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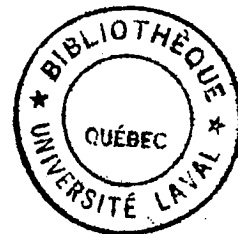
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## NICHOLAS OF CUSA ON GOD AND THE CREATURE

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Vincent M. Martin, O.P.

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

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

*Mens ipsa, omnia in se ambire, omniaque  
lustrare, comprehendereque supponens,  
se in omnibus, atque omnia in se taliter  
concludit: ut extra ipsum ac quod eius  
obtutum aufugiat, nihil esse posse af-  
firmat. (D. I, 6, p.78)*

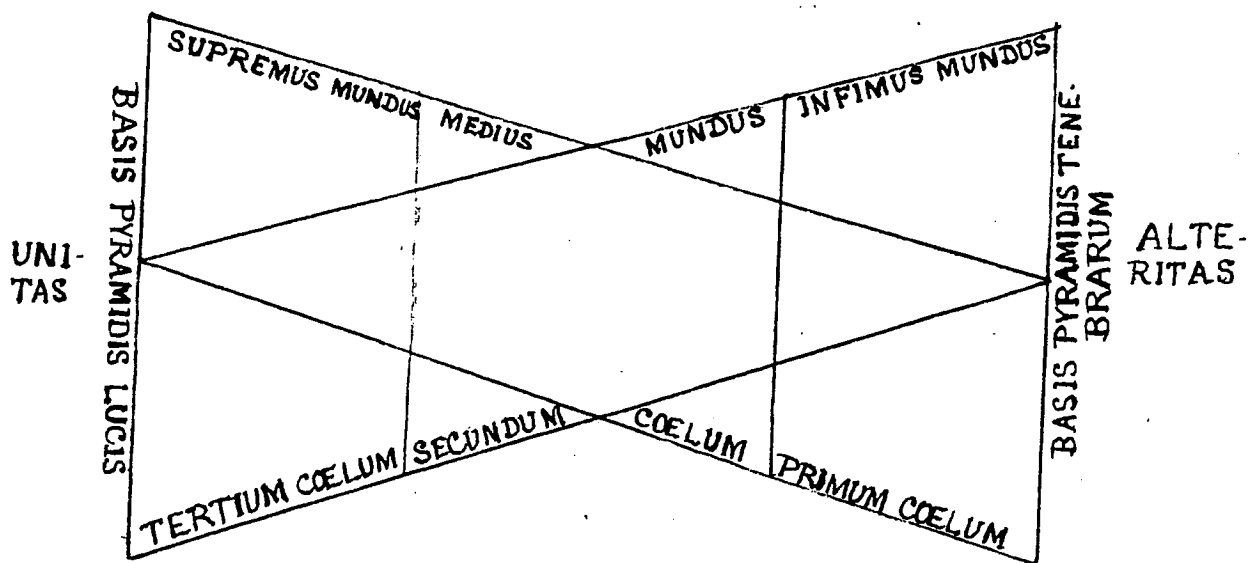
But this world of reality, this universe of mind can be reduced to four basic unities: God, intelligence, soul, and sensible body. Now, there is a complete intertwining between these four unities as being and as knowledge. Without the least difficulty Cusa passes from the being of God to man's knowledge of God; from the being of the pure intelligences to man's acts of

intellectual knowledge; from soul as substantial form to man's knowledge by reason and imagination; from sensible body to man's sense knowledge. For this reason De Coniecturis is a nightmare of anguish for a reader accustomed to the precision and formality of St. Thomas. But for the present we are interested in this work because of what Cusa says of real being.

Omitting all reference to the order of knowledge, we can say that these four unities are four kinds of real being; God, intelligence, soul, and sensible body. Intelligence is the immediate contraction of God, soul is the contraction of intelligence, and sensible body is the contraction of soul. Among these four unities there is an order of progression or of descent, as well as an order of regression or of ascent. In the order of descent intelligence is the contraction of God, or the unity in otherness of God; soul is the unity in otherness of intelligence; while sensible body is the unity in otherness of soul. In the order of ascent soul is the unity of sensible body; intelligence the unity of soul, and God the unity of intelligence. Hence all three created unities are descents from God; they are also ascents towards the unity of God.

To illustrate this progression and regression of the creatures Gusa employs the example of two pyramids which penetrate each other. In the one pyramid the base is the light or unity of God while the apex is darkness or the otherness of nothingness; in the second pyramid the base is the darkness of nothingness while the apex is the unity of God.

*Pacque pyramidem lucis in tenebras, et tenebrarum pyramidem in lucem progredi, et omne inquisibile in figuram redigito, ut sensibili manuuctione ad arcana, coniecturam convertere possis. Et ut in exemplo alleveris, univsum in eam figuram quae subsequitur conspice redactum. (C. I, 11, p.84)*



In the one pyramid is shown the descent of the three-fold world of creatures: intelligence (the supreme world or third heaven), soul (the middle world or second heaven), and sensible body (the lowest world or first heaven). In the other is portrayed the ascent of these same creatures. With the descent or contraction of God, there is a progression from unity to otherness, from indivisibility to divisibility, from incorruptibility to corruptibility, from immortality to mortality, from immutability to mutability, from form to formable, act to potency, whole to part, from the universal to the particular. With the ascent there is regression from otherness to unity, from divisibility to indivisibility, from composite to the simple, from mortal to immortal, potency to act.

Nam ratio unitatis est, indivisibilitas in se atque ab alio quolibet segregatio, unde unitatem dicimus multis attributionibus virtutis eius appellari. Nam omne id, quod quendam dicit indivisibilitatem, discretionem, atque connexionem, unitati convenit. Indivisibilitatem igitur in divisibilitatem progredi, non est aliud, quam unitatem in alteritatem descendere: ita de incorruptibilitate in corruptibilitatem, immortalitate in mortalitate, immutabilitate in mutabilitatem, immobilitate in mobilitatem, et ita de ceteris. Et ita pari ratione de forma in formabili, quoniam forma est discretiva, quare unitas, discretio in discretum seu continuum, speciale in confusum, lux in tenebras, subtile in grossum, spiritus in corpus, et similia horum concipito: sic actus in potentiam, totum in partem,

universale in particulare, species in individuum, amor in amabile, ars in artificiale: et quidem consequenter, de omnibus connectentibus aut complicantibus, ad complicata, nec est possibile opposita reperiri quorum unum non sit ut unitas alterius respectu. Si igitur ad figuram oculum direxeris, videbis per descendum unitatis in alteritatem, et regressum alteritatis in unitatem, quomodo in supremo coelo omnia quae alteritatis existunt, in ipsam unitatem pergunt. Divisibilitas enim in indivisibilitatem, tenebrae in lucem, grossum in subtile, compositum in simplex, mortale in immortale, mutabile in immutabile, foemineitas in masculinitatem, potentia in actum, imperfectum aut pars in totum, et ita deinceps. Contrarium in infimo mundo, ubi indivisibilitas in divisibilitatem degenerat (unitas enim formae indivisibilis sequitur naturam divisibilem, ut quaelibet pars aquae fit aqua, terrae terra) stabilitas ibi est in instabilitatem, immortalitas in mortalitate, actualitas in potentialitate, masculinitas in foeminitate, atque sic de singulis. In medio vero mundo, media est habitudo. (C, I, 12, p. 85)

Thus the entire world of reality is a progression from the absolute unity of God toward the otherness of nothingness; it is also a regression from otherness to the simple unity which is God.

In itself, each of these created unities in otherness is a generic unity in otherness, a more or less, a concordance in difference, of its superior. These generic worlds of intelligence, soul, and sensible body, are further contracted into various genera, which in turn are contracted by different

species. Thus God is first contracted by the universe which in turn is then contracted by the world of intelligence. The world of intelligence is next contracted or limited by the highest genus in this region of intelligence. This is contracted by its supreme species, which is then progressively contracted by each species beneath it. When the lowest species of the supreme genus of intelligence is attained, we start a new genus in the world of intelligence, for the highest species of this second genus coincides with the lowest species of the supreme genus. The process of contraction is repeated again and again, until finally the actually lowest species of the actually lowest genus of intelligence coincides with the highest species of the supreme genus of soul. With this coincidence the world of soul begins. The progressions are repeated again and again until finally the lowest species of the lowest genus of soul coincides with the highest genus of the supreme genus of sensible body; with this coincidence the world of sensible body begins and the progressions are again repeated until the lowest species of sensible body is attained.

This shows that Cusa conceives each of the three created unities or worlds as a collection of



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

From the way in which Cusa describes them the species are as a series of whole numbers which have their principle in unity, or God, and which progress as far as one desires. It is as though each of the progressing species or numbers participated in unity, or God, only through the medium of all the numbers or species which precede it. Each of the numbers or species is but a more or less of a more or less, etc. Thus the species in the world of sensible body would be the more or less of an indefinite progression of more or less.

Since there is but one unity, one nature, one essence involved in all the series, there is a universal quodlibet in quolibet. All being is in each being according to the mode of that being; in God, all is God; in intelligence, intelligence; in soul, soul; and in body, body.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is, all reality is either the maximum which is God, or it is one of the multitudinous states of the more or less which is the creature; it is either

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

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

- 1) God  
God contracted ----- Universe of creatures.  
Universe contracted ----- Predicaments.  
Predicaments contracted ----- Genera.  
Genera contracted ----- Species.  
Species contracted ----- Individuals.
- 2) God  
God with privation ----- Universe.  
Universe with privation ----- Predicaments.  
Predicaments with privation ----- Genera.  
Genera with privation ----- Species.  
Species with privation ----- Individuals.
- 3) Absolute unity  
Unity in otherness ----- Intelligence.  
Unity in otherness,  
in otherness ----- Soul.

Unity in otherness,  
in otherness, in otherness--Body.

4) Maximum

More or less-----Universe.  
More or less, of a more or less--Predicaments.  
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less-----Genera.  
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less, of a more  
or less-----Species.  
More or less, of a more or less,  
of a more or less, of a more  
or less, of a more or less--Individual.

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

Diceris forte unum berylli praesupponere  
essentiam recipere magis et minus; alio-  
quin per maximum pariter et minimum non  
videretur eius principium.

Respondeo, quod, quamvis essentia secundum  
se non videatur magis et minus recipere, ta-  
men secundum comparisonem ad esse et actus  
proprios speciei magis et minus participat  
secundum dispositionem naturae recipientis.  
(B. 20, p.61)

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