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Exploring a Scholastic *Terra Incognita*: Univocity, Analogy and Infinity in Nicholas of Cusa's *Idiota de Sapientia*

1. Introduction

Writing in his massive *Sentences* commentary Denys the Carthusian attacks in no uncertain terms the Scotist understanding of the univocity of being. According to Denys it is this doctrine which is at the root of all the errors of the *Nominales* and *Formalistae* and which undermines the pure Dionysian theology of divine simplicity.[1] While there are important questions concerning whether Denys really understood Scotus, a much more interesting question for us is whether Nicholas of Cusa, his close friend and companion, would have agreed with Denys on this point? Such a question is of no small importance. For in recent years, due to the work of scholars such as John Milbank, Charles Taylor and Brad Gregory, the univocity of being has taken up a position centre-stage in accounts of the "origins of modernity". For, following in the tradition of Etienne Gilson, many scholars have seen Scotus' univocal metaphysics as heralding nothing less than the entire dissolution of the medieval framework of the metaphysics of participation.[2]

Given Cusanus' profound debt to the metaphysics of participation it is no surprise that he has often been seen as belonging to the analogical tradition of Aquinas. Thus Rudolf Haubst, Markus Führer and Johannes Hoff have all emphasised Cusanus' close affinity with Thomist thought. Indeed, Hoff, following Louis Dupré and John Milbank, has described his thought as representing an "analogical turn", which he opposes to the univocal turn of late medieval Scotist and Nominalist philosophy.[3] Yet while the attraction of an analogical, Thomistic reading of Cusanus remains clear, and if anything seems to be growing, there are some notable voices of dissent. Thus Donald Duclow has questioned the

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[1] Denys the Carthusian, *Sententiae*, 1 d. 3.1; d. 8.6, in *Doctoris Ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia,* 42 vols. (Monstrolii: Typis Cartusiae S. M. de Pratis, 1896-1935), 19.217D, 390D-401B; cf. Kent Emery, "Denys the Carthusian and the Doxography of Scholastic Theology", in *Monastic, Scholastic and Mystical Theologies from the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1996), 347-8.

[2] See, for example, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006; 2nd ed.), xxv-xxx; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 774; and Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 25-73.

[3] Rudolf Haubst, "Nikolaus von Kues und die *Analogia Entis*", in *Streifzüge in die Cusanische Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1991), 232-42 and "Nikolaus von Kues auf Spuren des Thomas von Aquin", *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 5 (1965), 15-62; Markus Führer, *Echoes of Aquinas in Cusanus' Vision of Man* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); cf. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 167-89 and "Nature and Grace in Cusanus' Mystical Theology", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64:1 (1990), 153-70. Knut Alfsuåg, "*Explicatio* and *Complicatio*: On the Understanding of the Relationship between God and the World in the Work of Nicholas Cusanus", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14:3 (2012), 296-300 also explicitly rejects a Scotist, univocal reading of Cusanus.

applicability of Thomistic analogy to Cusanus and both Edward Cranz and David Albertson have identified univocal elements in his metaphysical reasoning.[4]

Yet, with the notable exception of André de Muralt,[5] there has been very little consideration of Cusanus' possible relation to Scotus' own doctrine of the univocity of being,[6] despite his possession of an impressive collection of Franciscan and Scotist writings and strong evidence for Scotist influence on his early thought.[7] In this paper I hope to explore the relationship between Cusanus' and Scotus' metaphysics of being. With its fascinating discussion of naming and conceptualisation, Cusanus' *Idiota de Mente* and especially his *Idiota de Sapientia* represent the perfect launchpad for such a discussion. It is crucial to remember, however, that Cusanus' discourse is not couched in the scholastic terms of analogy and univocity and so his relation to these traditions must be inferred.[8] Moreover, while this paper will argue for a deep connection between Scotus' and Cusanus' analogical metaphysics, this is by no means to negate the thesis of Thomist influence – although some qualifications to this will be duly noted. Indeed, as Alexander Hall has argued persuasively, despite their obvious differences, Aquinas' and Scotus' views on analogy actually share many important commonalities.[9]

2. Natural Theology and Principiation

At the heart of the *Idiota de Sapientia* is the theme of natural theology and the natural knowledge of God. While Cusanus has traditionally and rightly been thought of as a negative, or apophatic,

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[4] Donald Duclow, "The Dynamics of Analogy in Nicholas of Cusa", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 21:3 (1981), 293-9. Edward Cranz, "Development in Cusanus", in *Nicholas of Cusa and the Renaissance*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), 1-18 spoke of Cusanus holding to an "ontic univocity of God and creatures" as one phase of his development. David Albertson, 'Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century: New Directions in Research on Nicholas of Cusa', *Religion Compass* 4:8 (2010), 477 speaks of a "univocity of unity" in Cusanus' thought.

[5] See André de Muralt, *Néoplatonisme et Aristotélisme dans la Métaphysique Médiévale: Analogie, Causalité, Participation* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 77-99.

[6] It is worth noting that Meister Eckhart also subscribed to a doctrine of univocity. His reflections on the relation between uncreated and created may therefore represent another possible source for Cusa's metaphysical doctrine of univocity. See Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity*, tr. Orrin Summerell (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 2001), 67-96.

[7] For Cusanus' Scotist library see J. Marx, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften-Sammlung des Hospitals zu Cues* (Trier, 1905), 76-7, 80, 91. This includes John Duns Scotus' *Commentarius in Librum IV Sententiarum*, Francis of Meyronnes' *Lectura Super Lib. I Sententiarum*, Roger Rosetus' *Super Sententias Abbreviatas* and Thomas Buckingham's *Super Sententias 4 Jo(annis) Du(ns)*. These are to be found in *Codex Cusanus* 67, 79 and 90. Cusanus' Franciscan library is even more extensive than this and Pauline Moffitt Watts points out that "the sentences commentaries that Cusanus owned are all by Franciscans" (*Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 17). For evidence of Scotist influence on the early Cusanus see Nicholas of Cusa, *Sermones*, 4.34-5; 11.4; 16.6-8 (h XVI/1.70-1, 224-5, 264-5) where he takes up in his Trinitarian discussion both the formal/modal distinction and the twofold emanation from nature and will. In *Sermones*, 9.25 (h XVI/1.191) Cusanus explicitly cites Scotus on contracts from *Ordinatio*, 4 d. 15. It is worth noting that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Scotist and Lullist schools were closely allied, with both often employing a formal distinction in Trinitarian theology (Joseph Victor, "The Revival of Lullism at Paris, 1499-1516", *Renaissance Quarterly* 28:4 (1975), 517-20).

[8] This point is emphasised by Haubst in "*Analogia Entis*", 232.

[9] Alexander Hall, *Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus: Natural Theology in the High Middle Ages* (London: Continuum, 2009).

theologian, the *Idiota de Sapientia* reveals his growing fascination with positive theology. We may see this above all from Cusanus' enthusiastic appropriation of Anselmian perfect-being theology. First clearly set out by Anselm in his *Proslogion* and *Monologion* this was grounded on his famous understanding of God as "that than which no greater can be conceived". It holds that anything can be attributed to God which is compatible with him being the most perfect being. Developed extensively by Scotus, it was also at the heart of the ambitious Scotistic syntheses of Thomas Bradwardine and Ramon de Sebonde – both theologians well known to Cusanus.[10] Cusanus' general debt to Anselm's principle is well known and has been explored by Jasper Hopkins, Clyde Miller and others.[11] It is therefore significant that at key points in both books I and II of *Idiota de Sapientia* we find him invoking Anselm's principle in order to help us understand Wisdom as "the highest which is not able to be higher".[12]

Drawing on the biblical principles that "Wisdom proclaims herself openly in the streets" and "dwells in the highest places", the layman tells the orator that he must transfer the truths he has discovered by reason to the highest levels.[13] What this means, in effect, is that he must consider God as the Triune *principium* of all things.[14] Referencing the Augustinian and Chartrain triad of Unity, Equality and Connection, Cusanus argues that from the Father as Omnipotent Unity or Entity (*entitas*) all things receive their being (*esse*), from the Son as Wise Equality they receive their specified (*tale esse*) or formed being (*formatum esse*), and from the Holy Spirit as Loving Connection, unifying being and formed being, they actually exist.[15] Building on a long Platonic and Augustinian heritage Cusanus thus puts forward the Son as Wisdom as the "reason (*ratio*) of all things" and their "equality of being" (*essendi aequalitas*).[16] Yet where Augustine and the scholastics had mapped created forms onto their

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[10] See Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion*, 1-4; *Proslogion*, 1-5 (*Anselmi Opera Omnia* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), I.13-18, 97-104); John Duns Scotus, *The De Primo Principio of John Duns Scotus: A Revised Text and Translation, tr. Evan Roche* (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1949), 4.9-11 (pp. 77-81); Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei contra Pelagium* (London, 1618), 1.1 and Ramon de Sebonde, *Theologia Naturalis* (Venice, 1581), c. 1-13, 47-50, 68, 74. For the influence of perfect-being theology on Scotus see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31. For Cusanus' possession of Bradwardine and Sebonde see Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, 16-17.

[11] Jasper Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa's Intellectual Relationship to Anselm of Canterbury", in Peter Casarella (ed.), *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 54-73 and Clyde Miller, *Reading Cusanus: Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 17, 152, 156.

[12] Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.9; II.28 (h V.15-16, 58-9): "*Altissimum enim est quod altius esse non potest*"; cf. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 15 (*Anselmi Opera Omnia*, I.112). All translations are taken from Jasper Hopkins' edition of these works unless otherwise stated.

[13] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.3 (h V.5-6): "*Ego autem tibi dico, quod sapienta foris clamat in plateis, et est clamor eius, quoniam ipsa habitat in altissimis*"; cf. Proverbs 1:20; Ecclesiasticus, 24:7.

[14] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.5-8 (h V.8-15).

[15] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.22 (h V.44-7); cf. Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.5.5, in Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus*, 221 vol. (Paris, 1844-55) [hereafter PL], 34.21. For Cusanus' relationship to the Chartrain tradition of mathematical theology see David Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[16] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.23 (h V.48-50); cf. Augustine of Hippo, *De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII*, q. 46.1-2 (PL 40.29-31).

corresponding ideas in the divine mind in a kind of many-to-many relationship, he maps the singular *ratio* of the divine essence onto the multiple created *rationes* in a kind of one-to-many relationship.[17] In doing so he describes God, in pregnant terms, as the "quiddity of quiddities".[18]

We will see below more clearly Cusanus' profound debt to the methodology of perfect-being theology. Certainly, the layman's statement in book I that by following the pattern of principiation the orator will be able to form "innumerable most true propositions" about the relation between God and creatures demonstrates his conviction of its power as a method of natural, and positive, theology. Yet Cusanus never forgets the apophatic dimension of his natural theology.[19] Echoing the important late medieval maxim that "there is no proportion between the finite and infinite", Cusanus therefore insists that God remains "disproportional in every proportion".[20] Far from simply denying proportionality between the finite and infinite, he therefore simultaneously affirms and denies it. Undoubtedly those who have emphasised Cusanus' analogical thinking, even his adherence to the scholastic *analogia entis*, have identified something important and fundamental about his thought. Yet, as we shall now move on to consider, Cusanus' affirmation of disproportionality-in-proportion also reveals important univocal and equivocal moments underlying his analogical reasoning.

3. Precision and Univocity

Book II of the *Idiota de Sapientia* opens with the orator's question of how it is possible to form a concept of God since he is "greater than can be conceived".[21]   To the attentive reader the remark signals Cusanus' return to the question of perfect-being theology. The layman begins his response by reminding the orator of the truths established in the first book. Since God is the Triune *principium* of all things and the "quiddity of quiddities", this means that "in every conceiving the inconceivable is conceived".[22] According to the layman the implication of this is that the "concept of concept approaches

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[17] Nicholas of Cusa, *De Li Non Aliud*, 10.38-9 (h XIII.22-3). Cusanus' critical revision of the Augustinian and scholastic doctrine of the divine ideas is a complex topic deserving of further exploration. See further Benjamin DeSpain, "Seeing One's Own Face in the Face of God: The Doctrine of the Divine Ideas in the Mystical Theologies of Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa", in Simon Podmore and Louise Nelstrop (eds.), *Christian Mysticism and Incarnational Theology: Between Transcendence and Immanence* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 29-46.

[18] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.26 (h V.55).

[19] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.8 (h V.13-15).

[20] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.9 (h V.16): "*omni proportione improportionabilis*". Moffitt Watts, 38-42 draws attention to Cusanus' correspondences here with late medieval thinkers. It is true that this principle is also to be found in Thomas Aquinas in *De Veritate*, q. 23 art. 7 ad. 9 (*Opera Omnia* (Rome: 1882-), [hereafter OO] XXII[2(2)-3].672) and elsewhere. However, John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 554 notes the sharp distinction in Aquinas between mathematical notions of proportion and other, analogical, notions. Likewise, Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The "Divine Science" of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 115 emphasises the intrinsic relation between analogy and proportion in Aquinas. I am very grateful to Professor Enrico Peroli for discussion of this point.

[21] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.28 (h V.58-9).

[22] The Orator may be referring back to Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.14 (h V.30-1) which holds that Eternal Wisdom is "tasted in everything tasteable", is the "delightfulness in everything delightful" and is the "beauty in everything beautiful" ("*Ipsa est delectatio in omni delectabili. Ipsa est pulchitrudo in omni pulchro. Ipsa est appetitio in*

the inconceivable". Therefore, as he proceeds to explain, if one seeks "a more precise concept" of God then he should "conceive of precision, for God is Absolute Precision". Correspondingly if one seeks a correct concept, a true concept, a just concept and a good concept of God, he should conceive of rectitude, truth, justice and goodness themselves. Extrapolating, we arrive at the surprising principle that the answer to every question about God is presupposed in the terms of the question itself. Expressed in the technical language of scholasticism this means that "in every term's signification God is signified – even though he is unsignifiable".[23]

Cusanus' reasoning is dense here and we may well wonder exactly what he means. Part of the answer surely lies in the understanding of the human mind which he develops in *Idiota de Mente* as the power which "enfolds conceptually the exemplars of all things". Indeed, here Cusanus posits an important parallel between the conceiving of the divine mind, which is creating, and the conceiving of the human mind, which is an "assimilation of beings".[24] Likewise, throughout the *Idiota de Sapientia* he draws on the dynamic correspondence of human concepts and divine exemplars to illustrate the human mind's access to truth. In describing God as "quiddity of quiddities" and as "concept of concepts", Cusanus is therefore trying to express him as the "Absolute Concept" which in some way underlies every human conception of reality – a notion which has important parallels in Bonaventure.[25] Already, therefore, we are beginning to approach a hidden, unattainable, univocal core to all human discourse about God.

Even more relevant is Cusanus' understanding of God as "Absolute Precision".[26] Of course the theme of precision would have been thoroughly familiar to Cusanus' readers, not least in his oft-repeated axiom that the precise truth is both incomprehensible and unattainable.[27] Following the lead of his *De Docta Ignorantia* and other works the *Idiota de Sapientia* notably explores precision in terms of numerical, geometrical, exemplary, conceptual and what we might call veridical approaches.[28] In doing so he expresses an important parallel between the ontological and conceptual realms. As "Absolute Precision" God may be understood as the ontological ground of all reality, just as the number one is the "most precise exemplar" of every "numerable number" or the infinite circle enfolds all possible

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omni appetibili"). The subsequent development of this theme makes clear its connection to the Trinitarian and exemplary dimension of Wisdom.

[23] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.28-9 (h V.58-60): "*nam Deus in omni terminorum significatione significatur, licet sit insignificabilis*".

[24] Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, 2.58; 3.72 (h V.92-3, 108-10): "*arbitror vim illum, quae in nobis est, omnium rerum exemplaria notionaliter complicantem, quam mentem appello*".

[25] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.26; II.34 (h V.53-5, 66-7). See Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 3.3, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* (Quaracchi, 1882), V.304. Gerhard Krieger, "*Conceptus Absolutus:* Zu einer Parallele zwischen Wilhelm von Ockham, Johannes Buridan und Nicolaus Cusanus", in Harald Schwaetzer, João André and Gerhard Krieger (eds.), *Intellectus und Imaginatio: Aspekte geistiger sinnlicher Erkenntnis bei Nicolaus Cusanus* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 3-19 discusses further parallels between Cusa's notion of "Absolute Concept" and late medieval Nominalism.

[26] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.29 (h V.59-60).

[27] See, for example, Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia*, I.3.9-10 (h I.8-9).

[28] See as follows in Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*: Numerical (I.24 [h V.50-1]), Geometrical (II.43-5 [h V.76-8]), Exemplary (I.23; II.38-40 [h V.48-50, 70-2]), Conceptual (I.25 [h V.51-3]) and Veridical (II.36-7 [h V.68-70]).

figures.[29] Correspondingly, God may also be considered the precision of every human concept – a precision it should be noted that the mind is constantly striving for and in which alone its motion of understanding finds rest.[30] If we look carefully we also find that Cusanus' discussion of precision in *Idiota de Sapientia* is oriented around the two poles of the finite and infinite. On the one hand he admits that we can approach precision in terms of "more or less", such that in this world it is always possible to find something which is more precise than another – whether ontologically or conceptually. On the other hand he is emphatic that the Absolute Precision which is God is entirely free (*absoluta*) from "more or less" or any kind of comparative relationship.[31]

Cusanus' merging of mathematical and ontological notions of precision is extremely telling. For it was Scotus who famously revolutionised metaphysics by comparing degrees of being to mathematical degrees of intensity of light and colour.[32] It is notable therefore that in his early *De Conjecturis* that Cusanus should have chosen to map the degree of unity directly onto the intensity of light.[33] Moreover, in what Albertson has termed Cusanus' "univocity of unity", he also decomposes all numbers, which of course in this work also represent created reality, into a univocal oneness and a differential degree[34] - something for which there is importantly clear precedent in Scotus himself.[35] Cusanus thus urges his readers to "seek out the identity that is present in the diversity of things that you are to investigate, i.e. that you seek out the oneness that is present in otherness. For then you will see, in the otherness of contracted being, the "modes", as it were, of Absolute Oneness".[36] Given that Cusanus makes clear that this relation of degrees of intensity of light may also be extended to being and truth we may therefore clearly discern, with Cranz, an "ontic univocity of God and creatures" operative in Cusanus' early thought.[37]

If anything the *Idiota de Sapientia* espouses an even more radical kind of univocity. For here it is not just oneness or being that has a univocal relation to God but it is, in effect, every created *ratio*.[38] Indeed,

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[29] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.24; II.43-5 (h V.50-1, 76-8).

[30] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.18; II.28-9 (h V.37-41, 58-60).

[31] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.38-40 (h V.70-2).

[32] John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 58 62 (*Opera Omnia*, ed. Charles Balić et al. (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950-), [hereafter OO] III.40); cf. Peter King, "Scotus on Metaphysics", in Thomas Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27-33.

[33] Nicholas of Cusa, *De Conjecturis*, I.9.41, 10.48 (h III.45-6, 51).

[34] Cusa, *De Conjecturis*, I.9.37 (h III.42-3); cf. Albertson, "Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century", 477. As Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 226-7 makes clear, this does not have to mean that numbers themselves are univocal between God and creatures. Rather it might suggest that the analogical relationship which Albertson detects has a univocal core in oneness.

[35] Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 n. 84 (OO IV.192).

[36] Cusa, *De Conjecturis*, II.1.71 (h III.72).

[37] Cusa, *De Conjecturis*, I.12.61-3; II.1.71, 9.117-19 (h III.61-2, 72, 112-15); cf. Cranz, "Development in Cusanus' Thought", 1-18. However, this is not to say that Cusa's understanding of the transcendentals was identical to Scotus or indeed to Aquinas. Rather, in common with the Neo-Platonic tradition, Cusa tended to prioritise unity over being. For more on this see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 553-67.

[38] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.23; II.38-9 (h V.48-50, 70-2).

anticipating the breakthrough of his *De Li Non Aliud*, Cusanus can even argue that the divine Wisdom itself is the "most precise exemplar" of created forms as if it were "nothing at all other" than the created form itself.[39] We find a very similar line of argument in the *Idiota de Mente*. Taking up Hermes Trismegistus' cryptic saying that "God is named by the names of all things and all things are named by God's names", Cusanus argues that God is the "precision of every name". If we were to know only one name precisely, he argues, then we would know the names of every creature. Since "name" for Cusanus signifies definition, in its technical sense of genus and difference, we gain further confirmation for our understanding of God as the univocal, but inaccessible, *ratio* of every *ratio*.[40] Indeed, in the *De Li Non Aliud* itself Cusanus distinguishes between three "modes of being" pertaining to a single reality – the first is when a thing is seen most precisely as "not-other", the second is the apprehension of the thing's quiddity and the third when it is realised according to the discrimination of "this and that".[41]

All this becomes even clearer in his *De Possest*. For here Cusanus explains how we can obtain a concept of God from the concept of sun – and by extension from the concept of any other created being. First he says we must look to the "very being" (*ipsum esse*) of the sun. Secondly we must remove from this concept both its determination to the sun and everything which is not abstract – thus removing all negation. For when we normally consider the sun "we see being which is inabstract [i.e. concrete] and is contracted and limited in such a way that it is called solar". However, when we remove all these limitations we see "boundless or eternal being". Clarifying this, Cusanus' companion John adds that "in order to attain the Absolute" we must "negate the contractedness of what is contracted".[42] In this we see a dramatic extension of the Anselmic and Scotistic method of perfect-being theology. For Scotus it was possible to form proper concepts of God by taking Anselm's "pure perfections" – those attributes that are absolutely better to possess than not – and "infinitising" them by removing from them all creaturely limits and determinations.[43] Indeed, in one place Scotus explicitly connects this procedure to Pseudo-Dionysius' understanding of God as "super-substantial".[44] Here Cusanus clearly extends this methodology to every created *ratio*. In this he differs from Scotus who held that such concepts, for

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[39] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.23 (h V.48-50).

[40] Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, 2.67-3.70 (h V.103-7). The link with this section and the prior discussion in *Idiota de Sapientia* is made explicit in 2.67. Just before this discussion, in 2.65, the relation between name and the technical scholastic understanding of definition is made clear. This prepares the way for the bold claim in Cusa, *De Li Non Aliud*, 1.1-4 (h XIII.3-4) that "not other" is the definition of all things.

[41] Cusa, *De Li Non Aliud*, 21.98 (h XIII.51).

[42] Nicholas of Cusa, *Trialogus de Possest*, 68-9 (h XI/2.80-2): "*Ideo oportet de contracto contractionem negare, ut absolutum pertingamus*".

[43] Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 39-40 (OO III.26-7).

[44] John Duns Scotus, *Reportatio 1A,* d. 8 pars 2 q 5 n. 151 (*The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture: Reportatio I-A. Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. Allan Wolter and Oleg Bychkov, 2 vols. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 2004), [hereafter R] I.376-7).

example that of a stone, could not be extended to God as they contained an intrinsic creaturely reference.[45] Nevertheless, Cusanus' modification of Scotus' method is clear.

In light of all these examples we may also begin to discern an important new dimension to Cusanus' understanding of precision. For Cusanus, as remarked on above, conceptualisation could be understood in terms of the assimilation of the mind to the being of an object. In both the *Idiota de Sapientia* and *Idiota de Mente* he describes the mind's process of concept formation as a "living image" of Wisdom and an asymptotic motion towards the divine exemplar in which the mind finds its rest.[46] It is therefore highly significant that Cusanus should compare Wisdom's presence in created forms to the way in which "precision is present in an assimilation".[47] This is because for the scholastics precision (*praecisio*) referred to the mind's process of abstracting, whereby a concept could be decomposed into its metaphysical parts or aspects – whether really, formally or rationally distinct. Thus, for example, in his *De Ente et Essentia* we find Aquinas using precision to indicate the consideration of a species, for example man, cut off from designated matter as its principle of individuation. Even more importantly we find Scotus frequently employing precision in his metaphysics of being. Thus for Scotus "being in its precision" signifies the univocal concept of being abstracted from its intrinsic mode.[48]

Heightening this comparison we find that Cusanus' language of contraction also has a definite Scotistic valence. For it reminds us inexorably of the Scotist understanding that the univocal concept of being is contracted to different beings through its intrinsic modes. For Scotus, creatures can therefore be designated through being and a contracting mode. Yet in saying this we must immediately confront a crucial difference between Cusanus and Scotus. For the being that is contracted in Scotist metaphysics is not the infinite being of God but rather the univocal and transcendental concept of being, which is indifferent to finite or infinite. According to Scotus, in language which Cusanus could never admit, God himself "contracts" the mode of infinity.[49]

Yet we must not be too hasty in dismissing the connection. For it is crucial to remember that both Cusanus' understanding of God as "Absolute Precision" and his more developed understanding of God as the "not-other" were not only intended to express a radical identity between God and creatures but also a radical alterity. Indeed, we will not understand Cusanus' statements on the proportionality or disproportionality between God and creatures until we realise that they are his attempt to encode the

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[45] Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 39-40 (OO III.26-7); cf. Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131. It should be noted that Aquinas held a similar position.
[46] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.18 (h V.37-41) and *Idiota de Mente*, 7.106; 13.149; 15.159 (h V.158-60, 203-5, 216-17).
[47] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.25 (h V.51): "*Est enim in omnibus formis ut veritas in imagine et exemplar in exemplato et forma in figura et praecisio in assimilatione*".
[48] See Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, 2 (OO XLIII.373 l. 252-67) and Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 54-5, 61-2 (OO III.36-8, 42-4).
[49] Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 n. 108 (OO IV.202-3).

Dionysian maxim that God is "all things in such a way that he is nothing of all things".[50] The God who is "greater than can be conceived" is both radically univocal and radically equivocal with his creation. As the *De Li Non Aliud* neatly expresses it: "God is neither the sky nor is he other than the sky".[51] What this means is that any discussion of analogy in Cusanus must pay attention to the paradoxical simultaneity of univocal and equivocal moments in his reasoning about God.

4. Univocity, Analogy and Infinity

In this we may begin to discern both an important similarity with Scotus and an important dissimilarity with Aquinas. For Aquinas, analogy was intended as a kind of mean (*medius*) between univocity and equivocity. In his understanding concepts shared by God and creatures, such as 'being', 'wisdom' or 'goodness' are not univocal – signifying according to the same sense (*ratio*) – nor equivocal – signifying in entirely different, unrelated senses – but are analogical, which means they signify in different but related senses (*rationes*). While what is signified by these terms belongs primarily to God, their mode of signifying applies only secondarily and improperly to God. Moreover, although a term such as 'good' when used of creatures "in some way circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified", when attributed to God it leaves the thing signified as uncomprehended and as "exceeding the signification of the name". Importantly, therefore, the existence of an analogical relation between God and creatures does not imply the existence of any kind of neutral, univocal point of reference whereby God and creatures can be compared in their similarity and difference.[52]

Cusanus is in agreement with Aquinas that all names belong properly to God and that we cannot comprehend the manner of their signification in his "infinite simplicity".[53] Like Aquinas, he also clearly affirms the eminence of every *ratio* in God and their coincidence in the divine simplicity. Indeed, his understanding clearly resonates with Aquinas' Dionysian claim that "all things in a kind of natural unity pre-exist in the cause of all things; and thus things diverse and in themselves opposed to each other, pre-exist in God as one, without injury to his simplicity".[54] Yet his model of eminence, unlike Aquinas', is not described in terms of a mapping of a creaturely *ratio* onto a related and analogical divine *ratio*,

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[50] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, I.6, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Paul Rorem and tr. Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987), 56. See the important reference to Pseudo-Dionysius in Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 17 (h II.12-13). This reference recurs in different forms in Cusanus' writings but see especially Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, I.10 (h V.17-19) and *De Li Non Aliud*, 14.65 (h XIII.35).

[51] Cusa, *De Li Non Aliud*, 22.103 (h. XIII.53): "*Unde quando ipsum nec caelum, nec a caelo aliud esse video*".

[52] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 13 art. 1-6 (OO IV.139-50). The literature on Aquinas' doctrine of analogy is vast but see especially Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 193-226 and Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 65-122.

[53] See further Peter Casarella, "*His Name is Jesus*: Negative Theology and Christology in Two Writings of Nicholas of Cusa from 1440", in Gerald Christianson and Thomas Izbicki (eds.), *Nicholas of Cusa on Christ and the Church: Essays in Memory of Chandler McCusky Brooks for the American Cusanus Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 281-308.

[54] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 4 art. 2 (OO IV.51-2): "*in causa omnium necessere est praeexistere omnia secundum naturalem unionem. Et sic, quae sunt diversa et opposita in seipsis, in Deo praeexistunt ut unum, absque detrimento simplicitatis ipsius*"; cf. Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.36, 38 (h V.68-9, 70-1).

but rather in terms of an infinite intensification, or perhaps better sublimation, of the *same* creaturely *ratio*. Indeed, Cusanus' understanding of God as "not other" to every created *ratio* would surely imply a kind of definitional univocity to Aquinas. For, as Rudi te Velde insists, analogy for Aquinas is not a "procedure of abstraction and sublimation by which finite perfections are purged of their material flaws and defects and then extended to their ultimate limit in God".[55]

Yet for Cusanus, following an Anselmic and Scotistic pattern of perfect-being theology, this seems to be precisely what analogy is. In interpreting this we must be careful, however. As suggested above, it would be a mistake to suggest that Cusanus holds to any kind of one-to-one mapping of creaturely *ratio* onto corresponding divine *ratio*. Rather, for him the many-to-one mapping of creaturely *rationes* onto the singular divine *ratio* is such as to transcend the intrinsic opposition of the *rationes* themselves. Yet in this we may discern a profound affinity with Scotus, who, according to his controversial formal distinction, was able to maintain both the real identity and real distinction of the divine essence, attributes and ideas, without violating the divine simplicity.[56] For Scotus, drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius, God may be said to "unitively contain" all of his perfections. What he means by this is that the divine perfections, which must be considered as intrinsically possessing distinct formal *rationes* from each other – and not merely extrinsically, or according to our perception, as Aquinas would have it[57] - actually coincide in the infinity of the divine essence.[58]

While Scotus' formal distinction had many medieval detractors, including once again his friend Denys,[59] it is notable that Cusanus himself was not one of them. For in his earliest works he not only discusses it favourably in his Trinitarian theology but even affirms its applicability to the distinction of the divine attributes – a markedly Scotist point. Later references, in a 1454 letter to John of Segovia, can also be taken to imply Cusanus' ongoing recognition of the importance of the formal distinction in Trinitarian discussion, even more than a decade after his own metaphysical breakthrough.[60] Indeed,

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[55] Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 117.

[56] For helpful accounts of Scotus' formal distinction see Allan Wolter, "The Formal Distinction", in Bernadino Bonansea and John Ryan (eds.), *John Duns Scotus, 1265-1965* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 45-60 and King, "Scotus on Metaphysics", in Williams (ed.), *Duns Scotus*, 22-4. This basically maintained the possibility of the real identity of two formal reasons (*rationes*) which were distinct "*ex natura rei*", i.e. before any operation of the human mind.

[57] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 13 art. 4 (OO IV.144-5).

[58] For unitive containment see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 424.

[59] See Emery, "Doxography", 343-6.

[60] For Cusanus' various discussions of the formal distinction see the editors' note for Cusa, *Sermones*, 11.4 (h XVI/1.224-5) and Stephan Meier, "Von der Koinzidenz zur *coincidentia oppositorum*. Zum philosophiehistorischen Hintergrund des Cusanischen Koinzedenzgedankens", in Olaf Pluta (ed.), *Die Philosophie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert: In Memoriam Konstanty Michalski (1879-1947)* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1988), 327-9. For Cusanus' approbation of Segovia's rational apologetic for the Trinity, much of which was inspired by Richard of St Victor and Scotus, see Nicholas of Cusa, *Epistula ad Ioannem de Segobia*, 2 (h VII.97). However, despite their common ground, Gergely Tibor Bakos, *On Faith, Rationality and the Other in the Late Middle Ages: A Study of Nicholas of Cusa's Manuductive Approach to Islam* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 303-4 detects an important difference between Segovia and Cusanus in their approach to the mystery of the Triune God.

Scotus' own Dionysian account of unitive containment might easily be seen as an anticipation of Cusanus' own coincidence of opposites. For there is a sense in which Scotus' formal distinction pushes to the limits Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction.[61] De Muralt has therefore argued that this Scotist coincidence principle represents a fundamental platform for Cusanus' own mature metaphysics, allowing him to claim that in the infinite every *ratio* becomes infinity itself.[62] Moreover, in Scotus' understanding (contrary to Aquinas) of a "real multiplicity" of formally distinct divine ideas coinciding in the divine essence,[63] and in his subsequent account of them as "immediately known quiddities" existing within God according to their "cognised being" (*esse cognitum*) and corresponding directly to formal *rationes* in creatures, we may discern important features of Cusanus' own understanding of God as the "quiddity of quiddities".[64]

It also needs to be borne in mind that Aquinas' theory of analogy is intimately connected to his metaphysics of participation. For Aquinas it is fundamental that essence and existence are really-distinguished in creatures – a creature's *esse* is the 'accidental' participation (by likeness) of its essence in divine *esse*.[65] In participating the infinite divine *esse* to different degrees, creatures are said to analogically reflect the divine likeness.[66] However, while Cusanus affirms like Aquinas that all creatures participate in the infinite divine actuality, his Trinitarian model of principiation, especially as developed in the *De Possest* and *De Apice Theoriae*, seems to imply an identity of essence and existence in creatures, albeit leaving room for a rational or even formal distinction between them – a typical Scotist or Nominalist position.[67] Indeed, Louis Dupré and Nancy Hudson sharply distinguish Cusanus'

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[61] Meier, "Koinzidenz", 325-30 points to an important Scotist-Lullist background to Cusanus' coincidence metaphysics.

[62] De Muralt, *Néoplatonisme*, 78-81. For Cusanus' statement of this see Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 13.57 (h VI.48).

[63] James Ross and Todd Bates, "Duns Scotus on Natural Theology", in Williams (ed.), *Duns Scotus*, 215.

[64] For Scotus' doctrine of divine ideas see Maarten Hoenen, *Marsilius of Inghen: Divine Knowledge in Late Medieval Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 125-34 and Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 63-9. De Muralt, *Néoplatonisme*, 96-7 highlights Cusanus' important debt to the Scotist notion of *esse cognitum*.

[65] Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, 5 ff. (OO XLIII.378 l. 1 ff.) and *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 3 art. 4 (OO IV.42); cf. Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94-176. It should be noted that Aquinas' metaphysics of participation is a hotly disputed topic. Likewise, the sense in which creaturely *esse* is accidental or even really-distinct is a nuanced one. For more details on the range of interpretation see, for example, the helpful discussion in John Michael Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions: St Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 6-28.

[66] Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 115-22.

[67] Nicholas of Cusa, *De Apice Theoriae*, 18 (h XII.131) explicitly claims that "existence does not add anything to the possibility of existing" ("*Esse igitur non addit ad posse esse*"). Cusa, *De Possest*, 47-8 (h XI/2.57-9) makes the point that the possible rose, the actual rose and the possible rose which is actual are the same rose, although possibility, actuality and their union are not predicated truly of another as they are of the rose itself. This passage suggests that Cusanus still gives important place to the Scotistic formal distinction in the created realm. For discussion of the debate over essence and existence in the Middle Ages see John Wippel, "Essence and Existence", in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (eds.), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 383-410. It is also significant that Haubst, "Auf Spuren", 20 should identify the Albertist Heimeric de Campo, Cusanus' close friend and early mentor, as a fierce opponent of the key Thomistic doctrine of the real distinction between *esse* and *essentia*.

Neo-Platonic "form-essentialism" from the existentialism of Aquinas the Thomist tradition, arguing plainly for his rejection of Aquinas' famous essence-existence distinction.[68] This calls into question the claims of Führer and others for a straightforward relationship between Aquinas' and Cusanus' metaphysics of participation.[69] Indeed, it suggests the need for a more cautious evaluation of the relation of Cusanus' analogical metaphysics to that of Aquinas. Beneath the surface similarities of language there may well be lurking deeper metaphysical differences.

By contrast, for Scotus, in a manner comparable to Cusanus, analogy is clearly to be understood as a dynamic combination of univocal and equivocal aspects. In fact, Scotus held that it was meaningless to speak of any analogy between God and creatures unless we can establish a point of reference in a shared univocal concept. For him being and all the pure perfections in God must signify according to precisely the same *ratio*. At the same time, however, he preserved the infinite disproportion between God and creatures by insisting that they remained "wholly diverse" in reality.[70] Scotus was able to achieve this balancing act through his understanding of God's own being as intensively infinite. Now while there has been a marked tendency, especially among his detractors, to assume that Scotus is upholding a merely quantitative difference between God and creatures, a careful reading of him belies such an assumption. For, as Denys Turner, who as a Thomist certainly has no axe to grind, points out: Scotus "uses a quantitative model [of infinity] only so as to demonstrate how the divine infinity altogether transcends our common notions of quantitative infinity".[71]

Moreover, as Jean-Michel Counet has argued, there are striking affinities between Scotus' notion of infinity and that of Cusanus. Beginning from Aristotle's account of the infinite in the *Physics* according to which the infinite is such "that we can always take a part outside what has already been taken", Scotus argues that such an infinity is only potential and imperfect. For not only can parts always be added to it but it also is "composite" and made up of finite parts. Scotus then asks us to imagine an actual quantitative infinity in which all the parts subsist simultaneously. From here he makes one final conceptual leap from an actual numerical, or quantitative, infinity to an infinity of being. Unlike the actual quantitative infinity in which each part is finite and separate from the others, the intensive infinity of being is entirely simple and has no parts. Here we may detect an important similarity with Cusanus,

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[68] Louis Dupré and Nancy Hudson, "Nicholas of Cusa", in Jorge Gracia and Timothy Noone (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 471.
[69] Führer, *Echoes of Aquinas*, 106.
[70] For Scotus' discussion of univocity see John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 24-62 (OO III.15-44), *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 8 p. 1 q. 3 n. 136 (OO IV.221) and *Reportatio 1A*, d. 3 q. 1 n. 28-46 (R I.193-7). See further Richard Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy", *Antonianum* 76 (2001), 7-41; Thomas Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary", *Modern Theology* 21:4 (2005), 575-85; and Stephen Dumont, "Transcendental Being: Scotus and Scotists", *Topoi* 11 (1992), 135-48.
[71] Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 145.

whose mathematical reasoning on infinity likewise assumes a *transcensus* from potential to actual infinity and beyond that to the intensively infinite in being.[72]

Yet despite the striking similarity we must be cautious. For Jean Celeyrette has warned us that:

> … to say of God, as Scotus does, that he has a *perfection* [a beingness] that is determined at a supreme degree, would oblige us to concede that this perfection has a different, and thus other, being than that which the same perfection has in creatures; God then could not be the Not-other.[73]

Whatever we make of this objection we must concede that behind it lies a vital point which we must take note of. For up until now we have been ignoring, entirely purposely it must be stressed, *the* fundamental difference between Cusan and Scotist, indeed scholastic, metaphysics of being. This is that for Scotus the doctrine of the univocity of being was intended to safeguard the very principle of non-contradiction which Cusanus sought to break free from with his doctrine of the coincidence of opposites and "not other".[74]

However, while there can be no doubt that Cusanus' doctrine of the coincidence of opposites truly opened up a scholastic *terra incognita*, his radical metaphysical innovation was certainly not without precedent. For example, it clearly conformed to the general pattern of the late medieval *logica fidei*, with its important disjunction between natural and divine logic.[75] Even more importantly, as Ewert Cousins and Stephan Meier have both argued, Cusanus' attempt to think "opposites without opposition" has a definite Franciscan and Scotist pedigree. This is not only apparent in Scotus' formal distinction, as suggested above, but also in Bonaventure's paradoxical embrace of a kind of coincidence of opposites.[76] Moreover, one could argue – and this is a thesis which deserve further exploration – that Cusanus's own understanding of God as the precision of being represents an innovative blending of Bonaventure's striking account of the conceptual primacy of divine being with Scotus' structural understanding of analogy as a simultaneity of univocal and equivocal moments.[77] Seen in this light the

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[72] Jean-Michel Counet, *Mathématiques et Dialectique chez Nicolas de Cuse* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 167-9 and Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, 144-7; cf. John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, q. 5 art. 1 n. 1-11, in Felix Alluntis and Allan Wolter (eds.), *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 108-12.

[73] Jean Celeyrette, "Mathematics and Theology: The Infinite in Nicholas of Cusa", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 70 (2011-12), 151-65.

[74] See Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 26 (OO III.18).

[75] For a helpful account of the late medieval "logic of faith" see Michael Shank, *Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand: Logic, University and Society in Late-Medieval Vienna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). It is important to note that the transcendent, divine logic, unlike Cusanus' coincidence principle, was still understood to obey the principle of non-contradiction.

[76] Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 222-7 and Meier, "Koinzidenz", 321-30.

[77] See Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 3.3, in *Opera Omnia*, V.304. Here Bonaventure even implies, anticipating *De Li Non Aliud*, that the divine being is the "definition" of all things.

relation between Cusanus' and Scotus' metaphysics of being can only appear considerably more complex.

In particular, I cannot help thinking that Celeyrette may have read Cusanus' doctrine of the "not other" a little too glibly. Let us first recall his earlier *Apologia* against Johannes Wenck in which Cusanus says that "in this Form [i.e. God] all being can be nothing other than this Form", yet at the same time insists that God "ought in no respect to be conceived to have being in the manner (*modo*)" in which any created other has being.[78] To consider a created thing as "not other" than God is to consider it from the perspective of God himself and not from the perspective of the alterity of created being. As Clyde Miller has neatly expressed this: "as limited others, created things are not the Not Other, as the unlimited Not Other, they are not other than the Not Other itself".[79]

Yet, from what we have seen already, this does not preclude us from saying that God' perfection is coincident in *ratio* with a creature, and indeed with every creature, but determined to a supreme, infinite and uncontracted degree. The *Idiota de Sapientia* affirms that the being of God can be seen paradoxically both as entirely identical and entirely different from creatures – God is "all things in such a way that he is nothing of all things". Yet Cusanus would surely never say that God is "not other" from a being in terms of the degree of its contracted perfection, which is what Celeyrette's objection seems to me to imply. Indeed, returning to our example of the *De Possest*, he says "God is sun – though not according to the same mode of being (*eodem modo essendi*) as the visible sun" for he has solar being "in a better mode of being because [it is] divine and most perfect".[80] In God therefore all perfections have an infinite degree and cannot have being in the same manner as creatures. To me, despite the obvious differences, Cusanus seems closer to Scotus than Celeyrette reckons.

5. Transcendence and the *Theologia Sermocinalis*

Finally, in suggesting that Cusanus desired the demise of positive theology *tout court*, and Scotus' perfect-being theology in particular, Celeyrette has certainly missed the mark.[81] For the *Idiota de Sapientia* shows an important shift from the primarily negative and symbolic theology of the *De Docta Ignorantia*. For in this work, without in any way downplaying his Dionysian and apophatic heritage – indeed, quite the opposite – Cusanus now seeks to accommodate a positive, linguistic and conceptual

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[78] Cusa, *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 11 (h II.8-9): "*in ipsa forma non potest aliud esse quam ipsa ... Deum nequaquam concipi debere habere esse, modo quo singulare diversum et distinctum aliquod esse concipitur, neque eo modo, quo universale esse concipitur aut genus aut species ...*"
[79] Miller, *Reading Cusanus*, 195.
[80] Cusa, *De Possest*, 12 (h XI/2.14-15): "*Immo dicebam ipsum solem; sed non modo essendi quo hic sol est, qui non est quod esse potest. Qui enim est id quod esse potest, utique solare esse sibi non deficit; sed habet ipsum meliori essendi modo quia perfectissimo et divino*". Own translation
[81] Celeyrette, "Mathematics and Theology", 151-65.

theology within its framework.[82] In addition, as we have sought to argue, even in his mature thought Cusanus maintains close links with perfect-being theology. Indeed, Cusanus' attempt to put forward a *theologia sermocinalis* which is able to "lead us to God through the meaning of a word" undoubtedly must be seen in light of his Anselmic desire to find a concept of God who is "greater than can be conceived".[83]

In an important article Peter Casarella has situated Cusanus' *theologia sermocinalis* in the context of the fifteenth-century dispute between the scholastic *viae*.[84] As is well known, the central issue here was the dispute between Realist and Nominalist views of universals – and it is worth noting that this is something that Cusanus tacitly addresses in his *Idiota de Mente*[85] – but questions of the analogy or univocity of being and the signification of theological language were also prominent. Indeed, one of the primary disputes between Thomists and Scotists concerned the priority of the positive or negative theology. While Aquinas, much like Cusanus in the *De Docta Ignorantia*, famously claimed that "we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not", Scotus was of course an ardent defender of positive theology.[86]

In *Idiota de Sapientia* Cusanus seeks at one and the same time both to reconcile these two opposing strands of positive and negative theology and to transcend them. Drawing on the famous *triplex via* of Pseudo-Dionysius, Cusanus identifies three different ways of doing theology. The first two, derived from Pseudo-Dionysius' way of causality and remotion, conform to the above-mentioned positive and negative theology, but the third, derived from Pseudo-Dionysius' way of eminence, affirms that God is "beyond all affirmation and negation". To illustrate this he gives the example of the typical scholastic question "whether God exists?" Cusanus says that according to the pattern of the positive theology described above we see that the answer is presupposed in the question, thus "God exists and is Absolute, presupposed being". According to negative theology we must say that God does not exist. However, according to the eminent theology we must answer that God "neither is Absolute Being nor is not Absolute Being nor both is and is not Absolute Being – but rather is beyond [being and not-being]".[87]

Ultimately, therefore, it must be said that all scholastic categories of analogy and univocity utterly break down in the face of Cusanus' coincidence of opposites. For none of them can truly capture the

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[82] Peter Casarella, "Language and *Theologia Sermocinalis* in Nicholas of Cusa's *Idiota de Sapientia* (1450)", *Old and New in the Fifteenth Century* 18 (1991), 139 n. 7. Casarella focusses on links with Gerson and Heimeric de Campo.
[83] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.33 (h V.66): "*Unde haec est sermocinalis theologia, qua nitor te ad Deum per vim vocabuli ducere modo quo possum faciliori et veriori*"; cf. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 15 (*Anselmi Opera Omnia*, I.112).
[84] Casarella, "Language and *Theologia Sermocinalis*", 131-8.
[85] Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, 2.58-66 (h V.92-103).
[86] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prologue to 1a q. 3 (OO IV.35) and Scotus, *Reportatio 1A*, d. 3 q. 1 n. 28-46 (R I.193-7).
[87] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.32 (h V.63-5): "*nec esse absolutam scilicet entitatem nec non esse nec utrumque simul, sed supra*". For Cusa's link to Pseudo-Dionysius' *triplex via* see his *Mystical Theology*, 1-5, in *Complete Works*, 135-41.

transcendence-in-immanence and immanence-in-transcendence that his theology is grounded on. Nevertheless, reading through the *Idiota de Sapientia* we cannot escape the nagging sense of God as the hidden, unattainable, univocal core of all reality, thought and discourse – the "absolute presupposition of all things … presupposed".[88] For Cusanus, in our hopeless but at the same time hopeful attempt to express the inexpressible and conceive the inconceivable reality of the Triune God, we must recur again and again to the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, cited approvingly by him in his *De Li Non Aliud*: "divinity which transcends the measure of every being is the being of all things".[89] Yet let us not forget, as too many have done, that Scotus too was a Dionysian, whose method of perfect-being theology was intended to lead us to the knowledge of God as infinite, transcendent and ultimately unknowable in essence.[90]

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[88] Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, II.30 (h V.60-2): "*Nam Deus est ipsa absoluta praesuppositio omnium, quae qualitercumque praesupponuntur, sicut in omni effectu praesupponitur causa*".

[89] Cusa, *De Li Non Aliud*, 14.55 (h XIII.30): "*quippe esse omnium est ipsa divinitas, quae modum totius essentiae superat*"; cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, 4, in *Complete Works*, 156-9.

[90] Scotus, *Reportatio 1A*, d. 2 p. 1 q. 1-3 n. 10 (R I.116-17) and *Ordinatio*, 1 d. 3 p. 1 q. 1-2 n. 65 (OO III.46). Scotus is often thought of as weakening the doctrine of the ineffability or unknowability of God (cf. Cross, *Duns Scotus*, 39). However, such a view does not do justice to his innovative understanding of the intensive infinity of God as far transcending human understanding. Indeed, Scotus here explicitly states that the essence of God as a "*haec*" or "*sub ratione deitatis*" is "unknown to us".