

**NICHOLAS OF CUSA'S
METAPHYSIC OF CONTRACTION**

by

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On p. 93, line 18 of the Latin text, “*qua*” has been corrected to “*quae*”.

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CHAPTER FIVE

91 THE GIFT OF THE FATHER OF LIGHTS by Nicholas of Cusa

Although the dimness of my intelligence is already known to Your Paternity,¹ nonetheless by careful scrutiny you have endeavored to find in my intelligence a light. For when during the gathering of herbs there came to mind the apostolic text in which James indicates that every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights,² you entreated me to write down my conjecture about the interpretation of this text.

I know, Father, that you have a firm grasp of that which has been written by the most learned theologians but that I have read very little of their writings. Thus, I would rightly be ashamed were I to be unaware of the soundness of your mind. Read, then, with a suitable interpretation what my view is.

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1

The most blessed Apostle's intent, it seems to me, was to lead us, by an easy route, unto everything desired. For every intellectual spirit desires to know. For the life of the intellect is understanding, and this is its desired being. But one who is unknowing cannot by his own light ascend unto the apprehension of wisdom. For one who is in need is in need of that which he lacks. Therefore, it is necessary that the one who is in need know he is in need and that he eagerly recur to him by whom his neediness can be met. For example, suppose that someone who is in need of wisdom asks it of Him whose storehouses are fullness of wisdom, who through emptying them increases them, and whose possessiveness is most abundant pouring forth. In that case, he cannot fail to obtain wisdom, which infuses itself into the minds of those who seek it. This is the very deep teaching of most wise Philo,³ who when he endeavored to praise wisdom showed that it enters into the minds of those who seek it. Now, to-ask-for is to seek with the ardent faith, and the confident hope, of obtaining. For, as an honored mother, wisdom will come to meet the one who in fervent pursuit approaches her, whom he does not yet know.

93 But the Apostle, wanting to exclude all error, shows from whom

wisdom (which is a light for our pathways and a lamp for our feet,⁴ as well as the form and life of the soul) is to be asked, when he says “Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above.”⁵ For if every existing thing so thinks itself to be a good that it always desires to be only itself in the best manner compatible with the condition of its nature,⁶ then that whole power which recognizes that that thing exists from the Best recognizes that it exists in the best manner. Therefore, it knows that its own being—whose corruption or whose change into another being outside its own species it never at any time wills—was not given to it by some other [being] which is not from above, not over all things, and not existing in the loftiness of goodness which is in every respect maximal. For example, the human intellect does not believe that its nature could have been given to it by someone whose goodness is not supreme, not from above, and not over every other good; nor would any being find rest in its given nature if the nature were given by a diminished and created good. But because every existing thing received its being from the best and greatest Teacher, than whom no one is higher, it finds rest in its own specific nature as in a best nature from the Best. Therefore, every kind of natural gift in every existing thing is a best gift—according to the judgment of all the things which exist and which find rest in their own being qua best being. Therefore, [every natural gift] is. from above, from Infinite Omnipotence, which has such art and wisdom that it is the most sufficient Formative Power of all things.

- 94 But not every given nature actually attains to the degree of possible perfection of its species; rather, except in the case of our one Lord Jesus Christ, each individual contraction of the species is known to fall short of the ultimate perfection of the actualization of its potency.⁷ Therefore, the intellect (whose potency encompasses everything except the intellect’s Creator) needs, in order to be activated to apprehend, the gift of grace of the Creator. For a rational creature has in itself the discriminating light of reason; but, like the eye of a nocturnal owl, this light is quite weak, and it is dimmed, in this perceptible body, by many shadows. Hence, by the influence of the Divine Word’s spirit [the rational light’s potency] is actualized and its dimness is made bright. For, [by comparison], a student is enlightened by the word of a teacher when the student’s rational power is here or there actualized through the gift of the teacher’s enlightened reason, which is inculcated by means of the breathed word [*verbalis spiritus*]. But

the whole of this actualizing illumination, which is a gift from above, descends from the Father of all gifts; these gifts are lights, or theophanies. In accordance with the nature of his soul Solomon obtained from God a best gift. However, it was not the case that in accordance with this gift his soul was better than the soul of another man; rather, in accordance with the gift of enlightenment he received a soul whose intellectual power ascended—more than in the case of any previous king of the Jews—to actual apprehension. Because he asked for the gift of wisdom, it descended to him from above, from the Father of lights.

Moreover, we see that the power-of-a-seed given by a father of lights, viz., by the sun, does not become actualized unless [this actualization] is caused by the sun. For a tree is not brought forth from the potency of a seed except by the sun's gift—whose gift it also is that this power is present in the seed.

95 Thus, the Apostle wanted to exclude the errors both of those who affirmed that God is the cause of evil and of those who elevated themselves by their own presumptiveness—as if a man, of himself and apart from the Father's gift of grace and His drawing, could attain to apprehending wisdom. [The following] were sins of this kind: that most presumptuous sin (1) of the rational immaterial spirit Lucifer, who attempted to ascend by his own power to the likeness of the Most High, and (2) of the rational embodied spirit of [our first] ancestors, who were hoping that by means of the nourishment from the perceptible food of a tree they would attain unto a divine perfection of knowledge. From these examples we are taught that the actualizing [which is necessary] in order that we may apprehend wisdom (which is both a living light and the glorious quieting of our spirit's desire) cannot come either from ourselves or from lower, perceptible forms of life, but can come [only] from the Father and Giver of forms, who alone has the prerogative of perfecting.

The [Apostle] also undercuts the errors of others, who, having disregarded the Father of lights, asked Minerva, Apollo, Jupiter, and the other gods for assistance. For since the position of all the pagans maintained that there is no creator of all nations except the one infinite God of gods, it showed that every perfect gift is to be asked of Him alone and not of these deified beings (even though they were deified because of their excellences). For on the part of those who have from themselves nothing which they have not received from the Father of all, there can be no capability of giving, since they have nothing which

96 is their own. For every gift, regardless of by whose ministry it is imparted, is from the Father (to whom belongs everything which is), from whom it must descend.⁸ So all our intercessors who have come to possess wisdom request that light be given by the Father of lights. They themselves do not give [light]; rather, [it is given] only [by] Him who is both Giver and Gift.

[All of] the foregoing seems to be [what is] meant by the Apostle, who induces us to constant prayer with very steadfast faith, without any wavering⁹ and in the certainty of obtaining what we hope for, since our Father gives generously and does not reproach.¹⁰ Let these points be stated in this way about the Apostle's meaning.

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Let us further admire the marvelous light that is hidden in the Apostle's words. In order that this light may somehow be disclosed, I shall endeavor to explain, according to my ability, the true meaning of his words. He says "Every best gift . . .," etc. Hence, it seems that every creature is in a certain way God.¹¹ For God alone is maximally good, i.e., best. So if a creature is a best gift, because every creature is exceedingly good, then God, it seems, has been given. For God can give nothing which is not subject to His power. For, necessarily, that which is given is in the power of the giver. Now, [what is] in the power of the Good is good. But the Best, because it is the Best, is only a single, simple, indivisible thing. Therefore, it can give only itself. The Best imparts itself, though not piecemeal; for the Best can be only the Best, since it is all that which it can be. Hence, its maximal goodness and its eternity are its being. Therefore, it imparts itself undiminishedly. Thus, it seems to be the case that God and the creation are the same thing—according to the mode of the Giver *God*, according to the mode of the given *the creation*. Accordingly, there would [seem to] be only one thing, and it would receive different names in accordance with the different modes. Hence, this [one] thing would be eternal in accordance with the mode of the Giver, but it would be temporal in accordance with the mode of the given; and it would be both Creator and created, and so on.

98 Without doubt the foregoing manner of speaking lacks precision; yet, let us look into the correct understanding of the matter. The philosophers maintain that it is form which gives being to a thing.¹² But this statement lacks precision; for there does not [first] exist a

thing to which a form [then] gives being, since whatever exists exists only through a form. Therefore, there does not exist a thing which takes its being from a form; for, [if there did,] this thing would exist before it existed. Rather, a form gives being to a thing in the following sense: in every existing thing the form *is* the being, so that the very form which gives being *is* the being which is given to the thing. Now, God is the Absolute Form of being;¹³ and this is the Apostle's teaching in this passage, for all the being of all things is given by the Father. But the form gives the being. Therefore, God, because He gives being to all things, is the Universal Form of being. Now, because form gives being to every single thing (i.e., the form *is* the being of the thing), God, who gives being, is rightly called by many the Giver of forms. Therefore, God is not the form of earth, of water, of air, of aether, or of any other thing; rather, He is the Absolute Form of the form of earth or of air. Therefore, earth is neither God nor anything else, but is earth; and air is air, aether aether, and man man—each through its own form. For each thing's form is a descent from the Universal Form, so that the form of earth is its own form and not another's—and likewise for the other forms.

- 99 The Apostle expresses the foregoing points to us with admirable subtlety, by saying that the best gift *descends*.¹⁴ It is as if he were to speak [as follows]: The Giver of forms does not give something other than Himself; rather, His gift is best and is His own maximal goodness, which is absolute and in every respect maximum. But it cannot be received as it is given, because the receiving of the gift occurs in a descending manner. Therefore, the infinite is received finitely; the universal, singularly; and the absolute, contractedly. But since such a receiving falls short of the truth of the one who is imparting Himself, it turns toward a likeness and an image, so that it is not the truth of the Giver but a likeness of the Giver.¹⁵ For [one thing] cannot be received in another thing except in a manner other than [it is in itself]. For example, your face, in the course of multiplying from itself a close resemblance [*aequalitas*] of the facial features, is received in a mirror otherwise [than your face is in itself]—according as the mirror (i.e., [according as] the receiving) varies. In the one [mirror the face is received] more clearly, for the mirror-reception is clearer; in another, [it is received] more dimly; but in no [mirror] is it ever [received] as it is. For it will have to be received in something other [than itself] in a manner other [than it is in itself]. There is only one Mirror without flaw, viz., God Himself, in whom [what is received] is received

as it is. For it is not the case that this Mirror is *other* than any existing thing;¹⁶ rather, in every existing thing, it is that which is, for it is the Universal Form of being.

100 Various illustrations help us to grasp the aforesaid. For example, light is a universal form of all visible being, i.e., of all color.¹⁷ For color is the contracted receiving of light, and light is not commingled with things but is received [by them] in a descending manner according to a given grade of descent. Color is the limitation of light in a transparent medium—in accordance with one mode [of limitation] *red*, in accordance with another *blue*. And the entire being of color is given through descending light, so that in all colors light is all that which is. It is the nature of light to impart itself purely and out of its own goodness. But although it gives itself purely when it imparts itself, a diversity of colors arises from the diverse descending receptions of it. Color is not light; rather, it is light received contractedly in the foregoing manner. By means of such a likeness [we see that] as the form of light is related to the form of colors, so God (who is Infinite Light) is related as the Universal Form of being to the forms of created things.

By comparison, the substantial form of Socrates is one, simple, indivisible form. The whole of it is in the whole of Socrates and in each of his parts; through this form Socrates and all that is a part of him exist. For example, the [hand of Socrates] has from the form of Socrates the fact that it is Socrates' hand and not someone else's. But because the hand does not receive the form of Socrates with the simplicity and universality by which this form is the form of Socrates but rather with a particular descending (viz., as such a member), the hand of Socrates is not Socrates. The case is similar as regards the other members.

101 [By way of further illustration:] Our soul is a universal discriminating power for discerning. It is one and simple; and it is present as a whole in the whole [body] and in all its organs, so that in the eye the entire discriminating power is given by the soul, which gives itself to sight. But the eye receives the soul only with a descent, for it does not receive the soul as a universal discriminating power. Accordingly, the eye does not distinguish between audible things or tastable things; rather, it receives the universal power in a restricted way (*contracte*), so that it discerns visible things. The eye is not the soul that sees or discerns; yet, the whole of what discerns in the eye

is the gift of the soul. A similar thing holds true for hearing and the other senses.

[By way of further illustration:] Substantial form entirely gives substantial being. This being is received in a descending manner—viz., quantifiedly, qualifiedly, relationally, actively, passively, situationally, possessingly, spatially, and temporally. For simple oneness is received in nine modes, so that in this way all things are numbered by the number ten.¹⁸ But because [the substantial form] is not received by quantity in a purely substantial way but in a descending manner and with such contractedness [as it has], quantity is not substance, although the entire being of quantity is given by substance.¹⁹ Thus, nothing which is in quantity is *other* than substance; and quantity is quantity of substance. The case is similar with the other accidents.

- 102** From the foregoing [illustrations] our intellect can be helped to enter somewhat into the Apostle's text in order to be able to see how it is that God is the Universal Form of being for all forms—[a Form] which the specific forms receive by way of a descent. [They do] not [receive it] universally and absolutely, as it is and as it gives itself, but [only] with specific contraction. For example, angelicness receives the Universal Form of being in accordance with the descent which is called angelicness. Humanity contracts the Universal Form of being in accordance with the descent which is called humanity. Leonineness participates in the Absolute Form [of being] in accordance with the descent [which is called leonineness]. And although in this way God is all in all, nevertheless humanity is not God. Yet, provided our construal be sound, we can accept Hermes Trismegistus's statement²⁰ that God is called by the names of all things and that all things are called by the name of God, so that a man can be called a humanified god and so that, as even Plato claimed,²¹ this world can be called a perceptible god.²² And since He who worked all things for His own sake²³ is the goal of His own work, He gave *Himself* as perceptible world. Thus, the perceptible world exists for His sake, so that the descending reception-of-Him which turns toward perceptible degrees attains His goodness perceptibly and so that Infinite Light gives light to perceptible things perceptibly and, likewise, to vital things vitally, to rational things rationally, to intelligible things intellectually.

Let these points be stated in this way about this [topic].

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3

Furthermore, I notice how cautiously the Apostle expresses [the view]

- that in the Giver every creature is eternal and is eternity itself.²⁴ For the omnipotence of the Giver coincides with His eternity, for the Omnipotent was always able to give. Therefore, every gift was eternally with the Father, from whom it descends when it is received. For the Giver gave always and eternally; but [the gift] was received only with a descent from eternity. Now, such a descent is a contraction of eternity into duration that has a beginning. This [point] is easily understood provided we consider how it is that a plurality of things descends from eternal reason [*ratio*]. Now, a plurality [of] is a number [of].²⁵ And the Creator's creating is comparable to reason's calculating or numbering. Number, which descends from reason, has a beginning, viz., oneness; but it does not have an end, since it is not the case that there can be posited a number than which no greater number can be posited. Therefore, number is an originated eternity; and absolute reason is absolute eternity. For reason is a cause; and absolute reason, since it is absolute cause, excludes [the possibility] that it itself was originated, or caused. Therefore, the creation descends from eternity, in which it was always present.
- 105**
- 106** But because the eternity which was given was received only contractedly, the beginningless eternity was received with a beginning. Therefore, the world does not have a beginning insofar as in the Father its entire being is eternity;²⁶ but because, with regard to the descent of the world, eternity is received only with a beginning, the world is not absolute eternity but is a contracted eternity that has a beginning. Therefore, the eternity of the world is an originated eternity, and the eternal world is a created world. There is not one world which with the Father is an eternal world and another world which through descent from the Father is a created world. Rather, the very same world [is] without beginning and, by means of a descent, [is] received in its own being²⁷ with a beginning. With the Father the world is not a changeable world but-existing with perpetual stability and in supreme brightness and without any variation of shadow²⁸—is the same as the Father. But as it is received in its own being, in the descent from the Father, it is changeable and fluctuates unstably with variation of shadow. [The situation is] as if the world were a changeable god, with variation of shadow, and the unchangeable world, without any variation of shadow, were the Eternal God. These are intelligible expressions which lack complete precision, although they come close to precision in their manner of imparting an understanding which
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is received regarding God and the world. Nevertheless, the ineffable God is spoken of more precisely by him who maintains that He dwells in light inaccessible²⁹ to the intellect, beyond all affirmation and negation, all positing and removing, all opposition, all change and unchangingness. ([I have written] about this quite extensively elsewhere.)³⁰ And since to speak in this way about the ineffable God is to speak with a speaking which is above all speaking and all silence (where to be silent is to speak), this speaking is not of this world but is of the eternal kingdom. Hence, in accordance with our manner of imparting understandings in this world, the Apostle denies that change and variation of shadow befit God the Father, since He is Eternal Light, in whom there is no darkness.

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4

It now remains for us to ponder [the part of] the Apostle's statement in which he says that God is the Father of lights. He does not say that God is light but that He is the Father of lights; and he denies that the one whom he affirms to be the Father of lights is darkness; rather, He is the Fount of lights. Things which come to our knowledge we affirm to exist; but things which are in no way manifest to us we do not take to exist. Therefore, all things are certain kinds of manifestations, or lights. But because there is [only] one Father and Fount of lights, all things are manifestations of the one God, who, although He is one, can be manifested only through diversity. For how could Infinite Power be manifested in any other way than through diversity?

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[By comparison], a teacher has an intellect which is active, powerful, and operative. It can be manifested only in the diversity of many acts of reasoning.³¹ Accordingly, diverse rational, syllogistic lights descend from such an intellect—which is a father of lights—so that the intellect is thereby manifested. [By way of further illustration:] oneness, the simple beginning of number, is of maximal and incomprehensible power; the manifestation of this power is disclosed only in the diversity of the numbers that descend from it. [Similarly,] the power of a most simple point is incomprehensible; it is made known only in the quantities that descend, as diverse lights, from this very simple point. [Or, similarly,] most simple presentness is an incomprehensible power which can be grasped only in a temporal succession. Now, with respect to number, all things are present in oneness;³² with respect to quantity all things are present in a point; with respect to tem-

poral succession all things are present in the now of the present moment;³⁴ and with respect to whatever all things are or were or can be, all things are present in the infinite power of Omnipotence.³⁵ For our God is absolutely infinite power that is completely actual.³⁶ When because of its natural goodness this Power wills to manifest itself, it causes diverse lights, called theophanies, to descend from itself. In all these lights it makes known the riches of the light of its glory. But this begottenness, which occurs so freely and which has no cause except because of God's goodness, occurs in the Word of Truth. The Word of Truth is Absolute Reason, or Absolute Art; i. e., it is Reason which can be said to be the Light of every reason. In this Light—which is the Father's Word, First-begotten Son, and Supreme Manifestation—the Father of lights has freely begotten all the descending manifestations. Thus, all the manifesting lights were enfolded in the Supreme Power-and-Strength-for-uniting-the-manifestations—just as [there is enfolded] abstract sonship all sonship, howsoever unfoldable, and just as [there is enfolded] in the most universal art everything at all unfoldable through art, and just as [there is enfolded] in absolute reason, or discrimination, all light, no matter how distinguishing.

111 But [the Father] has begotten us in the Word of His eternal Art and Manifestation,³⁷ so that when we receive, by way of a descent, the Light-of-His-disclosing, i.e., His Infinite Word—[receive it] in the manner in which it can be received by us via such a descent—"we are a beginning of His creatures."³⁸ Therefore, the receiving, via a descent, of the disclosing of the Father in the Word brings about a beginning of creatures. For we are a beginning of His creatures by virtue of the fact that in our own way we receive the Word of Truth, in whom [the Father] has begotten us. I have already shown sufficiently that the receiving, by way of a descent, brings it about that the eternal and universal Light becomes a beginning of particular creatures, so that in this way there arise creatures which have a primal beginning in the Word of Truth. Therefore, we are the offspring of God,³⁹ because He has begotten us. But He has begotten us all in the one Son, who is the Word of Truth, in whom He caused us to have a beginning of His creatures.⁴⁰ Just as in the word, form, or art of humanity all men have been begotten in such way that they receive, through the begottenness of the humanity, the fact that they are a beginning of being particular men, so in the begottenness of Universal Truth all that which truly exists was begotten in such way that it is a beginning of the Begetter's creatures. Hence, all existing things exist insofar as they are true,

for what is false does not exist.⁴¹ Therefore, in the eternal begottenness of Truth they were eternally begotten, and as thus [begotten] they *are* the eternal power of Truth.⁴² When they are manifested in a temporal succession, they receive from Truth the fact that they are a beginning of the Begetting Father's creatures. By comparison, the branch of a tree which I see to have just begun in the tree was begotten antecedently in the seed—[begotten] not as a branch but as the seed. For the truth of the branch was present in the truth of the form of the seed. Therefore, the truth of the seed is the truth of the branch. Hence, the truth of [the seed's] power contains the beginning of being something, viz., a branch, which is, as it were, a creature of the seed, from whose power it springs forth. Accordingly, the truth-of-the-branch—which, always being in the truth of the seed, was begotten with the seed—now is manifested, disclosing by its manifestation the power of the seed, its father. Similarly, we see clearly how it is that, in God, the Son is—in accordance with His absolute omnipotence and infinite light—the true disclosing of the Father. But every creature is a disclosing of the Father and participates diversely and contractedly in the Son's disclosing [of Him]. Some creatures disclose Him more dimly, others more clearly—in accordance with a diversity of theophanies, or manifestations of God.

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5

I will add one more [consideration] about the gifts of lights—[a consideration] which ought not to be omitted. The diverse gifts are [gifts] of one divine perfecting Spirit; for God, who is purest actuality, is also infinite perfection. But [what is received] by way of a descent is received not as it is but potentially. For example, it is not the case that by way of the descent of procreation a completed man [*perfectio hominis*] is received from a father; rather, [there is received] a potential man in the father's seed. [Likewise] a tree is not received in the fruit which descends from it; rather, [there is received] a potential tree in the [fruit's] seed. Accordingly, just as the Father begets all things in the Word of Truth, so in the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son all things are perfected. For the Spirit fills—i.e., leads to perfection—the whole world and all things (even those things which have a knowledge of what is spoken).⁴³ All things are present in the Father in a paternal way, in the Son in a filial way, and in the Holy Spirit in a perfected way. In the Father all things have being [*essen-*

tia]; in the Son, possibility; in the Holy Spirit, working. In all things God the Father *is* all things; in all things God the Son *can* all things; in all things God the [Holy] Spirit *works* all things.

- 113** Now, working proceeds from existence and possibility. The Spirit works (1) the perfection of existence in things which exist, (2) the perfection of life in things which are alive, (3) the perfection of knowledge in things which understand. The one Spirit, who is the Blessed God, works all these things in order that every creature, through its perfection and as closely as the condition of its nature permits, may ascend unto deification (i.e., unto the goal of quietude). Shadowy and corporeal being finds rest in living being; living being finds rest in intellectual being; intellectual being finds rest in Truth, which is God. Thus, in this way, all corporeal beings, through the medium of living beings, and all living beings, through the medium of intellectual beings, flow back to their Beginning. Now, it is intellectual beings through which lower beings flow forth from God and flow back to God. Hence, intellectual nature is diversely graduated in accordance with the reception by way of a descent. By comparison, with regard to number, simple numerical descent is completed by the number ten. But the tenfold descent [from oneness] is the beginning of composite number, is the end of what is simple, and is another oneness. Therefore, there are ten gradations of intellectual nature.⁴⁴ The first gradation is quite abstract and quite clear; it exists in a highly actual state of apprehending God. The last gradation, called human, is plunged into a corporeal shadow and exists as scarcely actual but as quite potential.
- 115** Our intellectual spirit does not find rest unless by its own intellectual nature it apprehends God; it has received intellectual being in order that it may apprehend Him. Therefore, in order that [our intellectual spirit] may be able to proceed from its state of potentiality to a state of actuality, the perfecting Spirit furnishes it with many lights. For all created things are lights for actualizing the intellectual power, in order that [the intellectual spirit], by means of the light thus given to it, may proceed to the Fount of lights. A man sees that there are diverse creatures, and by means of this diversity he is enlightened, in order that he may proceed to the Essential Light of created things.
- 116** For when he sees that one creature exists without vital movement, that another lives, and that a third reasons, immediately he is enlightened [and sees] that the Absolute Essence of created things does not simi-

larly exist or live or reason. For if life belonged to the Essence of creatures, what is non-living would not be a creature. If reasoning belonged to the Essence of creatures, a stone or a tree would not be a creature. Therefore, [the man] understands that whatever is apprehended with regard to the diversity of created things does not belong to the Essence [of creatures]. Therefore, since every creature exists contractedly as something, the Essence of all [creatures] does not exist as something but exists uncontractedly as not any of all [creatures]. Similarly, you see a diversity of forms. Therefore, the Essence [of created things] is none of these forms.

117 Some creatures are large, whereas others are small; some are higher up, whereas others are lower down; some have existed, whereas others will exist, some exist here, whereas others exist there—and so on with regard to all nameable diversity. Therefore, the Essence [of created things] is neither quantitative nor large nor small nor higher in position nor lower in position nor at a future time nor at a past time—and similarly regarding the other [nameable differences].

You see that many things unite in the elementative genus, many things in the vegetative genus, many things in the sensitive genus, and that these genera are diverse. Therefore, the Essence [of created things] is none of these [genera]. You see many different species within the genera; e.g., within the genus *animality* [you see] the human species, the leonine species, the equine species, etc. Therefore, the essence of the genus *animality* is not any one of all [these species] but is, rather, none of them. You see diverse men [and observe] that the one has died, the other is begotten; that the one is young, the other old; that the one is German, the other French; that the one is male, the other female; that the one is tall, the other short; that the one is blind, the other seeing; that the one is white, the other black; etc. For with regard to all [the characteristics] which can come under consideration there is diversity. Therefore, not anything that is perceptible, visible, tangible, etc., belongs to a man's essence. Therefore, humanity is not any of the things that are apprehensible in any man. Rather, humanity is a most simple essence which receives the generic essence specifically. In humanity, as in a simple power, there exist all those things which are individually participated in by diverse men. Therefore, humanity is a father of lights for diverse men. The essence of Plato exists, in the humanity, above all perceptible and temporal relation; and in Plato the same essence exists with perceptible and temporal relation. A similar thing holds true regarding all [other men].

Hence, the essences of perceptible things are present imperceptibly in species; and specific essences are present without specification in genera; and generic essences are present without generality in Absolute Essence, which is the Blessed God.

119 There are also other lights which are infused by divine enlightening and which lead the intellectual power to perfection. For example, there is the light-of-faith, through which the intellect is enlightened, so that it may ascend above reason unto an apprehension of Truth. And because [the intellect] is led by this light to believe that it can attain Truth (which, however, it cannot attain by the aid of reason, its “instrument,” so to speak),⁴⁵ it rises—by means of a divinely given impulse—above the weakness and blindness which caused it to be dependent upon the aid of reason. And made strong by the word of faith, [the intellect] is led to be able to advance, without further aid of reason,⁴⁶ in the certain hope of obtaining, on the basis of its steadfast faith, that which has been promised; and it quickly obtains it because of its loving pursuit. This is the enlightenment from the Apostle, who proclaims that one who believes unwaveringly and who asks will obtain wisdom.⁴⁷

120 Indeed, our intellectual power has, in a potential way, ineffable riches of light. Until they are made known to us through the intellectual light that exists actually, and until the manner of bringing [them] to actuality is disclosed [to us], we do not know that we have them, since they are potential. By way of illustration: [It might be the case that] on a poor man’s piece of land there are potentially many riches; if the poor man knows they are there and if he searches for them in the right way, he will find them. For example, wool, bread, wine, meat (and other things which he desires but does not see with his eyes) are there. Now, reason provides him with the light of revelation, so that he knows that these [goods] are there and knows that he may obtain wool from a sheep, milk from a cow, wine from a grapevine, bread from grain. And, in order that he may properly cultivate the field, various experienced farmers disclose to him the light of their knowledge. By means of their light he proceeds by faith and obtains the fruit of

121 the perceptible life. In a similar way, there is present in the power of an intellectual field all the things which give intellectual life when [this field] is properly cultivated and when its powers are elicited by the right means and practices. Moreover, diverse lights are found to have been handed down to us for the cultivation of this field—[hand-

ed down] by those men who have attended diligently to this intellectual cultivation. These were men devoted to the virtues; they left behind the shadows of this world and concerned themselves with mental light. Through them the Giver of lights has revealed to us both the hidden treasure and the manner of maintaining the field and of heeding the laws and precepts. [He has also revealed to us] the manner of uprooting the weeds (which do not yield the fruit of life but which impede and kill fertility) and the manner of planting, and cultivating, in this field, the tree of life. Examples of such men are Moses, the prophets, the philosophers, and the apostles.

122 The word of all these [men] is a light that was received by means of a descent of the Absolute Word (and was not the Word which is the Infinite Light of the Father)—received until such time as the Word that is without contraction revealed itself perceptibly in our Lord Jesus Christ. For in this Word of Truth we have been begotten as sons of light. For [Christ] has revealed that the riches of glory of the eternal kingdom are in us (*in nobis ac intra nos*); He has taught [us] to attain intellectual immortality by mortifying the perceptible world; and He has manifested Himself to us, in order that in the Light of Him who is the Word made flesh we may apprehend the Paternal Light of our life. For He Himself is the Paternal Light; and He enlightens every man and fills up, by His own Light, that which is lacking in us. [He does this] in order that we may attain—in Him and through Him, who is blessed forever—a most pleasant life of quietude.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>De Coniecturis</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>De Dato Patris Luminum</i>
<i>DI</i>	<i>De Docta Ignorantia</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>De Possesit</i>
<i>IL</i>	<i>De Ignota Litteratura</i> (by John Wenck; Latin text edited by J. Hopkins 1981)
<i>MFCG</i>	<i>Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft</i> (ed. Rudolf Haubst)
	<i>De Li Non Aliud</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa</i> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2nd edition 1980)
<i>SHAW</i>	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse.</i> Heidelberg: C. Winter
<i>VS</i>	<i>De Venatione Sapientiae</i>

PRAENOTANDA

1. All references to Nicholas's works are to the Latin texts specifically to the following texts in the following editions:

- A. Heidelberg Academy edition: *De Deo Abscondito, De Quaerendo, Deum, De Filiatione Dei, De Dato Patris Luminum, De Genesi, Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae, Idiota de Sapientia, Idiota de Mente, Idiota de Staticis Experimentis, De Pace Fidei, De Li Non Aliud* (Minnesota reprint).
- B. Heidelberg Academy editions as found in the Latin-German edition of Felix Meiner Verlag's *Philosophische Bibliothek: De Docta Ignorantia, De Coniecturis, De Beryllo, De Possess* (Minnesota reprint), *De Venatione Sapientiae, Compendium*.
- C. Strasburg edition as reprinted by W. de Gruyter: All remaining, Cusanus works, unless specifically indicated otherwise.

For some treatises the reference indicates book and chapter; for others, margin number and line; for still others, page and line. Readers should have no difficulty determining which is which when they consult the particular Latin text. For example, "DI II, 6 (125:19-20)" indicates *De Docta Ignorantia*, Book II, Chap. 6, margin number 125, lines 19 and 20.

- 2. Any Latin words inserted into the English translations for purposes of clarification are placed in parentheses—except that nouns whose cases have been changed to the nominative are bracketed. All expansions of the translations are bracketed.
- 3. References to the Psalms are to the Douay version (and, in parentheses, to the King James' version).
- 4. The corrigenda for *De Dato Patris Luminum* have not been incorporated into the Latin text as reprinted in the Appendix. Nonetheless, these corrections have been taken account of in the English translation.
- 5. The summaries of the positions of Walter Schulz, Klaus Jacobi, and Heinrich Rombach frequently contain, in translation, nearly verbatim renderings of certain of their German sentences. The notes do not always point out these sentences.
- 6. In the notes foreign expressions are italicized only where they indicate titles and where there is italicization in a direct quotation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. The *incipit* tells us that this treatise was written to Father Gerard, Bishop of Salona. Although the exact date of composition is uncertain, Paul Wilpert surmises that it was written in either 1445 or 1446. See p. x of Vol. IV of *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1959).
 2. James 1:17.
 3. Wisd. 6:13. In *Ap.* 3:6-7 Nicholas indicates that some people ascribe the book of Wisdom to Philo.
 4. Ps. 118:105 (119:105).
 5. James 1: 17.
 6. *DI I*, 1 (2:3-5); *I*, 5 (13: 10); *II*, 1 (97:19-20); *II*, 2 (104:5-9); *II*, 5 (120:13-14); *II*, 10 (154:7-9); *III*, 3 (202:16-17).
 7. *DI II*, 1 (96:19-2 1); 111, 1 (184:12-15; 188:1-4).
 8. I.e., the gift can be imparted only if it descends. Nicholas does not mean that God's giving occurs because of some constraint on Him or some necessity of nature.
 9. James 1:6.
 10. James 1:5.
 11. *DI II*, 2 (104:5-6).
 12. Cf. *Ap.* 26:6-7.
 13. Cf. *Ap.* 9:2; 8:19.
 14. James 1: 17.
 15. Cf. *DI II*, 2 (104:7-9).
 16. This point is elaborated in *NA*.
 17. *NA* 6 (20:20). *DI III*, 9 (233:17-18). N. B. *De Quaerendo Deum* 2 (34:10-13).
 18. *DI II*, 6 (123:9-15). *DC I*, 3.
 19. Cf. *DI II*, 3 (110:18-20).
 20. *Asclepius* 6 [*Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A. D. Nock (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Vol. II, 1945), p. 301, line 18 through p. 302, line 2].
 21. *Timaeus* 92C.
 22. Cf. *DI II*, 2 (104:6).
 23. Prov. 16:4.
 24. Cf. *DI II*, 3 (III:13). Also see *DI II*, 2 (101:6-7).
 25. *DI I*, 5 (13:11; 14:1).
 26. *DD* 3 (104:2-3). Cf. *DI II*, 2 (101).
 27. Here it is clear that the world's own being is different from God's being. However, Nicholas sometimes also labels as a thing's own being its enfolded existence in God. See *DP* 71:17-18.
 28. James 1:17.
 29. I Tim. 6:16.
 30. *DI I*, 4 (12:1-7); *I*, 26 (87:1-3).
 31. Here and in 119 Nicholas distinguishes between reason and intellect.
- Cf. *Ap.* 15:4-13.
32. *DI I*, 5 (14:3). *Ap.* 27:6-7.
 33. *DI II*, 3 (105:17-19).

34. *DI* II, 3 (106:3-11).
35. *DI* II, 3 (107).
36. This is the theme of *DP*.
37. Cf. St. Anselm, *Monologion* 9 and 34. See Col. 1:16.
38. James 1:18.
39. Acts 17:28. St. Thomas, II *Sententiae* 17.1.1 ad 2.
40. James 1:18.
41. Cf. St. Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.15.29 (*PL* 32:884).
42. See n. 37 above.
43. *Wisd.* 1:7.
44. See n. 18 above, as well as the passage where it occurs in the text.
45. See n. 31 above.
46. Literally: "... is led to be able to advance on its own (*per se*)"
47. James 1:5-6.