decision, whether he remains receptive, and makes every effort to become more so. Nikolaus here not only establishes the potential equality of all people (and of the humblest of creatures) in natural law, but he also lays anew therewith the foundation of the ecumenical principle, upon which alone a unification of all religions can occur.

Divine providence is thus by no means meant in that Calvinist sense, in which the material success of a person on Earth represents the proof of that person's being one of the chosen people, entirely independent of the question of how morally or immorally that person behaves.

Quite to the contrary, divine providence is potential and challenge:

I know, however, that the preparedness, which provides unity (with Thee), is nothing else than similitude. The incapacity to receive, on the other hand, issues from dissimilitude. If I make myself thus similar to your beneficence in every possible way, I shall be capable of receiving Truth in correspondence to the levels of similitude.

Here Nikolaus voices one of the most evident truths, to wit, that the question of intelligence is ultimately a moral question. If a person refuses to draw responsible consequences from something he recognizes, and thus makes himself “dissimilar” to the required task, he will close his ears and comprehend nothing. Moral dissimilitude always leads to an incapacity to be intellectually receptive.

Similitude, on the other hand, leads to ever growing comprehension.

This power, which I have from Thee, and in which I possess a living image (*vivam imag-*

inen) of the power of Thy almightiness, is the free will, through which I am capable of either increasing or reducing the capacity to receive Thy beneficence. I can increase it by becoming more similar: if I strive to be good, because Thou art good; if I strive to be just, because Thou art just; if I strive to be charitable, because Thou art charitable.

Since Nikolaus clearly describes the lawfulness of creation of the universe in many other places in his works as a negentropic process of development, in which one species passes over into the next highest through the full accentuation of all of its potentials, because it participates thus in the higher species, the concept of the living image of the almightiness of God has a meaning which should be understood in the same sense here. To become more similar to God, and to be his living image, that is to say, likewise creative, means nothing else than to bring one's own identity into ever greater accordance with the ordering of creation of the universe.

Up to this point in his *manductio*, Nikolaus has indeed chosen various pedagogical steps to lead the understanding of the monks (and of the reader) step by step closer to the mystery, but he has done this essentially by an appeal to reason, even in those places where he chose comparisons drawn from the area of sensuous experience. But now, once again in an utterly surprising way, he introduces the commensurate emotional qualities, and it becomes clear that the issue of God's vision is by no means a dry academic affair.

And what, Lord, is my life, but the embrace with which Thy delightful love so lovingly receives me! I love my life to the highest, because Thou art the delight of my life.

Thus, it is now stated that it is love which is the emotional quality making human beings similar to God, and it is love, which permits human beings to love their own lives. Indeed, this love imparts a feeling of delight, that is to say, it is free, grand, and beautiful. And if once a person has approximated his original image, if he can bear, that God “never ceases to contemplate me lovingly into the innermost of my soul,” if the person thus has nothing to hide, nor a bad conscience, which would make such an uninterrupted contemplation into the innermost of the soul something unpleas-

ant to him, or even intolerable, it is then that human life first properly begins.

And Thy vision is nothing but that which brings everything to life, none other than a permanent inspiration of love of Thee, which bring me the greatest of blessings, none other than that which enkindles in me love of Thee, and through the inspiration of love, through the enkindling, there is nourishment, through nourishment are my yearnings inflamed, and through this inflaming, I am steeped with the dew of joy, and through this steeping, I am inspired with the well-spring of life, and through the inspiration, there is a multiplication, creatures are bequeathed with existence, and Thy immortality is imparted unto them.

‘The Garden of All Delights’

Nikolaus defines this imparting of the capacity to participate in God as the “garden of all delights,” in which even the absolutely greatest perfection could not be greater than the entirety of intellectual yearning (*desiderii rationalis*). The fascinating feature here, evidently, is that the Cardinal employs the highest of emotions, which people usually associate with sensuous attributes, such as love, yearning, delight, etc., to the realm of partaking in God. And indeed, if one has once worked in a truly creative way, and concerned himself for no other value than the truth, who would not have already himself felt, that these intellectual pleasures are truly more delightful than all of the things which do not dwell in this highest realm? The joy of truly creative discovery, a joy which never loses its childlike innocence, it is what “makes the heart overflow,” expands it, and so enhances the creative potential of a person.

The vision of the absolute ground of meaning, which is the ground of meaning of everything,

is furthermore nothing else than to enjoy (*gustare*) Thee, God, in mind (*in mente*), for you are the sweetness itself of being, of life, and of cognition.

This vision, which is at once a tasting, is no simple relationship of a subject to an object. For God, symbolized by the icon which sees everywhere with the same intensity, is ever present and omnipresent. It instead depends on the individual person alone, on whether he severs himself and, by turning toward something else, prefers to deprive himself of the delicious taste of seeing the absolute ground of meaning.

The more the human being, however, contemplates the countenance of God, the more it appears to him, that the concentration of God’s eyes is ever more penetratingly directed upon him, which means nothing else than that the absolute simplicity, and likewise the growing complexity, of this vision become ever clearer to him.

God’s vision, his countenance, is at once free (*absoluta*) of all limitations of implied potential of particular existence, it is the absolute form, which is the countenance of countenances. And without losing this characteristic of the absolute, it yet imparts itself unto human beings to that degree of intensity, which the human being himself demands by his devotion to this countenance.

Thus he who beholds Thee with a loving countenance, [says Nikolaus,] will discover nothing else than Thy countenance, which contemplates him lovingly. And the more he shall attempt to behold Thee with greater possible love, all the more full of love will he find Thy countenance. He who unwillingly beholds Thee, shall find Thy countenance in the like way. He who beholds Thee in joy, shall find Thy countenance as joyful as is his, which beholds Thee.



Anonymous drawing of Nicholas of Cusa, from the sculpture on his tomb in Rome.

But how does Nikolaus guide his reader now to comprehend what the absolute form, the “countenance of countenances” is? He does this once more by producing self-consciousness in the beholder, by having him contemplate the same countenance through the eyes of many different creatures. He thus says:

The human being can judge in no other way than humanly. If the person ascribes to Thee a countenance, he will not seek this countenance outside of the human species, because his judgement is bounded (*contractum*) within the human species, and in judging this, he steps outside the deficiency of this bound. Thus, a lion, were he to ascribe to Thee a countenance, would see it in no other way than as lion-like; a cow, as cow-like; and an eagle, as eagle-like.

Oh Lord, how wonderful is Thy countenance, that a youth, if he wanted to form a notion of it, would imagine it as youthful, a man, as that of a man, and a venerable old man, as that of a venerable old man.

What a pedagogical genius Cusanus is! He makes it possible for every beholder to find his individual access to the countenance, by explaining that it is natural for everyone to believe that he recognizes in the countenance features similar to his own. And his images from the realm of animals are as insightful as they are humorous, for anyone who knows how to observe animals will immediately agree, that each species looks upon the world as if it were only to be understood from their point of view.

But how is the form of all formed countenances to be understood? It is absolute beauty itself, which grants to every beautiful form its existence. This countenance of countenances, however, is not beheld unconcealed, “as long as one does not proceed beyond all countenances into a kind of mystery and hidden silence, where there is no knowledge (*scientia*) and no concept (*conceptus*) of a countenance.”

But it is still too early to reveal the mystery. Part of the aim of Nikolaus’ *manductio* is really to awaken the curiosity of the monks, as well as the reader, about what this so mysterious knowledge might be. But he continues in ever new similes to approach the resolution.

It is the all-surpassing light, to which darkness

(*caligo*) lends certainty. It is the walnut tree, which in respect of its force (*virtualiter*), is already completely contained in the seed. Neither the seed of the nuts, nor all of the trees are at any time fully developable, they are nevertheless bounded in implicated potential, for only in this nut form can they develop their force. If thus I see the tree in the seed, I yet see it only in a force which is bounded in implicated potential, [Nikolaus argues further].

So, even the never fully exhaustible force of the seeds of the trees, and ultimately all diverse kinds of trees in their force of causality, are more than a force bounded by its implicated potentials.

Beyond such force of bounded implicated potential, there is the absolute, all-surpassing force, which lends to every seed power such a force; it is the original ground (*principium*), the cause (*causa*), which represents the cause of all effects (*effectui*) in an enfolded and absolute way. And the human being recognizes the principle common to all of the effects caused, he contemplates each walnut tree not in terms of its limited seed-force, but rather in respect to the creative cause of every seed-force. God is thus not only the countenance of all countenances, but rather the absolute power which effects everything, and thus the nature of all natures.

In an apparently very simple way, Cusanus leads the reader toward an ever more complex consideration, and finally employs once again the dialogue form of prayer to bring the reader even closer to the subject:

Oh, God, whither hast Thou led me, that I see: Thy absolute countenance is the natural countenance of every nature, the countenance which is the absolute being in existence of every existence, the art and the knowledge of everything knowable.

To know everything knowable? What enticement for every human being hungering after knowledge; and who is there, who has followed Nikolaus in his discussion thus far, who would not hunger for knowledge?

Thus, he who is worthy of beholding Thy countenance, sees everything openly, to him nothing remains hidden. Such a one knows everything. He, Lord, hath everything, who hath Thee.

‘I Am to Myself My Own’

While the dialogue now reaches a great intensity alone in respect of its form, as Nikolaus now lists crucial questions as to how this delightful condition to know everything knowable might be achieved, the voice of God surprisingly answers from within him:

Be thee thine, and I shall be thine!

At the discovery, that this possibility can be a certainty, Nikolaus now rejoices:

Oh Lord, delight of all sweetness,
Thou hast laid it in my freedom, that
I am to myself my own (*mei ipsius*),
if I only will.

The human being is thus a free person, and not a “slave of sins,” if he is himself. But he is only free, when he is indeed himself, but at once devoted to God, the Father, in childlike love. If the Father is denied, human beings cease to be children. Then they are not free either “in their own perfection of powers,” but rather go “into a foreign land”; they come into a “sinister bondage under a prince, who is opposed to Thee, O God.”

Here we have an immensely modern approach. The person, who develops the potential (*virtualiter*) with which he is endowed to the extent of his powers, is free, or as one would say today, “inner directed.” On the other hand, he who surrenders his own destiny to other forces is not free, or, as one would say today, is “other directed.” The person has thus surrendered his own freedom just when he acts “in his own perfection of powers,” or as one would say today, if he merely satisfies his own needs. It is therefore in our own hands, if we “squander freedom and our best knowledge for the sake of the corrupted desires of the senses,” for then “we lose in being,” as Cusanus says in another place.

Lyndon LaRouche.

As if Nikolaus had intended, by revealing the dangers of a freedom wrongly understood, to clear away additional barriers to a still more profound understanding of the puzzle, he now introduces his standpoint, which one could call a relative conception of



Lyndon and Helga LaRouche in 1986.

EIRNS/Philip Ulanowsky

time. To this purpose, he chooses the image of reading and comprehending the content of all books written, and still to be written. The individual person requires a certain time to comprehend the content in temporal succession. God, however, has read them all at once from eternity, and yet reads each of them also in succession, regardless of whether he reads quickly or slowly, so that it seems as if “Thou wouldst read in time, because Thou readst together with them who read.”

But it is not only the conception of time which is relativistic, it is also the optical perception, for the angle of God’s eye has no quantitative limit, it is infinite, a circle, indeed even an “infinite sphere.” His vision is *oculus sphericitatis*, everything around him he sees at once “from above” and “from beneath.”

In the power of God’s vision, which is indeed symbolized by the icon, the universal thus “coincides” with the particular. But one would need to see the way God sees to understand this correctly. If the person thus beholds, as if with the eyes of God, the human being in all persons wherever they may be, whether they are in motion or at rest, then he understands, that the person can only exist in his bounded potential, because “God as the original image of all persons, and as a person who is by virtue of himself (*homo per se*), which means as the absolute person, endows all other persons with existence.” God is thus the essence of es-

sences “which grants to all bounded essences to be that, which they are.”

The Coincidence of Opposites

Once more, Nikolaus employs the image of the icon to circumscribe the goal of his *manductio* with yet greater intensity. The vision of the icon moves together with all those who move, and rests with all those who are at rest, and is yet at once highly sublime and unfettered from all these images. And now Cusanus introduces the notion capable of resolving the opposites, the “falling into one of opposites,” because the person would have to seek the truth there where he meets with impossibility. But precisely there is God, absolute necessity. God as absolute necessity? After all the intellectual struggle in which Nikolaus has had his reader take part, he now grants him a brief pause to catch his breath, by formulating a thought central to his entire discussion.

Thus have I found the place at which Thou canst be found unconcealed. It is surrounded by the coincidence of opposites. It is the wall of paradise, within which Thou dost dwell. Its gates are guarded by the supreme spirit of Reason (*rationis*). If this is not conquered, the way will not be open.

It is thus on the other side of the coincidence of opposites, that Thou shalt be seen, by no means on this side. If, therefore, impossibility is necessity in Thy sight, then there is nothing, which Thy vision doth not see.

Thus, and this has by no means been understood in times thereafter, God is not the principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. This principle is rather the wall which encompasses paradise, which absolutely divides this side, where God can not be seen, from the other side, where He can be experienced and comprehended.

At the moment in which the person reaches the threshold of the entrance to Paradise, he suddenly grasps that God’s conception (*concipere*) is “the entirely simple eternity itself,” after which (*post*) nothing can come into being, and which accordingly must encompass everything.

The infinite duration (*duratio*) thus, which is eternity itself, encompasses every succession (of things which come into being) (*successio*).

God, therefore, is in paradise, and the unity, which is at once absolute eternity, is the Non-Other. The wall, however, is the coincidence, the falling-into-one, where the later falls into one with the earlier, and the end with the beginning, just as multiplicity falls together with unity. It is the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites, but not unity itself.

And thus is the creation, which proceeds from God, unfolding into multiplicity and enfolding into simplicity, but God himself is neither enfolding nor distinguishing (*disiunctive*), nor a connecting (*copulative*) which is folding outward. While the wall of coincidence is at once a distinction and a connection, God is beyond it, “unfettered by anything which can be spoken or thought.” But how should this be understood, if that wall is so high, that “no inventive mind” (*ingenium*) can climb it on its own power?

Nikolaus goes even so far as to call this problem, which is posed to the intellect, the wall of absurdity (*absurditatis*)—“as if it were impossible, that creating and being created coincided.” But he then immediately explains, that just on this point there is no contradiction, for “Thy creation is just Thy existing.” And Cusanus finally reaches the goal of his *manductio*:

As long as I conceive the Creator as creating activity, I am still on this side of the wall of paradise. So am I (also) if I conceive the Creator as creatable; I have not yet entered but I am at the wall. By when I see Thee as absolute infinity, to whom neither the name of a creating nor of a creatable Creator belongs, then I begin to behold Thee unconcealed, and to enter the ‘Garden of Delights.’ ... Thou art therefore not the Creator, rather infinitely more than the Creator, although without Thee nothing comes into being, nor can come into being.

The Comprehension of Actual Infinity

On the background of these astounding sentences, it now becomes meaningful to recall the various interpretations of a conception of God, which the contemporaries and the philosophical schools had in the period when Nikolaus wrote down these formulations, schools ranging from the Peripatetics, the scholastics, and particularly the successors to William of Ockham, for whom the very idea of a continuously creating Creator was by no means self-evident. But here Nikolaus places him who understands the Creator “only” as creating,

outside the wall of Paradise, for he comprehends God and Creation only from the standpoint of the Understanding. If, however, the person comprehends God as creatable, then he finds himself “at” the wall; he thus at least knows of its existence, as well as of the existence of a higher truth behind the wall which surrounds Paradise, and, in Cusanus’ philosophy, this is the level of Reason.

But this is indeed quite an astounding thought—to conceive of God, the Creator, as creatable, and to posit this idea as higher than that of a merely creating God! For if the Creator is also creatable, who and what then participates in this process of creation? The state of mind which, for Cusanus, surpasses the Understanding and Reason, is precisely vision, or the vision of God—*de visione Dei*. If God is understood as infinitely more than the Creator, the person then sees him unconcealed, he steps into the “Garden of Delights.”

The vision of God, or entering the Garden of Delights, however, is not a passive condition. And a paradox apparently opens up once more; God is the goal of the effort, which one only reaches, if one climbs



“For William of Ockham and his successors, the idea of a continuously creating Creator was by no means self-evident.” —Helga Zepp-LaRouche

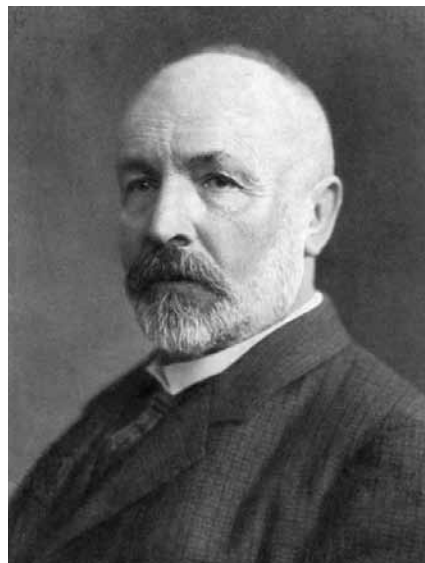
beyond the goal. But that means nothing else than that the limit of what is possible is broken through, that “capable-of-becoming coincides with capable-of-doing, and that potential coincides with actuality (*actus*),” says Nikolaus.

The comprehension of actual infinity as the creative principle is thus the mystery, which is hidden within the wall of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. With this step in his thinking, Cusanus has conceptualized the lawfulness of the principle of the development of the physical universe in a way that he holds his ground on all questions posed by modern natural sciences. Comprehension of this issue at once represents the conceptual breakthrough, which made Cusanus into the father of modern natu-

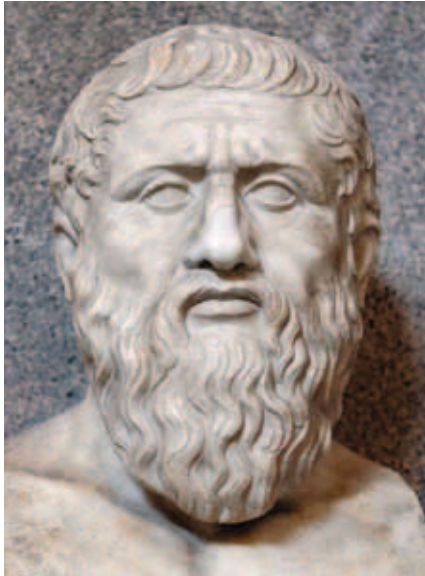
ral sciences, and upon which Leibniz, Cantor, Riemann, and LaRouche built.

As Nikolaus was working out this concept of actual infinity, he was thoroughly aware of the philosophical tradition of his thinking. Thus he writes straightforwardly in Chapter 14 of *De Visione Dei*:

That infinity is absolute infinity, follows, since



Cusa conceptualized the lawfulness of the development of the physical universe, making him the father of modern natural sciences, a concept built upon by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (left), Georg Cantor (center), Bernhard Riemann (right), and Lyndon LaRouche.



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Cusa chose the person of Socrates to explain the creative principle, which Plato called *hypothesizing the higher hypothesis*. For it is the Socratic method of thinking, alone, which makes creative thinking possible. Shown: A bust of Plato, and a depiction of Socrates teaching.

the one cannot be the other, just as the essence of Socrates encompasses the whole of Socratic existence. In this simple Socratic existence there is no otherness or diversity. The existence of Socrates is the individual unity for everything which is in Socrates, so that the existence of everything which is in Socrates is folded into one in this single existence, that is to say, into individual simplicity, in which nothing other or different can be found. Yet more, in this one single existence there is everything which has Socratic existence, and is encompassed by him.

The Socratic Method

It is extremely important that Cusanus here chooses the person of Socrates to explain the creative principle. For it is the Socratic method of thinking itself, which alone makes creative thinking possible. It is the thinking of hypothesis formation, in which Reason forms a series of hypotheses which become ever more adequate, which then, tested in reality, lead to a successively ever deeper and more complex understanding of the lawfulness of the universe. As such, human Reason can never fully comprehend Truth, rather it can do so to ever greater perfection. The capability of the person, however, which permits him to form this process as a whole, Plato calls the “hypothesis of the higher hy-

pothesis”: it is the generative principle. The Socratic method of thinking, particularly the Socratic dialogues themselves of Plato, has as its purpose putting the reader into the highest constitution of mind, which enables him to think at the level of the hypothesis of the higher hypothesis.

It is obvious, that Nikolaus is speaking about this very point when he speaks of the “simple Socratic existence,” in which there is neither otherness nor diversity. Everything which has Socratic existence is enfolded within this single Socratic existence. Socratic existence is nothing else than the capacity for adequate hypothesis formation.

That Nikolaus of Kues speaks of Socrates at this place in his *manductio*, when he has already brought the reader very near to understanding the mystery hidden within the wall of the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), is at once a complete rejection of Aristotle and the peripatetic school of his time. For *De Visione Dei* was finished on November 8, 1453, and, as is known, Nikolaus had already published his *Apologia Docta Ignorantia* (*A Defense of Learned Ignorance*) in October 1449, that is, about five years earlier.

In this work Nikolaus formulated a final crushing polemic against Aristotelian epistemology, which itself proceeds from the absolutely contrary principle,

the principle of non-coincidence. Aristotle called the axiom of impossible contradiction “the surest of all principles.”

In the *Apologia*, which was the answer to the “refutation” written by Johannes Wenck against his *Docta Ignorantia*, Nikolaus did not mince his words.

Since at this time the Aristotelian sect is dominant, which holds the coincidence of opposites to be a heresy, while in the admission of this principle lies precisely the beginning of an ascent to mystical theology, they who have grown up in this sect refuse this way as completely senseless. It is rejected as a way contrary to their intentions. It would therefore be tantamount to a miracle—just as if it were a transformation of the school—were they to dare the leap to greater heights, while rejecting Aristotle.

This is speaking plainly, to be sure. Nikolaus holds the Aristotelians to be a sect, and even says, that they “intentionally” pursue a contrary goal, and especially, that it is precisely Aristotelian thinking itself, which makes the achievement of “greater heights” impossible. If one considers the subsequent history of science down to today, one must all the more admire the precision with which Nikolaus of Kues identified the barrenness and impotence of Aristotelian thinking.

He made clear in the *Apologia* how little he esteemed it, when he commented on the fact, that Johannes Wenck had been given the volumes of *Docta Ignorantia* at all, saying:

We know, too, that our Lord Christ taught this, for he forbade throwing pearls, which is a simile for the kingdom of God, before swine, which have no understanding.

Absolute infinity as absolute unity is, of course, a notion which can only be thought within the philosophical tradition of Plato, Augustine, and Cusanus. But for Nikolaus, especially, it is the center of that which constitutes his Christian theory of evolution. Nikolaus had a most modern concept of the development of the physical universe, in which he not only distinguished between inorganic and organic matter, and, finally, human beings as beings endowed with Reason. He also posited the transition of each lower

species into the next higher species, as a process through which each fully accentuated the potentials with which it is endowed, then, at the highest point, to push upwards toward the next higher species, and thus to participate in it.

The same also holds for human beings: since they are the highest species, beyond which only God exists, the person can only fully develop his potential as a human being, insofar as he partakes in God. Now, how does this process of partaking (*capax Dei*) occur?

Thou showst Thyself, Oh God, in the humility of Thine infinite beneficence likewise as a creature, that we be thus drawn toward Thee. Thou drawst us toward Thee indeed in every possible way, in which the free creature of Reason can be drawn. Thereby, Oh God, in Thee coincideth the process-of-being-created with the process of creating.

How had Nikolaus expressed it earlier? As long as the person comprehends the Creator as a being which creates, he finds himself still outside the wall; once he comprehends Him as capable of being created, then he is at the wall, but not yet within Paradise. Thus, in God, both become one, and indeed in such a way that the person who is drawn to God partakes of Him.

The similitude (*similitudo*) which appears to be created by me, is, to wit, the truth which creates me.

The Triune God

After Nikolaus has now advanced yet a step closer to the mystery of Creation in this way, having seen the truth unconcealed to a certain extent for a brief moment, he interrupts his *manductio* as he had earlier, to break out into infinite jubilation over the “incomprehensible sweetness,” which he has begun to taste. But the growing enthusiasm over the recognition of God goes hand in hand with that modesty worthy of love, so that at this point, where the magnificence of God has become more clear to him than ever before, Nikolaus calls himself “little man” (*homuncio*), which does not make him feel small, however, but rather fills him with yet greater joy.

Once Nikolaus has permitted the reader once again a moment of reflection and self-consciousness, he in



“Only as triune can God be completely seen.” —Nicholas of Cusa. Shown: *The Holy Trinity*, a fresco by Raphael and Perugino. In the upper panel, Christ, the Son, is seated, flanked by saints and angels; the Holy Spirit is represented by the dove above his head; the image of the Father at the top is lost through deterioration, except for His attribute, the open book showing alpha and omega. The fresco is in the Chapel of San Severo, Perugia, Italy.

turn leads him one step further, and says: “Only as triune can God be completely seen.” And, as in so many places in his work, he defines the trinity of God in a more profound way, one less liable to be misunderstood, than is often understood in the definition as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God as infinitely loving (*amans*) is at once infinitely worthy of being loved (*amabilis*), and out of both, God’s capacity to love to an infinite degree, and his worthiness to be loved to an infinite degree, there grows the infinite bond of love (*amoris nexus*). God is thus the trinity of loving love, of love worthy of being

loved, and the bond between loving and love worthy of being loved. They are three, that is to say, the loving one, the one worthy of being loved, and the bond, but at the same time they are the simple absolute essence of God. “It is thus a triune essence; and yet, there are not three in it, since it is entirely simple.”

God is infinite love, and therefore he cannot hate. But it depends upon individual persons, whether they love God or not. God’s beneficence allows it to lie in the “freedom of the soul endowed with Reason” of people, to love Him or not. It is therefore only within the dictatorship of Reason that freedom is possible.

Nikolaus also defines God as the process of cognizing, or knowing, which also recognizes itself, as that cognizing which is capable of recognizing itself, and the connection of both; and since this is so, the created recognition (knowledge) of human beings can achieve unification with God who can be recognized, and that is what happiness of the soul is.

For he who receives God, the receivable light of the spirit, will be able to achieve such a unification with Thee, that he is united with Thee as the Son is with the Father.

The reader who has followed Cusanus up to this point, and who has been prepared to a certain extent step-by-step to behold the unconcealed truth, surely has a very different constitution of mind than at the beginning, when Nikolaus asked him to imagine the image of the icon. In a pedagogically unique way, Nikolaus has fulfilled the promise he made at the beginning, drawing his reader gently and continuously up to his standpoint.

The sentence: “For he who receives God, the receivable light of the spirit, will be able to achieve such a unification with Thee, that he is united with Thee as the Son is with the Father,” contains such a condensed statement, that, without the *manductio*, its full content

could probably be understood only by very few. What is said here is nothing less than that God is receivable, and a unification with Him is possible.

In the trinity of God, more often defined as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the created God is the absolute mediator, who binds God to men, since He is at once entirely God and entirely human. And since the Son is no less God than is the Father, Nikolaus says:

Thus Thou, God, worthy of love, art the Son of the loving God, of the Father; for upon Thee doth the goodwill of the Father rest (cf. *Mark* 1:11). So is all created existence enfolded into Thee, God, worthy of love.

And further,

For Thy conception is the Son, and everything is ‘in Him.’ (*Col.* 1:17) And the unity of Thee and Thy conception is the reality and originating activity, in which is the reality and unfolding of all.

The trinity is thus nothing else than the principle of creation, it is that which effects the development of the physical universe, for it is “originating activity.” And the connecting bond which unifies the process of conceiving and the conception, for Nikolaus, is called “spirit” (*spiritus*).

The spirit is, to wit, like a movement, which issues forth from the moving and the moved. The movement thus unfolds the conception of the moving one.

The person of Christ is thus the mediator, He is both absolutely united with God, as well as absolutely the Son of man. Through Him, human beings can fully partake of God, if they want to. It depends upon the person himself, whether he wants this unification of human nature, and through the person of Christ, this unification is “nothing else than the greatest possible drawing of human nature toward the divine, in such a way, that human nature as such can not be drawn any higher.”



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The birthplace of Nicholas of Cusa (Nikolaus von Kues) in Kues, Germany

The ‘New Man’: *Homo Spiritualis*

The mystery hidden behind the wall of the coincidence of opposites is thus nothing else than the key to one’s own creative powers as a person who identifies with Christ. For He is “the connection of divine nature which is creative, with human nature which is created.”

Only if the person thus lives in the succession of Christ, and overcomes the “old man” of arrogance, the *homo animalis* in himself, and becomes a “new man,” *homo spiritualis*, if he thus acts in accordance with the ordering of creation, then he contributes to a further development of this creation. Then he is a second God, as Nikolaus says in the work, *The Hunt for Wisdom (De venatione sapientiae)*. As the living image of God (*imago viva Dei*), the person is also the living image of the absolute art of the Creator, indeed his soul is the place where the qualitatively new is conceived. Just as the manifolds of the universe are infinitely capable of perfection, so is the human power of cognition which recognizes itself also principally unlimited.

Through Christ and the participation in the divine principle of creation, which thereby becomes possible, the human being can participate far more directly in the conscious further development of the lawfulness of the physical universe than the Socratic method itself permits.

The universe consists of negentropically growing manifolds of ever higher orderings, whose microcosm is human Reason. If the person now recognizes this divine order of creation, at each singularity, that is to say, at the transition from one manifold into the next higher, by his creative efforts he will determine the *terminus speciei* which enables further development. Since these manifolds become ever more complex in the course of evolution and of world history, human Reason must comprehend, in an ever more condensed way, the entire development of the universe in its essential features, since it is only from the standpoint of the totality, that something adequately new can be created.

Nikolaus proceeded from the standpoint that each human individual repeats in his spirit, as microcosm, the entire development of the macrocosm, but then in ever more complex form, the more developed the manifolds become. The human being creates something qualitatively new just when he actualizes absolute infinity in one point, and thus makes it become actual infinity.

It is at this moment, that creating and being created coincide also for human beings, since the actualization of infinity in one point (*terminus speciei*),— in a singularity—means, that the knowledge upon which he bases his creation, must be adequate, that is to say, it must represent the greatest possible approximation to Truth at that time. Through the creative act, the human being extends anew the lawfulness of the universe in a lawful way. But that which he has created becomes at once part of himself. At this moment, he approaches the divine in the closest possible way, he is a living image of God, in which creating and being created coincide. He is not identical to God, but yet he is one with Him.

Everyone who has been able to follow Nikolaus in his *manductio*, will agree with him when he remarks upon this recognition in the words already cited: “Who is there, who will not be enthralled (*rapiter*) to the highest degree, when he attentively reflects upon this?” And we must indeed agree with Cusanus, that to know the Creator means to become united with him.

But the point at which the further creation of the universe must occur is not fortuitous. Thus, Nikolaus says:

Divine knowledge (i.e., recognition) is necessity itself (*necessitas*), neither dependent nor in need of anything. But everything is in need of it. Without it, nothing can exist.

Neither is the point at which creation must occur fortuitous, nor is the further development itself. The physical universe, Creation, is a process of negentropic development of higher orderings. Knowledge of this process means at once the necessity to actively contribute to this development. That means nothing else than that creation is necessary.

The human being who so acts, represents the highest possible “perfection of spiritual beauty.” And if Nikolaus here equates creativity with beauty, that then is the moment in which he anticipates the most important ideas of Friedrich Schiller, or, the other way around, in which Schiller will think like Cusanus.

For Schiller, it is uniquely the beautiful soul of the genius, which extends lawfulness in a lawful way, and thereby is free.

A beautiful soul is the human being who has not only developed his mind to the level of Reason, but has also developed his emotions such, that he can surrender himself to them without hesitation, without ever running the danger of violating Reason in this way. A beautiful soul, a genius, is the human being who does what is necessary with joy and passion.

And for Nikolaus, too, the highest state of mind is no dry, academic affair, as he lays out the full richness of delicacies in the most diverse images, a wealth in which that human being who has chosen the most noble of delicacies participates.

Who can dissuade a bear from honey, once he has tasted of its sweetness? How great that sweetness of Truth is, which grants the most delightful life over and beyond all the sweetness of the body! For it is the absolute sweetness, from which everything issues, which is desired by every taste.

Who could entertain any doubt that the ideal of humanity which Nikolaus poses to us, is capable of overcoming the fragmentation of modern man and reestablishing the unified human being within us?

Again and again there have been great people who have brought the world into order for many generations, through the power of their minds and the courage of their ideas.

What could be more fitting to celebrate the day honoring such a person, than to reflect upon the grand and beautiful ideas of another such person?